

**Pan-America: Calypso, Exotica,  
and the Development of Steel Pan in the United States**

**A DISSERTATION**

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Throughout this dissertation, there are several mentions and an entire chapter (Chapter 4) dedicated to the United States Navy Steel Band. My research of this group was aided by several former members of the ensemble including Calvin Stewart, Greg Neville, Bruce Smith, Dennis Jansson, Greg Boyd, Manny Cepeda, Art Brockmeier, Don Miller, and several others not named here. I would especially like to thank Bruce Smith for his help with the Admiral Gallery Archives in Annapolis, Maryland. Furthermore, I am particularly thankful for the contributions of Gilda Strom, daughter of United States Navy Steel Band member Franz Grissom. Grissom was a key player in the ensemble’s formative years and Ms Strom’s help in collecting this research will help keep her father’s legacy alive for decades to come.

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Beatrice learn to dance while listening to a 1950s Lord Invader recording of “Marianne.” It seems as though while daddy was transcribing the steel pan parts, little Bea was bitten by the pan-jumbie. Only time will tell.

## Abstract

Scholar Reuel Rogers once commented that Caribbean immigrants to the United States were “ignored for many decades in much social science literature, prompting one observer to dub Afro-Caribbean immigrants the invisible minority.” The American steel band story is one of migration and the appropriation of the national music of Trinidad by and for the cultural dominance of America. Yet, the characters in this narrative have, in a metaphorical sense, created poetry out of their invisibility. That is, despite its humble beginnings the steel pan has slowly and pragmatically positioned itself to thrive in the United States and remake traditions, temporarily dominate American popular music, and integrate into institutional academia along the way. The following discussion will parse out the development of steel pan in America into sections that include an analysis of early steel band influences within Cold War American popular music, the Calypso craze, the New York Carnival scene, Pete Seeger and steel pan as American folk music, the United States Navy Steel Band, early examples of steel band success in academia, steel band’s attempt to find voice and identity within the American popular music landscape and commercial music, American steel pan’s first virtuoso Andy Narell, several individual case studies, and current national trends.

In America, the steel drum ensemble is quickly becoming a popular fixture in public schools, universities, and community centers. Despite its unique nature, the steel pan has experienced a fate similar to many other non-western folk instruments; it has been integrated, appropriated, and modified by American practitioners into an entirely new and independent genre, increasingly different in style and character from its roots. Yet, the title of this study suggests a master narrative to the development of the steel band in the United States, and the present study explores the whole social and artistic phenomenon of steel band, with a geographical focus on the United States rather than Trinidad, and its development over time. The development of steel pan in America is a serious art movement in both social identity and artistic development, and it is my aim to illustrate these methodologies while attempting to explain the sociological and artistic motives behind them.

Throughout this dissertation every attempt will be made to explore, locate, and provide a historical analysis of the first appearance of steel band music in the United States, drawing links between institutional locations (military bands, school and university programs, recordings/record labels, and more) and regional sites (Harlem, Brooklyn, Dekalb, Illinois) whenever possible. An understanding of the role of Trinidadian immigration to the United States and remade traditions created therein (*J’ouvert* in Brooklyn for example) will be crucial to portions of this historical analysis, and to a lesser extent methods of cultural theory which utilize the principles of cultural hegemonic domination. Avenues of research considered include American steel band’s historical links to conflicts with other, related Trinidadian musical genres, including calypso and soca, and to relevant Afro-Caribbean, black diasporic, and (white) mainstream postwar cultural practices in the United States. Under discussion, too, is the

global impact of the American steel band ensemble, the historical impact of American popular music on steel band music, cultural appropriation, transvaluation, and remade traditions such as the aforementioned Brooklyn J'ouvert tradition.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

In the prologue of his 1952 work *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison offers a poignant critique of postwar cultural and race relations in the United States. With specific reference to the black jazz artist Louis Armstrong, the protagonist of the story comments that:

Sometimes now I listen to Louis while I have my favorite dessert of vanilla ice cream and slogin. I pour the red liquid over the white mound, watching it glisten and the vapor in to a beam of lyrical sound. Perhaps I like Louis Armstrong because he's made poetry out of being invisible. I think it must be because he's unaware that he is invisible. And my own grasp of invisibility aids me to understand his music.<sup>1</sup>

In the published report of the 2000 United States Census, the population of Afro-Caribbean residents in New York was listed at 524, 107.<sup>2</sup> Caribbean scholar Reuel Rogers comments, "Indeed the group was ignored for many decades in much social science literature, prompting one observer to dub Afro-Caribbean immigrants 'the invisible minority'."<sup>3</sup> The history and development of steel band in the United States is perhaps best understood by someone who is aware of its invisibility. Steel drums (or steel pans, the two names are used interchangeably) are the music and/or instruments that we all know, but don't really know.

The American steel pan story is one of migration and appropriation of the national instrument of Trinidad by and for the cultural dominance of America. Yet, the characters

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: The Modern Library Edition, 1992), 7-8.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "New York Population by Race and Hispanic Origin" (2000) <http://www.census.gov/> <accessed May 13, 2009>

<sup>3</sup> Reuel Rogers, *Afro-Caribbean Immigrants and the Politics of Incorporation: Ethnicity, Exception, or Exit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 45.



in this narrative have, in a metaphorical sense, created poetry out of their invisibility. That is, despite its humble beginnings the steel pan has slowly and pragmatically positioned itself to thrive in the United States and remake traditions, integrating into institutional academia along the way. My aim in this study is to tell the narrative of steel pan in America as coherently as possible; however, one must note that, like American popular music, the development of steel pan in the United States is not a tidy and directly chronological lineage. Slippage and overlapping occurs frequently, and geographically distinct scenes—New York, Dekalb, Illinois, Southern California and others—often develop independently of one another. Borrowing a methodology from popular music, I turn to Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman’s concept of “streams of musical influence” to help negotiate the steel band narrative. Waterman and Starr apply their streams of cultural influence principle to the historical chronology of American popular music development in order to provide a master narrative that is chronologically linear in a general sense, but which also has room for overlap and flexibility.<sup>4</sup> Based on this model, the following discussion will parse out the development of steel pan in America into sections that include an analysis of early steel band influences and the Calypso craze, the New York Carnival scene, Pete Seeger and steel pan as American folk music, the United States Navy Steel Band, early examples of steel band success in academia, several case studies examining steel pan’s attempt at finding a distinct voice within Latin-jazz, pop music, and commercial music, American steel pan’s first virtuoso Andy Narell, several individual case studies of successful American steel panists, current national trends, and a conclusion of final thoughts.

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<sup>4</sup> Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman, *American Popular Music: From Minstrelsy to MTV* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1-17.

In structuring the overall thread of this study, much inspiration was drawn from Steven Stempfle's landmark text *The Steel Band Movement: The Forging of a National Art in Trinidad and Tobago*. Here Stempfle employs the term "movement" to represent "the whole social and artistic phenomenon of [steel pan] as it has developed in Trinidad over time."<sup>5</sup> In a similar vein, although the development of steel pan in America is not exactly a "movement" per se, the present study explores the whole social and artistic phenomenon of steel band, with a geographical focus on the United States rather than Trinidad and Tobago, and its development over time.

Stempfle's study is one of two major works that explore the development of the Trinidadian steel band movement; the other is Shannon Dudley's *Music From Behind the Bridge: Steel Band Spirit and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago*. Although both monographs address the steel band movement in Trinidad and Tobago, Stempfle focuses more on the sociological aspects of the steel band movement where as Dudley's study is more solidly focused on actual music and music making. The present study attempts to bridge the two approaches, though ultimately it takes a course more congruent with Stempfle's methodology. However, in several instances throughout this study, effort is made to explore the actual music and music making of steel pan in America and the focus is not fixated only on the social aspects of steel band. Kim Johnson (quoted in Dudley) sounds his frustration that "[Steel Band] fell to the social scientist by default, as if beating pan was some quaint folk practice, an aspect of ethnicity or national identity or pluralism—anything but a serious, modern art form."<sup>6</sup> The development of steel pan in America is in many ways a serious art movement in both social identity and artistic

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<sup>5</sup> Steven Stempfle, *The Steelband Movement: The Forging of A National Art in Trinidad and Tobago* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pg. xv.

<sup>6</sup> Kim Johnson, *Pan lime* Vol. 3, No. 4 (April 1996).

development. For instance, the United States Navy Steel Band strove for the highest artistic standards and yielded in excess of 200 steel band arrangements, ranging in style from folk calypso to complex Panorama-style tunes (I will return to these styles in the pages that follow). Moreover, the United States Navy devoted significant resources in an attempt to improve the technology of steel pan building and tuning in order to create the highest level of artistic product and sound quality. It is my aim to explore these methodologies while attempting to explain the sociological motives behind them.

Another area in which this study diverges from the work of Stempfle and Dudley is in the range of the time frame under discussion. Most studies on steel band history tend to focus on pre-independence developments (before 1962) in Trinidad. Dudley suggests:

Writers tend to construct the steel band's master narrative in reference to Trinidad's pre-independence history, when the most dramatic transformations in the steel band's social and musical status occurred. Little has been written about the Panorama competition, which began in 1963 and which has come to dominate the repertoire and the energies of most [Trinidadian] steel bands. The abundant popular and journalistic discourse on contemporary steel bands is often characterized by nostalgia for the time when steel bands had a more varied entertainment role, and by dismay at the creative stagnation or commercialization of pan.<sup>7</sup>

Along with his focus on music and music making, Dudley further attempts to frame his monograph around the activity of post-independence Trinidadian steel bands, drawing a comprehensive narrative that, while focusing on contemporary steel band issues, has recourse to the pre-independence heritage. A dominant force in the history of the Trinidadian steel band movement, Trinidadian independence had little impact in America, and the development of steel pan in America felt only tremors of the Trinidadian restructuring.

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<sup>7</sup> Shannon Dudley, *Music from Behind the Bridge: Steelband Aesthetics and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pg 25-26.

Moreover, the development of steel pan in America, which can be seen as a continuous stream beginning in the 1920s, was impacted more by WWII and changes to immigration laws in 1965 than by any Caribbean post-colonial migration or political activity. The present study differs from the work of Dudley and Stempfle in that the focus is mainly on the development of steel pan in America, rather than Trinidad, and encompasses the course of the entire twentieth-century. The two countries have significantly influenced each other for decades, exchanging commodities such as oil and natural gas, as well as cultural capital such as calypso and rock'n' roll music. Yet, the impact of steel pan in America is something that thus far has eluded serious scholarship. Trinidad and Tobago is the birth place of the steel pan and the small island nation has, without question, guided the socio-musical culture of the instrument for the past century. However, considering the island's strong economic ties to New York City, Trinidad and New York City have long enjoyed a constant exchange of people and commodities for the past two centuries. Moreover, since Trinidad and Tobago's independence in 1962, the spread of steel pan throughout the globe has increased exponentially. As of 2011 the steel pan is no longer *only* Trinidad's national instrument but a global sound and phenomenon.

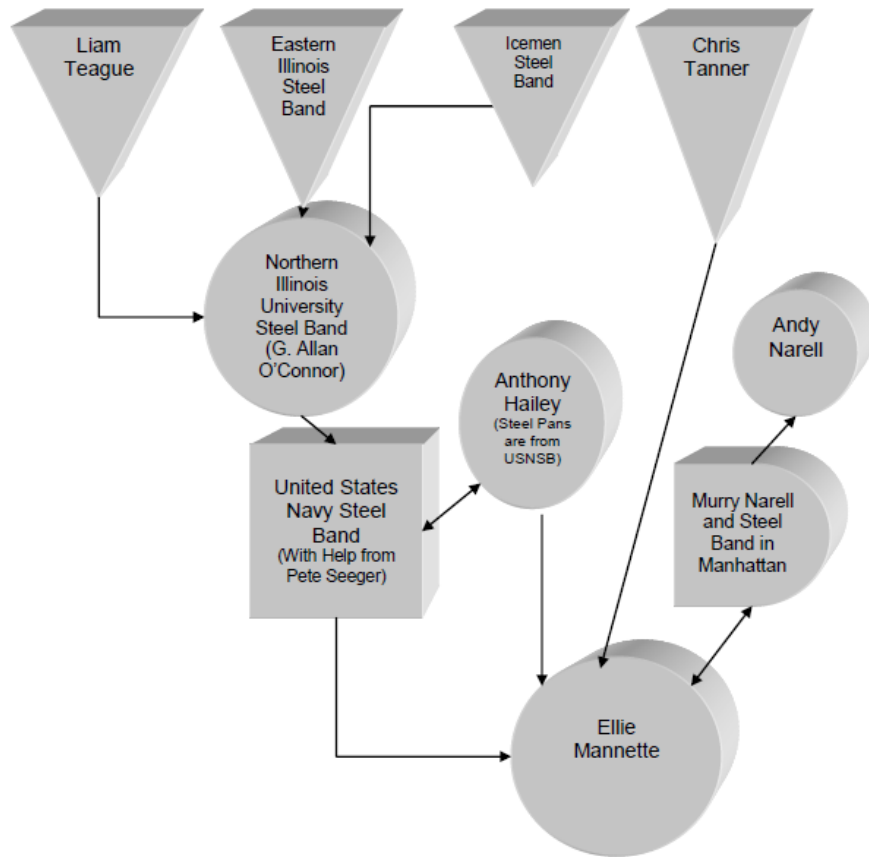
### **Followers of Pan, Followers of Man**

Returning briefly to Stephen Stempfle, it is import to draw one major distinction between his work and the present study. The steel band "movement" in Trinidad is a unified social movement and Stempfle carefully describes how the people of this nation collectively created steel pan (and steel bands by extension) over the course of the

twentieth-century. By itself, the steel band movement in Trinidad could also be seen as a metaphor for the independence movement of Trinidad and Tobago as the nation broke free of Britain's colonial tethers. Conversely, the development of steel pan in America is not a unified "movement" and more accurately resembles loose strands of thread that once woven together create a single cord. As such, the title of this study, "Pan-America: Calypso, Exotica, and the Development of Steel Pan in the United States," makes specific reference to three specific themes (calypso, exotica, and steel pan). There is no assertion of a master narrative to the development of the steel pan in the United States, nor would that be a useful way of characterizing the study at hand.

Beyond calypso, exotica, politics, and social movements, the development of steel pan in America, and indeed this study, can be reduced into two primary elements: steel pans and steel panists. The spread and growth of the instrument throughout America is primarily driven by skilled individuals—steel pan performers and steel pan builder/tuners alike—rather than a unified social movement. The individualized nature of steel pan in America is not, however, entirely independent. Interestingly, despite their exclusivity in any given geographic region, the lineage of steel panists and steel pan makers active in the United States is often tangentially connected. The following chart (Below) illustrates the ancestry and interconnectivity of several key steel pan agents discussed over the course of this study.

Connectivity of Steel Pan In America  
Chart #1

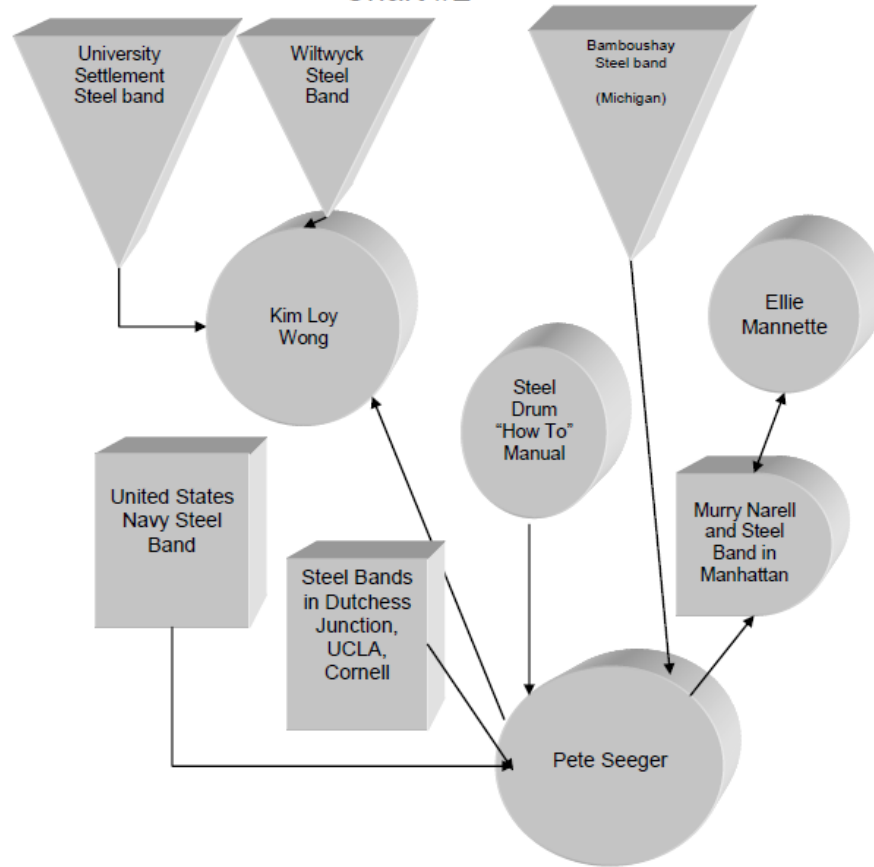


As we can see in Chart #1 above, Ellie Mannette is the basis for one specific thread of American steel pan development. Mannette was brought to America by the United States Navy Steel Band in the late 1950s for the purpose of building steel pans for the Navy. The United States Navy Steel Band, in turn, influenced several other steel bands and steel panists including Anthony Hailey of the Virginia Rhythm Project and Allan O'Connor of Northern Illinois University. Through O'Connor several other steel bands formed including the Icemen Steel Band of the University of Regina, Saskatchewan, and he also aided steel pan virtuoso Liam Teague in immigrating to the United States. Mannette also had a similar influence on Murry Narell and the development of steel pan in New York;

however, it is worth noting that Mannette worked primarily in New York and West Virginia. Despite the fact that the same individual (Mannette) provided steel pans and inspiration for all of the steel bands mentioned above, each group is geographically distinct—the United States Navy Steel Band was based in Puerto Rico and New Orleans, Northern Illinois University is located just west of Chicago, Anthony Hailey’s steel bands are in the Norfolk/Virginia Beach area, Chris Tanner is based near Cincinnati—and this study will show that each individual scene tailored itself to regional tastes. The various steel pan scenes of America have a shared genesis; however, the provincial nature of each group has crafted the steel pan landscape of America into a collection of individual steel pan scenes with little continuity rather than a singular unified movement.

In order to further support the argument that the agents responsible for the development of steel pan in America are related but not a cohesive movement, Chart #2 (Below) demonstrates another series of individuals and steel bands and involves some of the same agents noted in Chart #1, but which are not related to its thread.

Connectivity of Steel Pan In America  
Chart #2



For example, although Ellie Mannette built the first set of steel pans for the United States Navy Steel Band, Pete Seeger was perhaps more instrumental in aiding Admiral Daniel Gallery (founder of the group) in establishing the steel band and providing musical arrangements and stylistic advice. Seeger also helped Murry Narell establish the steel band program at the Lower East Side Settlement House in Manhattan during the early 1960s. In turn, Narell hired Mannette to work full-time for the project in 1967. Mannette and Seeger; however, did not work together and never actually met in person. Furthermore, Seeger facilitated the immigration of steel panists Kim Loy Wong to the United States in late 1959. Despite their single degree of separate from Seeger, Wong worked independently from Mannette and United States Navy Steel Band for his entire



career which continues to the present. Here we see an example of the independent nature of steel pan in America. These men worked during the same time period, with the same goals, sometimes even in the same regional areas (New York for example) with the same people, but never together in a unified manner. This theme is repeated time and again throughout the course of the past seven decades and is one of the contributing factors driving the pioneer spirit of early steel pan founders in America.

As this study will demonstrate in the following pages, acquiring a set of steel pans in America has proven no small task throughout the course of the past seventy-five years and servicing and tuning the instruments is another complicated matter entirely. Furthermore, the lack of qualified steel pan builders in any given geographic area of the United States has led to a follow-the-leader mentality. That is, regional pockets of steel pan activity in America often develop around skilled individuals, many of them Trinidadian expatriates, who create scenes of steel pan activity. If this skilled individual decides to move on, the scene rarely survives and usually results in the liquidation of the steel pans and dissolution of the cultural equity.

The steel pans, however, live on and many of the steel bands discussed over the course of this study have benefited or have begun due to the death of another steel band elsewhere. For example, many of the steel pans used by the Virginia Rhythm Project were acquired from the Navy when the United States Navy Steel Band dissolved in 1999. In another more personal example, the steel pans of the Inver Hills Steel Band (which I direct in Minnesota) were acquired from the Saint John Super Steel, Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada, when the group dissolved in 2010. The physical size of a steel band (set of steel pans) is immense and storage of the ensemble is always a problem.

Therefore, when faced with the possibility of storing an entire steel band long-term while attempting to locate and hire another qualified instructor, many organizations choose instead to liquidate the steel pans rather than attempt to recreate the enthusiasm and scene built by the previous instructor. The instruments are then purchased by another motivated individual intent on fostering a steel band scene elsewhere and the cycle begins anew. This pattern is repeated with a surprising amount of regularity over the course of the development of steel pan in America. The uniqueness of the instrument, the specialized training required of instructors, and the general public's misunderstanding of the music, are all contributing factors that influence this pattern to varying degrees.

### **Trinidad and Tobago, Steel Drums: An Abbreviated History**

A brief history of the steel pan in Trinidad and Tobago is useful in setting the stage for an analysis of the development of steel pan in American. The steel drum ensemble as it is known today descends from a combination of West African rhythms, Western European classical melody and harmony, jazz, blues, and Trinidadian ingenuity and creativity. The steel drum ensemble can further be understood as the culmination of several different cultural elements, including Spanish, French, and British colonialism, as well as twentieth-century American mainstream culture and south Indian culture. As in other former colonies of the Caribbean, slaves brought to Trinidad and Tobago during the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries retained elements of their native customs in spite of the oppressive conditions imposed by their colonial masters. In particular, the trauma of their capture, sale, and trans-Atlantic voyage did little to erase the strong drumming and

dancing traditions of former Africans. Unlike several other colonies of the Caribbean, the slaves of Trinidad and Tobago were not all of West African descent. Actually, as a result of the simultaneous British imperial expansion in India during the nineteenth-century, a substantial portion of Trinidad and Tobago's slaves—or more accurately, indentured servants—were of South Indian descent. Britain imposed a ban on the slave trade (not slavery) in 1807, and turned to relocating resources, in the form of indentured servants, from colony to colony.<sup>8</sup> Amenable to the tropical climate of the Caribbean and abundant in supply, the South Indian indentured servant was a seemingly perfect fit for the plantations of Trinidad and Tobago.

Although French colonial culture is a dominant force in the historical development of Trinidadian music and culture, the French never actually controlled the islands of Trinidad and Tobago. The islands, which lie seven miles from the coast of Venezuela, were discovered by Europeans in 1498 when Christopher Columbus sighted them on his third trans-Atlantic voyage; they had by then been inhabited by Arawak and Carib Native Americans for some time. Initially claimed by Spain as a result of Columbus' discovery, Trinidad was captured by Britain in 1797 and ceded in 1802 under the Treaty of Amien; the sister island of Tobago was ceded by France to Britain in 1814. Abundant in scenic beauty and wildlife, the islands proved difficult for the British to farm and, following the expulsion of the French colonist from Haiti in 1803, Britain invited the recently dispossessed plantation owners and managers to settle Trinidad and Tobago in order to, in the minds of British, salvage the usefulness of the property and begin harvesting the natural resources of the islands. The new French control of the islands'

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<sup>8</sup> The "Slave Trade Act" was an act of Parliament passed on March 25, 1807 and effective throughout the entire commonwealth. It can be found in the Parliament Archives under citation *47 Geo III Sess. 1 c. 36*.

economic viability infused elements of British and French cultural practices into all elements of society for island inhabitants including slaves and indentured servants.

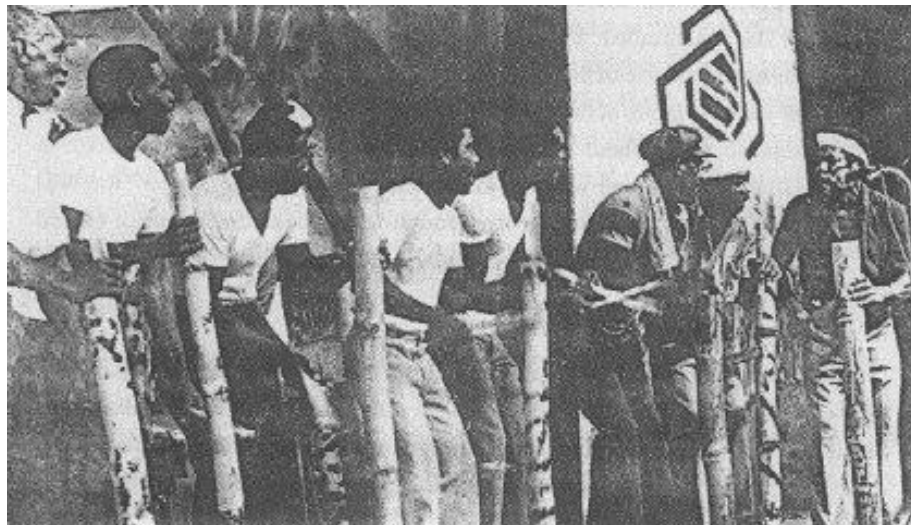
One result of this cultural mix was a propensity to celebrate sacred periods of the liturgical Christian calendar; in particular, the Lenten season. The solemn Lenten season officially begins on Ash Wednesday and the period leading up to this holy day was a time of festivals and celebration. A joyous time for those of French and Spanish descent residing on Trinidad and Tobago, the lead up and onset of the Lenten season was often punctuated with a celebratory apex signaled by a continuous party encompassing J'ouvert Monday, Fat Tuesday, and finally ending on the morning of Ash Wednesday. The Catholic religion's penchant for adopting local gods, legends, or spirits as a method for winning over the oppressed had long been a strategy in the conquest of Latin America. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago the festival atmosphere of European Carnival and bacchanal was quickly adopted by the Afro-Trinidadian slaves, many of whom saw Catholicism as an adoptive surrogate for Shango and Yoruban theistic rituals and worship practiced in Africa. An annual Carnival fête, celebrated by colonists, indentured servants, and slaves alike, began to assume its own identity, utilizing signature aspects of West African music including call-and-response, polyrhythm, syncopation, rhythmic layer, etc., and western classical harmony of French sailing songs known as Chantwells, which set the basic ground work for the style known today as calypso.<sup>9</sup>

The transfer of governance from Spanish to British control served to further shake the social landscape of Trinidad and Tobago. In the later part of the nineteenth century, the British grew increasingly suspicious of the Carnival festivities—which were unlike

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<sup>9</sup> Raymond Quevedo, *Atilla's Kaiso: A Short History of Trinidad Calypso* (St. Augustine, Trinidad: The University of the West Indies Press, 1983).

anything experienced or celebrated in Britain up to this point—and moved to curtail the remade Carnival tradition of the islands. In an effort to control the underprivileged social classes of the islands, the colonial government in 1883 issued a law that banned “[S]inging, dancing, drumming and other music-making by...rogues and vagabonds or incorrigible rogues.”<sup>10</sup> In defiance of the British, Afro-Trinidadians transformed their deeply rooted drumming tradition into a different medium. In order to side step the anti-drumming ordinance, Trinidadian’s substituted various lengths of hollowed out bamboo shoots which they would strike against the ground, to replaced drums. Trinidadians played the same rhythms and songs with these bamboo drums, or “tamboo bamboo,” together in bands and in the streets during Carnival (See Below).



**Tamboo Bamboo Players<sup>11</sup>**

In a report from 1930, Trinidadian David Leach, a resident of George Street, Port of Spain, describes the next evolutionary step of the steel drum on its way from bamboo to steel.

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted in William R. Aho, “Steel Band Music in Trinidad and Tobago: The Creation of a People’s Music,” *Latin American Music Review*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Spring – Summer 1987), pg 30, and originally found in *Amendment to Ordinance No. 6, 1868*, submitted 1883, Colonial Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

<sup>11</sup> Photo Courtesy of Kim Johnson.

[tamboo bamboo players] would pick up garbage covers, pieces of steel from the smith shop in George Street, and any cooking utensil they could find and proceed to beat it in time with the rhythm of the tamboo bamboo.<sup>12</sup>

Metals such as spoons, tools, and car parts quickly became popular time-keeping devices, and were integrated into the tamboo bamboo bands.

In Trinidad, bamboo is ample in supply but inherently fragile, and the rapid deterioration of the stalks often limited the duration of the performance.<sup>13</sup> By chance and out of desperation, some tamboo bamboo players discovered that a single garbage can lid could not only be acquired with ease on Carnival day, but could also play multiple pitches. The discovery was further explored through the mid-to late 1930s by several Trinidadians, most notably Winston “Spree” Simon and Ellie Mannette, who are widely considered the first to play a recognizable song on garbage lids, and universally seen as the fathers of the steel drum family of instruments. From this point onward, countless individuals worked to develop better drums with more refined tonal capabilities. Through experimentation it was discovered that the 55-gallon oil drum offered the best possible palate for tuners to work with and were in abundant supply. The surplus of discarded empty oil drums littering the islands was thanks in part to the United States military—which had a naval base in Chagauramas, Trinidad—provided ample amounts of free (or easily accessible) stock for bands to acquire and build their instruments.

The annual showcase for steel bands happens in late winter at the Panorama competition of Carnival. Despite its current status as the premier event of the annual Trinidad and Tobago Carnival, Panorama did not traditionally hold such an important

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<sup>12</sup> William R. Aho, “Steel Band Music in Trinidad and Tobago,” 26-58.

<sup>13</sup> For More information on tamboo bamboo and their history, see:  
<http://www.tntisland.com/tamboobamboo.html>

position in Trinidadian society, and steel bands gradually integrated into the Carnival competition season. Steel drum bands in the 1940's and 1950's participated in Carnival as marching pan-around-the-neck ensembles in the masquerades, and at fetes (large tent parties set up especially for Carnival). On the mornings leading up to the final day of Carnival, rival steel bands would meet in the streets and hold impromptu competitions with a winner ultimately judged by crowd reaction. These competitions were extremely important as a medium for poor neighborhoods to elevate their collective social status in a way that did not involve crime and was blind to social class. Constantly trying to outdo each other, steel bands started to arrange pieces of western classical music, such as Beethoven piano sonatas (Op. 27, No. 2 the "Moonlight" Sonata for example), and then learned the works in secret. They would surprise rival steel bands with their rendition of "the classics" on J'Ouvert morning of Carnival. These pieces were called "bomb" tunes and the practice of "dropping the bomb" on rival steel band became extremely popular. Master composers the likes of Beethoven and Schubert lent much-sought respectability to the instrument and genre. After Trinidad's independence, the government moved to promote island culture in an effort to wash away the past colonial occupancy. One offshoot of this movement was the 1963 creation of Panorama, a steel band competition in which only "traditional" Carnival music styles such as calypso were allowed as test pieces.<sup>14</sup> Classics still had their place in the greater celebration of Carnival, and the

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<sup>14</sup> In 1950, the Trinidad and Tobago Steel Band Association (TTSBA) was established in order to coordinate the numerous steel band competitions and festivals throughout the Islands, and further the cause of what was quickly becoming adopted by the Trinidadian public majority as the national music of the island nation. The TTSBA felt that the integration of bomb tunes (also known as the classics) along with traditional Carnival music such as calypsos, would add legitimacy to the steel band movement and steel band music by catering to a broader, more middle-class audience. The succession of Trinidad from Britain in 1962 set steel bands in yet another direction. In 1963, the new government sought to create a uniform cultural identity that would wipe clean traces of past colonial occupancy. The *Carnival Development Commission* and the *National Association of Trinidad and Tobago Steel bandsmen* (which replaced the

“bomb” competition continued long into the 1970s though it eventually took a back seat to the Panorama competitions in future Carnivals.<sup>15</sup>

Trinidadian steel drum music has continued to evolve since Eric Williams led the country in a cultural revolution following independence in 1962. An amalgam of international musical styles, as early as the 1950’s and 1960’s Trinidadian steel bands were already using elements of mambo, cha-cha, and rock’n’ roll music in the early calypso-style arrangements. Further musical influences on Trinidadian steel band music came from the continued performance of bomb tunes during Carnival time and American radio stations—heard widely on the island—playing American popular music such artists as the Beatles and Perry Como.

Perhaps the most significant development in the evolution of steel band music was the succession of the “soca” style of music from calypso. Soca, which is short for soul calypso, emerged in the 1970’s as a popular style influenced by international cultures that allowed steel bands to take advantage of foreign markets. Soca’s “selling out” for the sake of wide national and international appeal prompted concern from calypso traditionalist.<sup>16</sup> A 1978 calypso by the Mighty Chalkdust (aka Dr. Hollis Liverpool) summed up these concerns:

...Ah tell dem

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Trinidad and Tobago Steel Band Association) established a new steel drum competition at Carnival with the intention of portraying a more “Trinidadian” image. Known as “Panorama,” the competition was the NATTS and CDC’s answer to the impromptu street steel band battles and hodge-podge of small local competitions, except with the underlying intent of excluding bomb tunes. Instead, the NATTS and CDC decided that the Calypso, one of several other traditional Carnival music types, best portrayed the image of the newly formed country. The government heavily funded Panorama and arranged for heavy corporate sponsorships for the winning steel bands. Subsequently the bomb competitions, which were by now formally judged, died out within a couple of years. Today, Panorama is perhaps the biggest event of Carnival and draws thousands of people from around the world.

<sup>15</sup> For more information concerning soca and calypso see Shannon Dudley, “Judging “By the Beat”: Calypso versus Soca,” *Ethnomusicology* Vol. 40, No. 2 (Spring – Summer 1996) : 269-298.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*



If you want to make plenty money and sell records here and overseas  
Yes, well plan brother for de foreigner, compose souls songs and soca  
Doh half-lease; But if you are concerned about your roots  
Anxious to pass on truths to the young shoots, dem youths  
and learn of the struggle of West Indian evil  
*ref.* If so, yuh got to sing calypso.  
Culture comes first in every land, Come Calypsonians,  
First leh we sing for Trinidadians.<sup>17</sup>

In a striking 1997 public display of hypocrisy, notable soca singer and composer Ras Shorty attacked the younger generation of Trinidadians by stating that the new musical style that they sing and play (soca) is “rubbish.” In response to these charges, Iwer George recorded an extremely popular tune titled “Ta-Ta”, which is slang for the American phrase “Bullshit,” that illustrates the tension between progressive and conservative views of calypso, steel band music, and the development of Soca.

De Father of the Soca coming down on Iwer,  
He say I singing ta-ta, plenty, plenty ta-ta...  
This may sound like a big joke, but I don't want to stay broke,  
From now I singing ta-ta, plenty ta-ta.  
Like Max I need the money, so don't vex with me shorty,  
Come on pick up the ta-ta, plenty, plenty ta-ta,  
Time to love the ta-ta,  
Look the ta-ta like it have plenty power  
In every fete, people soaking wet and they ent tired yet.<sup>18</sup>

Thus Trinidadian steel drum music faces many of the same social and cultural pressures as American popular music. And questions of this kind arise afresh when we seek answers to such slippery questions as “Should American ensembles strive for a sound that is authentically Trinidadian?” or “Do American ensembles have a responsibility to perform more traditional repertoire and less commercial arrangements?”

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Lorraine Leu, “Raise Yuh Hand, Jump up and Get on Bad!”: New Developments in Soca Music in Trinidad,” *Latin American Music Review* Vol. 21, No. 1 (Spring – Summer 2000) : 45-58.

## The Development of Steel Pan in American

In America, the steel pan ensemble is quickly becoming a popular fixture in public schools, universities, and community centers. Despite its particular origins, the steel pan, like the banjo, has experienced a fate similar to many other non-western folk instruments; it has been integrated, appropriated, and modified by American practitioners into an entirely new and independent genre, increasingly different in style and character from its roots. The semiotic operation of steel pan as both a visual image and musical signifier is at work in countless forms of Latin-Jazz fusion music and commercial media advertising. The instrument is often employed as a *musical* invocation of the Caribbean islands in spirit and geographic location, often in the form of a melding of American popular music and steel pan. Divorced from its socio-political roots, the paradoxical shift of the steel pan from an instrument of social change to an instrument of consumerism catalyst is a testament to the impulsive gravitation of the instrument's unique sound. Interestingly, the hegemonic associations of steel band are founded on its conceptualization as a folk instrument, and technological refinements to the instrument, although necessary for wider commercial adoption and appropriation, have done little to change this perception.

Throughout this dissertation every attempt will be made to explore, locate, and provide a historical analysis of the first appearance of steel pan music in the United States, drawing links between institutional locations (military bands, school and

university programs, recordings/record labels, and more) and regional sites (Harlem, Brooklyn, Dekalb, Illinois) whenever possible. An understanding of the role of Trinidadian immigration to the United States and remade traditions created therein (J'ouvert in Brooklyn for example) will be crucial to portions of this historical analysis, and to a lesser extent methods of cultural theory which utilize the principles of cultural hegemonic domination. Avenues of research considered include American steel band's historical links to conflicts with other, related Trinidadian musical genres, including calypso and soca, and to relevant Afro-Caribbean, black diasporic, and (white) mainstream postwar cultural practices in the United States. Under discussion, too, is the global impact of the American steel pan ensemble, the historical impact of American popular music on steel band music, cultural appropriation, transvaluation, and remade traditions such as the aforementioned Brooklyn J'ouvert tradition.

Chapter 2 introduces the historical center of American steel pan, which is located in New York City. The goal of this chapter is to trace the early migration of steel pan players and the early developments of Trinidadian steel band music in New York, with a brief discussion of the current Brooklyn Carnival scene and steel pan activity in the city. In particular, this chapter will focus on detailing the foundations of key players in the New York calypso and the Brooklyn Carnival music scenes. This chapter will further attempt to assess the residual influence of this early New York scene throughout the current development of steel pan in America. The early New York steel pan scene is dominated by many independent agents, both Trinidadian and non-Trinidadian, of various levels of importance to the overall development of steel pan in America. To this end, the final goal of this chapter is to provide a sufficient background of the early New

York scene to support the later chapters of this study, which focus on important individual case studies, the Chapter 3 discussion of Pete Seeger and the Chapter 7 discussion of Andy Narell in particular.

Chapter 3 introduces Pete Seeger, who besides his status as a legendary folklorist and iconic American political figure, also serves as one of the most important pioneers of the development of steel pan in America. Seeger is famous for his musical and political collaborations, including his work with bands such as the Weavers and Almanac Singers and political figures such as Henry Wallace and Carl Robeson. One of the more obscure such collaborations was between Seeger and Admiral Daniel Gallery, who was founder and patron of the United States Navy Steel Band. Because of his work with Gallery and other early American steel band figures, steel band emerged as one of many side projects in which Seeger found the freedom to explore during his entertainment industry blacklisting in the 1950s and 1960s. The goal of this chapter is twofold. The first is to explore Seeger's activities within the early development of steel pan in America, including the love of calypso music that steered him towards the culture of Trinidad. Steel pan had a profound effect on Seeger, and this chapter will investigate these steel band activities and the role they played in Seeger's career. Second, this chapter aims to Seeger in action; that is, to explore a case study in which Seeger employs his unique skills as a folklorist, organizer, political activist, and musician. For this case study, I focus on Seeger's work with the United States Navy Steel Band, presenting largely unpublished personal correspondence between Seeger and Admiral Gallery.

Chapter 4 offers the story of a true American original, the United States Navy Steel Band. Fueled by the popularity of singer Harry Belafonte's 1956 *Calypso* album,

the meteoric rise of the American calypso craze temporarily propelled calypso music to the status of American cultural phenomenon. America was meanwhile becoming increasingly entrenched in the Cold War, and the United States Military was eager to secure the Atlantic and Caribbean seafront. The United States Navy had, since the end of WWII, either built and/or occupied several outposts throughout the Caribbean. Often to the chagrin of island inhabitants, American sailors in Trinidad, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and other Caribbean islands adapted to island life by shopping at local establishments and participating in local festivals and celebrations. For Rear Admiral Gallery, this meant starting (in consultation with Pete Seeger) a Trinidad-style-steel band comprised of naval musicians at his base in Puerto Rico in 1957.

The United States Navy Steel Band was an immediate success on the naval base in Puerto Rico, and its popularity carried over to the mainland. The group toured the United States extensively and gave performances at the White House and on national variety shows, including *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1958 and 1959. By design, the United States Navy Steel Band, which moved to New Orleans in 1972 and was stationed there until its disbandment in 1999, brought the cultural capital of the Caribbean (music and dance) to the fore of the American populous? Despite its obvious significance to the growth and development of steel pan in America—the ensemble gave some 20,000 performances world-wide—the United States Navy Steel Band has flown under the scholarly radar. The goal of this chapter is a periodized history of the United States Navy Steel Band, with an effort made to contextualize the group’s influence within the overarching narrative of the development of steel pan in America. The global impact of the United States Navy Steel Band is historically and culturally rich, and a discussion of

issues such as cultural appropriation, the remaking of traditions, and American Cold War politics, tensions, and fears are crucial to this narrative. The story of the United States Navy Steel Band is vast; therefore, for the sake of brevity this chapter will only discuss the first fifteen years of the United States Navy Steel Band's existence, spanning roughly 1956 to 1972. This analysis is divided into sections that include a discussion of Admiral Gallery, Franz Grissom, the ensemble's early success, the South American tour of 1960, album recordings, United States Navy Steel Band on film, instrument development, and the group's move to New Orleans. Though the latter years of the ensemble (1973-1999) are interesting and important to the continued development of steel pan in America, the United States Navy Steel Band's first period dovetails neatly with the calypso craze, and is thus more germane to this study of the early development of steel band in the United States.

As the maturing American steel pan scene looked to expanded beyond New York City, academia offered a receptive harbor for these steel bands to flourish. The present state of steel pan education in primary schools, secondary schools, and universities comprising a thriving and robust scene: the strongest and most dynamic period of activity in the steel pan's sixty year history in America. If steel bands have become increasingly popular additions to school curricula throughout the United States over the last two decades, a look to the past offers an important perspective on these roots. The open arms of American universities, though initially on a very small scale, proved a receptive outlet for steel band activity following the implosion of the calypso fad and waning public interest in exotica in the late 1950s. Like the vibrant folk music revival of the 1960s, contemporary steel pan ensembles were received warmly at college and university

campuses across the country during this time. Moreover, there are numerous accounts of touring Trinidadian steel bands, the Esso Trinidad Tripoli Steel Band for example, visiting American universities and performing concerts for the student body or at multicultural festivals.<sup>19</sup>

Following the success of seminal steel band programs such as those at Northern Illinois University, the University of Akron, and West Virginia University, steel pan spread quickly to academic institutions across the United States. Chapter 5 illuminates the genesis of the academic steel bands and highlights the key agents and specific universities that fostered early permanent and non-permanent steel pan programs. This exploration will make use of several case studies, a nation-wide survey, and fieldwork conducted with the University of Minnesota steel band in order to examine and understand the real-life functions of creating and sustaining a contemporary steel band in an American university. Broadly, my aim in analyzing the function of these steel bands within their respective universities is to explore the methodology, motivations, and goals of institutions accommodating steel pan ensembles in academia.

Despite harboring the early stages of steel pan in America, the world of academia and regional hotbeds of New York City are not the exclusive sanctuary for American steel bands and American steel band music. Rather, American popular music, jazz, and the commercial advertising industry have all appropriated and assimilated the unique sound and visual characteristics of the steel pan. Yet the very inclusion of the steel pans within the framework of television and radio advertising commercials, and their seamless integration alongside standard western instruments such as keyboard and guitar, is also

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<sup>19</sup> This statement is based on the large body of existing accounts documenting visiting concerts at American universities. These visits often took place as part of student life activities and are documented in student newspapers and campus yearbooks. For more information, see Chapter 5 of this study.

the result of refinement and technical advancement in the field of steel pan production. Chapter 6 seeks to trace the course of Trinidadian steel pan music as it was introduced into American popular culture beyond the calypso craze and, conversely, the appropriation of the steel pan's sound and image by American forces such as pianist Liberace and entertainer Jimmy Buffett. This chapter sets off from an exploration of the impact of the calypso craze fueled by Harry Belafonte on the American jazz scene of the 1950s with a focus on the role of Sonny Rollins as one of the primary agents of the Caribbean jazz movement. This chapter will then turn to an analysis of the impact of early touring Trinidadian steel bands in the United States and the development of the early steel band scene in Southern California, with the case studies of Andrew de la Bastide and Robert Greenidge.

Unlike many folk music traditions found throughout the world, the steel band tradition in Trinidad is full of “great men,” or iconic composers and/or performers who dominate the genre and capture the imagination of the participants.<sup>20</sup> Steel pan in America has a “great master” in Andy Narell. His story is unique within the American steel pan narrative and his contributions to the development of steel pan in America become even more improbable considering his middle-class New York roots and Jewish-American heritage. Interestingly, Narell's route to steel pan greatness took a much different path from his Trinidadian predecessors and has firmly embraced jazz and fusion as the stylistic mediums by which his steel pan voice is heard.

Chapter 7 is a study of Andy Narell's career, highlighting early successes, his work with the Steel Bandits steel band, his move to California in 1970, and his embrace of jazz music. Moreover, the early musical foundation that led Andy Narell to become the

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<sup>20</sup> Kay Shelemay, “Response to Rice,” *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Autumn, 1987), p 489-490.



world's most recognizable steel panist is derived largely from his father's work as a social worker in Manhattan. Narell's father Murry was a key agent in the early development of steel pan in America during the 1960s, and a discussion of Murry Narell's practice of fusing social work with steel pan, particularly his involvement with the Lower East Side Settlement House in Manhattan, is essential in teasing out Andy Narell's steel pan heritage. The elder Narell was a true pioneer in the development of steel band in New York and his efforts in Manhattan laid the foundation for the current manifestation of steel pan in America. The steel pan roots of Andy Narell mirror in many ways the foundation of steel pan in America. Accordingly, this chapter aims to discuss Narell in terms of three sections, the first of which is his involvement with the Lower East Side Settlement House steel band project. The second major section discusses his membership in the American steel drum ensemble *The Steel Bandits*, which was comprised of Narell family members and featured the young Andy Narell. Born out of Murry Narell's work with the Lower East Side Settlement House, the group was a regional success from 1962 to 1970, recording an album for *Decca* and appearing on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. The third major section of this chapter is a discussion of Andy Narell's solo jazz steel pan career. This section aims to chronicle Narell's success in establishing his solo jazz career, his work with the *Caribbean Jazz Project*, his popularity in South Africa, and the process of finding his own voice as a musician and performer of jazz on the steel pan.

The narrative of Narell's life in steel pan is important for locating many of the driving factors behind the global success of steel pan and steel pan music during the past fifty years. To this end, this chapter illustrates the delicate balance between tradition and

creative growth that Narell juggles while attempting to find his unique voice as a musician and steel panist. His integration of jazz and steel pan, and an analysis of the attitudes, perceptions, and struggles Narell encountered—and continues to encounter—along his life-journey in steel pan, serve as an excellent case study for the perils and triumphs endured and celebrated by a successful American panist and global steel pan icon.

As mentioned above, New York City is the epicenter for the historical germination of steel pan in America; however, New York is not the exclusive sanctuary of steel pan activity in the United States and—even beyond those academic settings explored in Chapter 5—calypso and steel pan music spread to the far reaches of the country including the Midwest and West Coast. These geographical regions developed distinct steel band traditions independent of New York and the Brooklyn Carnival. Historically, regions such as Southern California, Florida, Chicago, Atlantic Coastal areas, and Pittsburgh have harbored vibrant steel band scenes and new scenes, such as the Norfolk/Virginia Beach area, are being formed regularly.<sup>21</sup> In Southern California for example, Andrew de la Bastide and Robert Greenidge are integral in telling the history of the early Southern California steel band scene; yet, their contributions to the American steel band narrative also provide understanding to the current situation of the region's steel pan scene and the entertainment industry.

Chapter 8 explores several regional steel band scenes outside of New York. In particular, this chapter will delve into an analysis of three individual case studies of panists, both American and Trinidadian, who have carved new traditions and created

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<sup>21</sup> Throughout this dissertation, I use the term “scene” in reference to the Mark Slobin concept of specifically located regional areas of musical activity. This is drawn from Mark Slobin, *Subcultural Sounds: Microcosms of the West* (Middleton, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1993).

successful steel band education programs in the continental United States. Moreover, through an analysis of the steel pan careers of Chris Tanner, Anthony Hailey, and Liam Teague, this chapter aims to tease out successful teaching and administrative methodologies in order to further understand the energy and skill involved in juggling the many musical and cultural elements associated with pursuing steel pan as a full-time occupation in the United States. All three of the above panists perform on the steel pan; however, unlike Andy Narell and other performing panists, Tanner, Teague, and Hailey earn their livelihood as professors, teachers, and ensemble directors of steel pan within the boundaries of academia and thus occupy a different space in the steel band landscape of American steel band. Their path differs from gigging steel bands and panists and in many ways foreshadows the continued future of steel pan in America.

## Chapter 2

### **Early Developments in the United States: Calypso Craze, New York Carnival**

Precisely when the steel band first appeared in the United States is not entirely certain. Likewise, the exact moment of its first hearing on United States soil is elusive. Considering that oral histories are often plagued with revisionist memories, the narrative of this genesis is subjective at best. However, research suggests that early steel band activity in the United States is tied directly to the movement and migration of calypso musicians from the Caribbean to New York during the first half of the twentieth century. Many of these calypso artists began employing steel panists as sidemen for club and recording dates in New York as early as 1939. Moreover, early non-Panorama and non-Carnival steel pan music and ensembles in the United States owe much of their early success and visibility to the American calypso and exotica crazes launched in the 1950s. Because of this, a significant portion of steel pan music from the 1950s was facilitated and mediated exclusively via the hegemonic, though largely unwritten, guidelines of the calypso and exotica crazes. That is, the calypso music and culture in the United States—one that is saturated with post-war American hegemonic visions of island bliss and happiness—represents a starkly different portrait of reality from the genre's roots in Trinidad. Here, in the traditional homeland of calypso, the Trinidadian-style more accurately reflects the reality of unemployment and political disenfranchisement plaguing audiences and calypso practitioners alike throughout the twentieth-century.

New York City, a global hub for information, commerce, and culture, is effectively the entry point of steel band music on its long road to integration into

American culture. New York City is also a traditional entry point for many afro-Caribbean immigrants as they immigrated to the United States during the twentieth-century. The stress of adapting to new social norms paired with the cultural transition of these Afro-Caribbean immigrants from their former lives into Afro-Americans is one of several important underlying factors in the creation of the American steel band scene. This chapter offers a discussion of two parallel movements—the early calypso music and New York Carnival scene—which, despite their chronological overlap, represent contrasting scales of cultural spectra and opposing sides of racial boundaries. That is, the early calypso craze is one of difference, and what makes calypso popular in America among mainstream white patrons is its exoticness. Conversely, the New York Carnival scene is one of sameness; that is, this is a cultural movement aimed at remaking a tradition held passionately and closely by Afro-Caribbean immigrants in New York. To this end, the goal of this chapter is to trace the early migration of steel pan players and the early developments of Trinidadian steel band music in New York City. In particular, this chapter will focus on detailing the foundations of key players in the New York calypso and the Brooklyn Carnival music scene. Furthermore, this chapter will attempt to assess the residual influence of this early New York scene throughout the current manifestation of steel pan in America. The early New York steel band scene is dominated by many independent agents, both Trinidadian and non-Trinidadian, of various levels of importance to the overall development of steel pan in America. As such, the final goal of this chapter is to provide a sufficient background of the early New York scene to support the later chapters of this study that focus on important individual case studies; mainly, the Chapter 3 discussion of Pete Seeger and the Chapter 7 discussion of Andy Narell.

## Early influence and the Calypso Craze

Following the close of WWII America once again became a land brimming with optimism. The country was entering a period of economic prosperity and to many baby-booming Americans this was a time of great social change that further witnessed significant cultural developments in the arts and music. During this decade, the booming economy padded the pockets of American consumers who eagerly spent their new-found disposable income. Facets of this growing wealth were reflected in the global expansion of the travel and tourist industry which, thanks to the solidified route agreements of the airline industry, could connect patrons to the most remote areas of the world at a moment's notice. In particular, tourists became increasingly interested in traveling to island destinations, Hawaii, French Polynesia, or the Canary Islands for example, which were previously only accessible by boat, prohibitively expensive to reach via airplane, or both. Due to their proximity to the continental United States, the Caribbean Islands emerged in the 1950s as one of the premier exotic vacation destinations for many burgeoning middle-class Americans.<sup>22</sup> For this newly established middle-class, the stresses of WWII were replaced by the taxing association of the nuclear family and grind of everyday suburban life. The geographical obscurity of many Caribbean islands and the ignorance of most Americans towards the colonial, economic, and social struggles of the indigenous people of these locations allowed Caribbean music to inspire specific

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<sup>22</sup> For more information on American post-WWII tourism, see [http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel/route66/Postwar\\_years\\_of\\_Route66.html](http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel/route66/Postwar_years_of_Route66.html) The National Park Service, Christopher Endy, *Cold War Holidays: American Tourism in France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), and Nicholas Dagen Bloom, *Adventures into Mexico: American Tourism Beyond the Border* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006).

geographical associations, free of the political baggage carried by West Indian inhabitants, for prospective American tourists.

As I will discuss in the following section, the history of calypso in America encompasses several key elements and/or agents, including Trinidadian calypsonians immigrating to the United States to perform in the 1930s and 1940s, the Andrews Sisters hit “Rum and Coca Cola,” the Broadway musical *House of Flowers*, the “Manhattan” calypso style of Harry Belafonte, and the adaptation of calypso for commercial advertising. The American fascination with calypso was, in part, a cumulative process that began in earnest in 1945 with the hit single “Rum and Coca Cola” by the Andrews Sisters and was later built upon by the Caribbean-themed Broadway musical *House of Flowers* (1954), written by Truman Capote. Yet, the movement came into full swing when in 1956 the *Calypso* album released by Caribbean-American singer Harry Belafonte soared to the top of the *Billboard* charts. Practically overnight, the airwaves became saturated with the tuneful sounds of “Mary Ann,” “Banana Boat Song,” and many other calypso favorites. However, the Belafonte style of “fun-in-the-sun” musings is a far cry from the harsh political protest that forms the chief subject matter of traditional Trinidadian calypsos. This cultural disconnectedness led contemporary Trinidadian artist/dancer/musician Geoffrey Holder to dismissively categorize the Belafonte style as “Manhattan Calypsos.” He and many other skeptical West Indians questioned the sincerity American calypso phenomenon, unsure as to whether this new craze was, in a sociological sense, a newly re-made tradition or the un-making of a Trinidadian traditional style. Holder’s dilemma is a complicated one and is a subject that will be addressed later in this chapter in order to lend perspective to the historical

foundation of “Manhattan Calypso” and the role this genre played in 1950s American popular culture and society.

Prior to the wide-reaching success of Harry Belafonte’s calypso singing style in the 1950s, calypso music enjoyed a long history of popularity among Caribbean and Caribbean-American audiences. Calypso singing as a genre originated on the islands of Trinidad and Tobago during the later part of the nineteenth-century.<sup>23</sup> Though the American calypso craze really took hold in the mid-1950s, the genesis of calypso music in the United States began two decades prior, in approximately 1934, when the American Recording Corporation (soon to be Decca) decided to enter the “race records” market and started importing a steady stream of calypsonians from Trinidad to record in their New York studios. The experiment was a modest success within the United States markets, and American Recording Corporation continued funding the project through the end of the 1950s, often releasing the material on its my subsidiary record labels.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, in Trinidad and Tobago these American-recorded calypso albums were wildly popular and Trinidad-born calypsonians such as Roaring Lion (Rafael de Leon) and Atilla the Hun (Ramond Quevedo) achieved great respect for their work in Trinidad and became national heroes. In one sense, the Trinidadian calypso is analogous to early Black rhythm and blues artists in the late 1940s and early 1950s, such as Louis Jordan, Johnny Otis, and Ruth Brown. Their music was on the cusp of exploding into mainstream American cultural popularity and had many white supporters, including noted disc jockey Alan Freed. Yet it was only with agents such as Elvis Presley and producer Berry Gordy,

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<sup>23</sup> For a detailed history of calypso see Funk, Ray and Stuempfle, Stephen. 2007. “Calypso: A World Music” An Exhibition of Photographs and Illustrations of the International History of Calypso. Online <<http://www.calypsoworld.org/noflash/introduction.htm>>

<sup>24</sup> Michael Eldrige, *There Goes the Transnational Neighborhood: Calypso Buys a Bungalow*, ed. Annie J. Randall, *Music, Power, and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 175.



founder of Motown Records, that emerging Black music styles, rock'n' roll included, transcended the color barrier and resonated with white mainstream American audiences on a grand scale. In the end, unlike rock'n' roll and rhythm and blues, it was the edgy Trinidadian-style of calypso music, and not race, which failed to resonate with the mainstream American audiences. Moreover, it was not until Harry Belafonte's toned down style of calypso that the singer began honing in the early 1950s that the style was able to penetrate the white American cultural mainstream thus creating the calypso craze. By this time, Trinidadian-born calypsonians such as Lord Invader, the Mighty Sparrow (Slinger Francisco), Lord Kitchener (Aldwyn Roberts), Roaring Lion, and Atilla the Hun had never really established themselves or their music among the American popular cultural mainstream. As calypso music fell out of favor for the American audience, the brief window for Trinidadian calypsonians to make a wide-scale impact in the American music industry closed and these singers returned to performing in the heavily Caribbean Boroughs of New York and the greater Caribbean.

If the catchy tunes and musical style of Trinidadian calypso seemed ripe to appeal to American consumers, one reason for the apparent disconnect was that lyrics and song meanings were very coded and colloquial. An example of this colloquial nature is the way in which Trinidadian calypsos commented on the world events as they pertained to Trinidadians. Calypsos with titles such as "Roosevelt in Trinidad" and "The Louis/Schmeling Fight" share a global familiarity among the American and Trinidadian public; however, in the case of "Roosevelt in Trinidad" the actual calypso focuses mainly on the Trinidadian perspective of intruding Yankees and their occupation of the island. To this end, despite the expanding West Indian population in New York the early calypso

genre was only a modest success by American standards. It wasn't until the genre had an image makeover that the disconnectedness between Trinidadian calypso lyrics and American audiences could be overcome and the genre could gain ground in the popular music markets of the United States. Among the first of the singing groups to shed the image, social commentary, and political baggage of Trinidadian calypso was the Andrews Sisters who enjoyed a smash success with a cover version of the Lord Invader calypso hit "Rum and Coca Cola" in 1945.



### Andrew's Sisters (1945)<sup>25</sup>

The exotic destination paired with the familiar sounds of the Andrews Sisters was an effective combination. Moreover, attempts to pair the exotic with the familiar were evident in the marketing of the group and the song. Even in the sheet music cover (above) of "Rum and Coca Cola" the Andrews Sisters headshot photo is offset with a hand-

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<sup>25</sup> Andrews Sisters with Vic Schoen and his Orchestra, *Rum and Coca Cola* (New York: Leo Feist, Inc, 1945).

illustrated map of the Trinidadian/South American coast perhaps meant to resemble one of Iberian explorer Christopher Columbus' early diagrams of the region.

The lyrics for the Andrews Sisters' version of the calypso are slightly changed from the original version; however, despite reading similarly to the lyrics of Lord Invader a few strategic alterations change their meaning significantly.

<b>Andrews Sisters Version Verse 1</b>	<b>Lord Invader Version Verse 1</b>
If the Yankee come to Trinidad They got the young girls all going mad  The young girls say they treat them nice Make Trinidad a paradise	When Yankee first came to Trinidad Some of the young girls were more than glad They said that the Yankees treat them nice And they give them a better price

The verse material above is where lyric variation occurs; interestingly, the lyrics of the chorus to "Rum and Coca Cola" remains the same in both versions of the song and considering the above alterations in the lyrics the phrase "Both mother and daughter / Working for the Yankee dollar" takes on an entirely different meaning.

Another major discrepancy between song versions lies in the vocal delivery. The Andrews Sisters' sing the tune in their classic style; that is, pure-toned voices in three-part jazz-infused harmonies inflected with chromatic scoops and slides throughout, unfolding above Tin Pan Alley-inspired chord changes. Absent is any hint of the nasal and heady tenor voice of Lord Invader which he expertly manipulates with a signature behind-the-beat vocal delivery and sharply witted comic timing. The vocal delivery and clean-cut image of the Andrews Sisters was able to mask the changes in the lyrics from the original version.

As a result of the Andrews Sisters' wholesome and sanitized vocal delivery, gone too, were the secondary lyrical meanings commonly associated with Trinidad-style

calypso. As mentioned above, the American public was unaccustomed to the politics and culture of Trinidad and was oblivious to the colloquial language of Trinidad-style calypsos. Without the aid of a skilled calypsonian, such as Lord Invader, to emphasize key textural elements or pause on certain syllables, it appears as though the pointed lyrics about prostitution—“Drinkin' rum and Coca-Cola, Go down Point Koomahnah, Both mother and daughter, Workin' for the Yankee dollar”—had no deeper implications, understanding, or meaning to the American audiences. “Rum and Coca Cola” is a classic example of the forces behind the “Manhattan Calypso” genre and is a testament to the Trinidadian roots from which the genre sprang forth. The song spent ten weeks at the top of the *Billboard Top 100* charts in 1945 and in those short weeks the “Manhattan Calypso” was born.

In the mid to late 1950s, the American entertainment industries began to slowly capitalize on the public interest in all things Caribbean by creating music, films, and musicals with calypso flavorings. Jumping on the latest consumer trends, industry insiders began to realize that steel band and calypso music was the perfect marketing tool; the unmistakable sound was a foolproof musical signifier and had much greater potential than its fun-in-the-sun stereotype might initially suggest. Sound and image are powerful tools and in the following quotation exotica scholar Shuhuei Hosakawa takes aim at the partnership between sound and image that describes the use of exotica music in 1950s film.

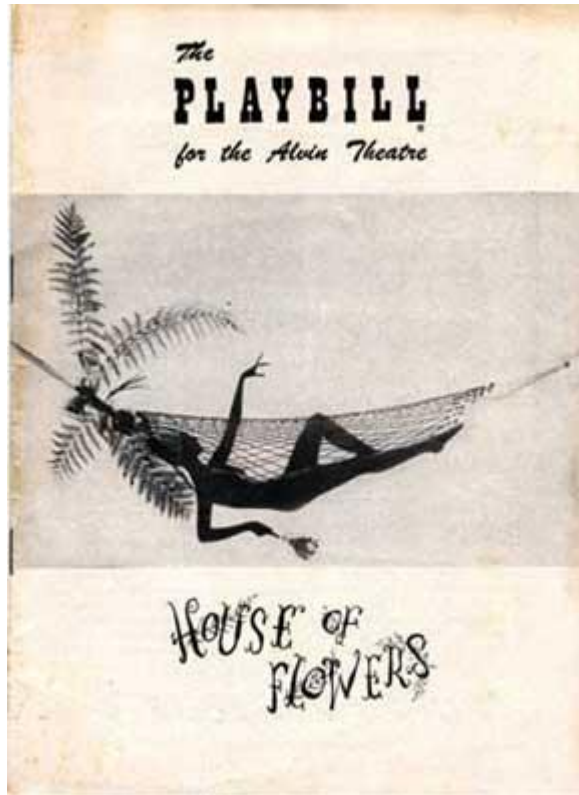
[I] contend that it [exotica and calypso] is a complex form premised on a play of subtle sound textures which condense various (aural) stereotypes

within an unobtrusive style designed to be easily consumed and appreciated.<sup>26</sup>

Interestingly, Hosakawa's theory suitably applies to calypso music used by advertising and entertainment industries during the same decade and beyond. Interestingly, the concept of "influenced" versus "imitating" summarizes the appropriation of calypso music and the calypso craze by American entertainment outlets. Given the above consideration, calypso is by definition designer music and is appropriated as such with little regard or sensitivity to the music's culture and heritage. The "Manhattan" style of calypso represented by the Andrews Sisters, Harry Belafonte, and others, is defined by stereotypes and was appropriated for utility and consumption with little regard for or sensitivity to the music's roots or heritage. Drawing from Hosakawa's theory, I argue that the "Manhattan Calypso" is not the result of a half-hearted effort to learn the stylistic performance practice of Trinidadian calypso. Rather, this new style was expertly crafted for exploitation and was a vehicle of commerce for American consumerism.

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26 Shuhuei Hosakawa, "Martin Denny and the Development of Musical Exotica", ed. Hayward Philip Hayward, *Widening the Horizon: Exoticism in Post-War Popular Music* (Sydney, Australia: John Libbey & Company Ltd, 1999), pg 72.



**House of Flowers Playbill (1954)<sup>27</sup>**

The American appropriation of a traditional world musical style is nowhere more apparent than in the musical *House of Flowers* (1954). The work, which opened on Broadway in 1954, is loosely based on calypso themes and complete with all the stereotypical trappings one could assume from the time period, including a steel band trio imported directly from Trinidad. Although the musical was not a long-running success, it gave calypso music significant exposure to the middle and upper-class theatre patrons of white New York, and, to a lesser extent, America, while paving the way towards the impending calypso craze some two years later.<sup>28</sup> *House of Flowers* was written by Truman Capote with music by Harold Arlen and the premier was held at the Alvin

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<sup>27</sup> This image courtesy of Ray Funk.

<sup>28</sup> Ray Allen and Les Slater, "Steel Pan Grows in Brooklyn: Trinidadian Music and Cultural Identity" ed. Ray Allen and Lois Wilcken, *Island Sounds in the Global City: Caribbean Popular Music and Identity in New York* (New York: New York Folkloric Society, 1998), 119.

Theatre in Manhattan. The plot is set in a Caribbean bordello and many of the cast members—who included the likes of Pearl Bailey, Maya Angelou, and Geoffrey Holder—were of African-American and/or West Indian heritage.

By the 1950s, appropriation of an exotic style was nothing novel in the case of musical theatre; yet, like any new show public reception and box office sales are the final critic and any attempt at a seemingly “risky” production is cause for judiciousness. Arlen, Capote, and company, would have to walk a fine line between the exotic nature of Caribbean music and culture and the realities of theatre going public’s taste and tolerance for such regionalisms and cultural diversity. Considering that most Broadway productions are financial busts, *House of Flowers*, if anything, offers an interesting case study on the difficulties of launching a new production; in particular, a production that incorporates regionally appropriate “traditional” music (calypso) and presents it to a broad audience demographic with little or no understandings of the very “traditional” nature from which the music is based.

The first strike against the show came from its review by *New York Times* theater critic Brooks Atkinson, who was resoundingly negative:

Mr. Capote has invented a trickle of story about a pure romance that flowers out of the scarlet haven of lonely men. The book runs through the West Indian routine of voodoo dances; and the dialogue plays various changes on the single-entendre. . . . Mr. Capote’s lyrics are elementary.<sup>29</sup>

Atkinson was by no means an expert on West Indian culture or music, yet he was a well respected theatre critic in New York and his denigration of the show, though surely not a death sentence, did not bode well for its future. Pragmatic in his denouncement of *House*

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<sup>29</sup> Brooks Atkinson, “Theatre: Truman Capote’s Musical,” *New York Times*, December 31, 1954, p. 11.

of *Flowers*, Atkinson then attacked Arlen, a non-Trinidadian, for his lackluster musical score:

Even the music is common-place. Harold Arlen wrote the score. It begins with an uninteresting overture and continues through the familiar set pieces of business-like musicals. Apart from one or two interpolated numbers, and constant drumming, the score does not make much use of West Indian sources. Mr. Arlen's big numbers are second rate Broadway or Hollywood.<sup>30</sup>

Arlen, who famously wrote the score for the "Wizard of Oz," was an experienced and critically accomplished musical theater composer and it is not preposterous to suggest that he could adapt West Indian musical styles into his score. Precisely what the so called "West Indian sources" were that Arlen and Capote failed to "make much use of" is somewhat perplexing. Indeed the score for *House of Flowers* toes the line of 1950s exotica and calypso with an opening number that features bongo drums and creates a rhythmically pulsating backdrop for the strings to paint their lush picture of an aging colonial plantation house situated on a desolate Caribbean island. Perhaps Atkinson is really referring to an idealized version of Caribbean music; one that marks a less than subtle reminder of Atkinson's, and America's by extension, hegemonic vision of precisely what "Manhattan" calypso should actually be, or in this case how it should sound. And what precisely this sound actually *is* remains somewhat ambiguous considering that at the time of this review Belafonte had yet to release his *Calypso* album and calypso was more than a year from becoming an American cultural craze. Moreover, the critic's above statement is extremely interesting in light of Atkinson's further assessment of the show:

Every Negro show includes wonderful dancing. "House of Flowers" is no exception in that respect. Tall and short Negros, adults and youngsters,

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



torrid maidens in flashy costumes and bare-chested bucks break out into a number of wild, grotesque, animalistic dances. And a steel band provides haunting accompaniment. Apart from an ingenious ballet representing sea monsters, the dances look and sound alike by the time of the second act.<sup>31</sup>

Looking through the casual and not so casual tone of his racially discriminatory language, Atkinson mentions the “haunting accompaniment” of a steel band. It may be hard to imagine that perhaps the Caribbean’s most powerfully associative image, the steel pan was considered, at least in the 1950s, not something entirely West Indian. Atkinson’s criticism of the show as being not Caribbean enough or suffering for not employing more direct marks of indigenous Caribbean music seem to be rooted in a fanaticized recreation of how traditional Caribbean music *should* sound versus reality. In this sense, Atkinson is indirectly promoting the difference between American and Trinidadian calypso and he appears to have been pining for something more along the lines of a Belafonte-style of calypso and as such was subconsciously advocating for the re-making of Trinidadian calypso to the more digestible “Manhattan” style. History has relegated the *House of Flowers* to obscurity, and any contemporary success via revivals was apparently short-lived. Yet, the show remains an interesting case study in its attempt to infuse world music genres into the established Broadway canon.

Musical Theater aside, by the early 1950s forays into large-scale distribution of Black music was a profitable, but risky, endeavor for many major music labels that by 1955 had been made increasingly uneasy by the volatility and controversial nature of Black music’s emerging genres. To compound the matter, many small regional independent record labels or “indies” had once again risen into relevance following their collapse during the Great Depression, and many of these indie labels—such as Chess and

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Sun—were successful with up-and-coming black music artists. Conversely, white performers such as Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, and other rock'n' roll artists had at the same time recognized the potential and untapped markets to which black music could appeal. The first white artist to capitalize on rock'n' roll was Bill Haley who scored the first ever number one hit on the *Billboard* and *Cashbox* charts with the song “Rock Around the Clock” on July 9, 1955. Despite the importance of this moment in the larger trajectory of rock'n' roll history, Haley's contemporary success was, however, short lived and “Rock Around the Clock” was deposed from the number one position by the Mitch Miller Singers and their rendition of a nineteenth-century American parlor song “The Yellow Rose of Texas” some two months later. Mitch Miller was a powerful executive at Columbia Records and is often tabbed the anti-rock crusader of the 1950s for having famously denounced rock'n' roll as geared towards “eight to fourteen year-olds, to the pre-shaved crowd that make up twelve percent of the country's population and zero percent of its buying power.”<sup>32</sup> Miller may have been patently off-base in his denouncement of the buying power of teenagers; yet, the popularity of Miller's singing groups was undeniable and signals to a greater extent the forces at work within the music industry that were competing with rock'n' roll and other black music styles (calypso in particular) for the American audience.

The fickle nature of the American public's revolving taste for specific musical genres was only one element with which record companies had to contend, another issue was race. Rock'n' roll was a risky genre choice considering that racial tensions in the United States rose to a fever pitch with the impending de-segregation of Southern schools and the ubiquity of the racially motivated underhanded practices of radio censorship that

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<sup>32</sup> Donald Clarke, *The Rise and Fall of Popular Music* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), p 410.

ultimately lead to the payola scandal. The longevity of rock'n' roll was in question, and forward looking record companies had to consider carefully the sustainability and risk of their investments. This led many executives for the major labels such as Capital and RCA to hesitantly resist the perilous siren call of rock'n' roll and instead focus on the proven sales of crooner Nat "King" Cole and others.

The cylindrical architecture of the Capital Records headquarters in Los Angeles is often referred to as the "House that Nat built" in reference to Black singer Nat "King" Cole, who signed with the label in 1943 and had a string of hits spanning the following decades. Cole was part of small fraternity of black artists who stylistically reached beyond the color boundaries of the American cultural mainstream and attained significant commercial success. Building on the success of Cole and others, major recording labels simultaneously salivated for the untapped consumers and market share represented by the audience of black music.

For RCA, the answer to this conundrum came from the young Caribbean-American Harry Belafonte who surprised record executives, and the nation, with his overnight hit album *Calypso* released in 1956.



**Harry Belafonte, *Calypso* (1956)<sup>33</sup>**

The distinctly bold crimson of the album's background (Above) served to propel the singer, and calypso music, to the fore, announcing his arrival to the American mainstream. In fact, Belafonte had been singing his own brand of calypso in New York throughout the first half of the 1950s and the style of calypso developed by Belafonte is starkly different from its Trinidadian predecessor. His interpretation of the style can be characterized as calypso stripped of most of the confrontational and lascivious lyrical content and displaying the same sanitized "easy-to-listen" format that so aptly transformed African-American gospel quartets into Doo-wop throughout the decade of the 1950s. The success of the newly-made Americanized calypso style of Belafonte and other American-based calypso artists resulted in a unique American popular style. In order to reach the consumer abundance rampant throughout the first two decades of post-war America, the new calypso style necessitated a certain degree of appropriation by

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<sup>33</sup> Harry Belafonte, *Calypso*, LPM 1248 (New York: RCA, 1956).

major record labels for consumption by American audiences. These appropriations included a certain amount of audience participation—coordinated hand clapping, chorus singing, call and response, etc.—all historically uncharacteristic of Trinidadian calypso performances. Regardless of the authenticity of his ties to the original genre, Belafonte’s calypso struck a chord with audiences; Pete Seeger, whom we will discuss in Chapter 3, often cites Belafonte, from among the top echelon of American calypso craze performers, for his abilities to actively involve the audience in performances.<sup>34</sup>

The *Calypso* album was immediately popular and Belafonte, within a few short months, became an iconic musical superstar. As a result of Belafonte’s success, calypso craze was launched in earnest and further exposure for the music and genre came from several calypso-themed Hollywood films such as *Calypso Heat Wave* (Below) and *Bob Girl Goes Calypso* which, similar to *House of Flowers*, utilized loosely structured plots infused with calypso music and stereotypical “islands” themes the likes of limbo parties and luaus.

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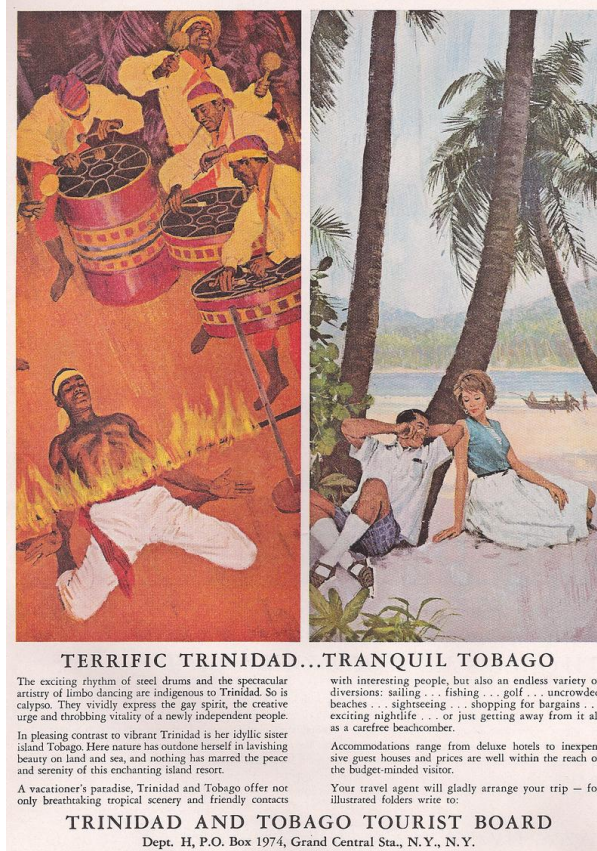
<sup>34</sup> David Dunaway, *David Dunaway Collection of Interviews with Pete Seeger and Contemporaries* (Washington, D.C.: American Folklife Center, Library of Congress).



### Calypso Heat Wave (1957)<sup>35</sup>

The newly re-made, or Americanized, calypso styling of Belafonte and other calypso artists who emerged as a result of his success formulated an American popular style (Manhattan style) that resulted from a certain degree of revamping in order to become more easily digestible and easier for distribution by major record labels, and by extension, more appealing to post-war American consumers. The template for this revamping was established by the Andrews Sisters and is most evident in their adaptation of “Rum and Coca Cola” the decade prior.

<sup>35</sup> Ray Funk and Stephen Stuempfle, ““Calypso: A World Music” An Exhibition of Photographs and Illustrations of the International History of Calypso, 1930-1970” Historical Museum of South Florida (Accessed January 1, 2007), <<http://www.calypsoworld.org/noflash/introduction.htm>>



### Late 1950s Travel Poster<sup>36</sup>

The imagery of the above poster sets forth a binary that is very representative of the forces at work in the 1950s Caribbean tourism industry. On one side of the poster, prospective tourists are excited by the image of a dark-skinned islander, courageously defying bodily harm in his attempt at clearing the limbo bar and fulfilling a seemingly ritualistic duty. On the other side, the tranquility of white sand beaches awaits the white couple as they relax after a long day of endless sun. Pairing the two ideals was an effective combination that only lacked the stimulating sound of steel drums in order to attract the prospective middle-class American traveler contemplating an exotic vacation.

<sup>36</sup> This poster was acquired by the author and was found in a stack of 1950s *New York Times* advertisements. The publisher is unknown.

The overwhelming consumer abundance of post-war America was truly a dominant force that reached beyond economics and impacted both social and cultural activities. By the early 1960s Americans were spending upwards of 300 billion dollars annually on non-essential consumer products.<sup>37</sup> Calypso was *en vogue*, and the entertainment industry scrambled to capitalize on the deep pockets of American consumers' penchant for escape. At the same time that these Caribbean destinations shed their respective colonial tethers, travel to the exotic destinations increased tenfold and the recently emancipated nations of the Caribbean, Trinidad, and Jamaica in particular, became travel hot spots. The stability of these fledgling governments now offered solid political constancy which simultaneously soothed and emboldened foreign travelers; reaching out with open arms to the pocket books of eager American tourists.

This moment also spawned the concept of the calypso club in the United States, which calypso scholar Ray Funk describes thus:

Calypso clubs created an imaginary Caribbean atmosphere with fishnets, palm fronds and other trappings. Performers often wore straw hats and striped and floral outfits, unlike the dress suits worn by calypsonians in Trinidad. Particularly appealing for Americans were performance routines involving extemporaneous singing about audience members, risqué lyrics, limbo dancing and steel pans.<sup>38</sup>

Fashionable indeed, the calypso club served the hip and elite of New York and Chicago as an escape from the urban jungle without leaving the harbor. Calypso clubs often featured an all-inclusive Caribbean spectacular show, complete with a cornucopia of Caribbean cultural capital. Similar to Americanized calypso music, however, the

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<sup>37</sup> Andrew Hurley, *Diners, Bowling Alleys and Trailer Parks: Chasing the American Dream in the Postwar Consumer Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 4-5.

<sup>38</sup> Ray Funk and Stephen Stuempfle, "Calypso: A World Music" An Exhibition of Photographs and Illustrations of the International History of Calypso, 1930-1970" Historical Museum of South Florida (Accessed January 1, 2007), <<http://www.calypsoworld.org/noflash/introduction.htm>>



trappings and costumes of calypso music perpetuated stereotypes and cultural practices far removed from reality. The experience was exotic in comparison to the white American experience, and the calypso club atmosphere capitalized on this difference.

Throughout the country in New York, Chicago, and other major cities with substantial, or at least notable, Caribbean immigrant populations, Americans readily enjoyed the calypso clubs and participated in the festivities.



**Calypso Club, Chicago 1950s (Rudy King steel pan)<sup>39</sup>**

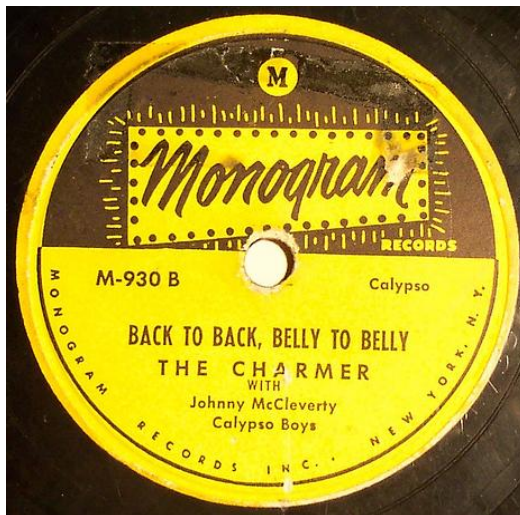
For their part, the calypsonians and steel panists wooed patrons and played the role of entertainer much the same way their Trinidadian counterparts entertained the American troops in Trinidad during WWII.<sup>40</sup> By catering to the American audience new to calypso, the calypso club scene in America quickly associated the newly created calypso craze and steel pan sound with the entirety of Caribbean culture.

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Harvey Neptune, *Caliban and the Yankees: Trinidad and the American Occupation*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

The American calypso club venue also proved beneficial to singers who sought to establish careers as pop singers without venturing headlong into New York's crowded jazz scene. Moreover, the stylish calypso clubs, compared to the West Indian nightclubs of Harlem, provided higher-class performance opportunities for many Afro-American and Caribbean-American singers. Most notable of these hopeful artists attempting to move up in the entertainment business was Louis Farrakhan (Below) who, before co-founding of the Nation of Islam, was a popular calypso singer performing under the moniker "The Mighty Charmer."



**"The Mighty Charmer"<sup>41</sup>**



**A.K.A. Louis Farrakhan<sup>42</sup>**

Farrakhan and other notable calypsonians released albums on the Monogram label. Prior to the calypso craze, many crooners, Black pop, and Caribbean singers worked a circuit of jazz nightclubs that often inserted the calypso-themed acts in between small instrumental and vocal jazz groups. Despite the attempt at incorporating variety acts such as calypsonians the circuit was mainly a jazz scene and it was increasingly difficult for Caribbean singers in particular to establish solid careers among audiences waiting to hear

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.last.fm/music/The+Charmer> <accessed June 21, 2010>

<sup>42</sup> The Charmer, "Back to Back, Belly to Belly," M930-B (New York: Monogram Records, 1957).

the next jazz group. In light of these difficulties the American calypso club venue lent itself well to singers who sought to establish singing careers without venturing headlong into the jazz scenes of New York and elsewhere. Other notable calypso singers, Belafonte and Farrakhan aside, include the controversial singer and political activist Paul Robeson.

By the mid 1950s the American public was indeed becoming excited about calypso and absorbing the style in a very direct way; yet, the American public was not also simultaneously exposed to steel drums on the same national level. At typical calypso performances, artists such as Farrakhan, American calypsonians, and several well-known Trinidadian-born calypsonians regularly included steel pan as part of their performing entourage. Widely considered traditional accompaniment in these shows in Trinidad and Tobago, by the mid 1950s even “Manhattan” calypsonians such as Belafonte, like his Trinidadian compatriots, often hired steel drum players to accompany his calypso flavored concerts. However, despite the overwhelming popularity of calypso shows (including acts using steel drum accompaniment) hosted by Trinidadians Lord Kitchener and Roaring Lion throughout the Caribbean and Caribbean-American pockets of New York, it is in Belafonte’s recorded brand of “Manhattan Calypso” heard on his *Calypso* album that the masses of mainstream white Americans first experienced the exotic and infectious sounds of calypso. Moreover, in a move perhaps aimed at broadening his audience and distancing his music from a purely Caribbean sound association, steel drums are absent in Belafonte’s early calypso recordings and many of his important television appearances such as *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1956. Because of this, the American public appears to have separated the two elements—steel drum and calypso—

in a way Trinidadians never considered and one result was an American preference for calypso music rather than calypso and steel drums.

Following a research expedition to Trinidad in 1956, Folklorist Pete Seeger describes Trinidad the following way:

The Island [Trinidad] exports petroleum products, foodstuffs, Angostura bitters, and Calypso music.<sup>43</sup>

Yet, the Trinidadian calypso music known to Pete Seeger is markedly different in lyrics, meaning, and artist image from the “Manhattan” style created by Belafonte et al. in the late 1950s. Mainly, Trinidadian calypso is based fundamentally on a tradition of social satire and political commentary so important to the Afro-Trinidadian people of this culture. The disparity between Trinidadian and American calypso was an issue that angered many Trinidadians. No shortage of ink was spilled by Trinidadian and American newspapers criticizing the rise of the American style and the topic was something that Trinidadian calypsonians were particularly fond of attacking in song within the calypso tents and other calypso performance venues during Trinidad’s annual Carnival celebration in late winter.

Perhaps the most important of these anti-Manhattan calypso critiques was penned by Trinidadian dancer, musicians, and artists Geoffrey Holder. In a 1957 *New York Times* article titled “That Fade from Trinidad,” Holder confronted what he felt was the desensitization of calypso music in America and blatant disregard for the calypso tradition in Trinidad. In this article, Holder details the history of calypso and attempts to educate the reading audience of the true nature of calypso performance; complete with a

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<sup>43</sup> Pete Seeger, *The Incomplete Folksinger*, ed. Jo Metcalf Schwartz (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), p 165.

synopsis of the annual Carnival celebration. Holder's article even provided drawings of traditional Carnival characters and participants (Below).



**Images of Carnival sketched by Geoffrey Holder 1957<sup>44</sup>**

The article also functions as a sounding board for Holder who attempts to explain to the broader American public the elements of style and meaning of calypso music:

The new craze was started, I must say, by Harry Belafonte. He is a fine singer, but he is not a calypsonian. It is somewhat saddening, too, to know that a lot of what you hear now is amusing, oh yes, but not true calypso. It is Manhattan Calypso. . . .<sup>45</sup>

His dismissal of Belafonte is no surprise and was a sentiment shared by many Trinidadian calypsonians.<sup>46</sup> Later in the article Holder defines what he feels is the difference between Trinidadian and Manhattan calypso music:

The difference between true calypso and the kind of music I call Manhattan Calypso is this. It is an American version of West Indian melodies and lyrics, similar to American versions of Hawaiian music, for example. It is slicked up prettied up and sophisticated up. It is not

<sup>44</sup> Geoffrey Holder, "That Fad From Trinidad," *New York Times*, April 21, 1957, pg 192.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Personal Conversation with Trinidadian scholar Kim Johnson, February 21, 2011.

spontaneous; it is calculated. Also, it must more nearly conform to the popular music Americans know than to the West Indian music they don't know. To stick too close to the true Caribbean Calypso would be to make it unpopular, too foreign, too unfamiliar. It would be liked only by a chic few. . . .<sup>47</sup>

Holder's words attempt to address the issues surrounding the appropriation of calypso music, the calypso craze, and the realities of acculturation and conformity faced by many traditional music genres throughout American history. Furthermore, the sharp tone of Holder's prose is largely representative of the shared frustration of Trinidadians as they witnessed, before their eyes, the re-making of a Trinidadian cultural pillar by Yankee interlopers.<sup>48</sup> One of the ironies of Holder's above comments is that by altering traditional calypso in a way that is more relevant to American sensibilities, Manhattan calypso in a way upholds a traditional function of calypso music as a reflection of local society. Yet, the purging of unfamiliar Trinidadian elements from traditional calypso allows Manhattan calypso the ability to appease the American mainstream's familiar Caribbean ideals while simultaneously inspiring the exotic unknown.

Regardless of whether the "Manhattan Calypso" was the re-making or un-making of calypso music, the calypso craze was a star that burned fast and bright, and by early 1957 the enthusiasm for calypso had transcended the ethnic neighborhoods of the New York Boroughs and spanned the globe. Moreover, despite the decreasing popularity of calypso records from their pinnacle in 1958, the calypso craze resulted in the Caribbean cultural capital being firmly established as an American popular culture edifice. As with its many musical predecessors, the calypso obsession would not, perhaps could not, last forever and within four years of the 1956 ascension of Belafonte's *Calypso* album the

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<sup>47</sup> Geoffrey Holder, "That Fad from Trinidad," *New York Times*, April 21, 1957, pg 192.

<sup>48</sup> The tone of Holders' prose was further supported by Trinidadian scholar Kim Johnson. Interview with Kim Johnson, Port of Spain, Trinidad, January 19, 2008.

calypso supernova was completely imploded. Unlike doo-wop and other early rock'n'roll genres cultivated by Dick Clark at school dances and other youth driven events throughout the United States, calypso retained its popularity among a decidedly older clientele. This directly affected the genre's posterity among baby boomer Americans, many of whom, despite a shared youth experience, so often reminisce past the calypso music of their youth and instead embrace teen heartthrobs the likes of Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly, Pat Boone, and the plethora of Doo Wop sensations.

In the end, Trinidadian calypso, in spite of taking a backseat to "Manhattan Calypso" in the United States during the 1950s, has ultimately survived the brief American obsession and appropriation. For all intents and purposes, calypso in America is footnote of post-war popular culture whereas calypso in Trinidad is still a vibrant and important musical and cultural genre.<sup>49</sup> Geoffrey Holder's following comments further point to the irony of "Manhattan Calypso" as he, and many other hopeful immigrants dreaming of coming to America, can measure.

What I get from "Jamaica Farewell" (But I'm sad to say I'm on my way/Won't be back for many a day/My heart is down/ My head is turning around/ I had to leave a little girl in Kingston Town) is this picture: Geoffrey sitting on a jetty in Port of Spain, Trinidad, looking at the horizon and dreaming that someday he will be in America. My God, my dream has come true.<sup>50</sup>

According to Holder, the song punctuates a reverse take on the lyrics considering that as vacationing Americans look to the song to help remember back to their island vacation, many islanders look to the song as a way to look forward towards a better future. Each

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<sup>49</sup> It should be noted, however, that in recent years a lack of young calypsonians and the rise of soca and chutney soca as the premier carnival musical genres have lent cause for concern among those interested in the preservation of traditional Trinidadian music. Both the *Trinidad Express* and the *Trinidad Guardian* have run countless editorials on the issue in the past few years.

<sup>50</sup> Geoffrey Holder, "That Fad From Trinidad," *New York Times*, April 21, 1957, pg 192.

perspective can lay claim to the aspirations of a better life; however, the duality and sometimes controversy of the calypso song genre is something never fully reconciled by the American public, nor did it ever have intentions of doing so.

### **The New York Carnival Scene: Past and Present**



**The New York Carnival in Brooklyn (1973)<sup>51</sup>**

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<sup>51</sup> Photo courtesy of Newton Kirby Jr.



*Carnival is sort of a therapy, a way of forgetting troubles. . . this [West Indian Day Carnival in New York] is exactly how it used to be in the West Indies—Carlos Lezama (1991)<sup>52</sup>*

Thanks to mandated congressional changes to the United States immigration laws in 1965, the United States once again saw an influx of Latin American and Caribbean immigrants similar to that of the years prior to 1924. The most important of these was the Hart-Cellar Act which abolished the National Origins Formula that restricted the influx of immigrants based on existing percentages of an ethnic group's population present in the United States at any given time. The National Origins Formula was first enacted in 1924 and effectively set low immigration quotas for several geographic areas including Eastern Europe and the Caribbean whose citizens, prior to the act, enjoyed relatively easy immigration access to the United States. Historically, immigrants were admitted to the United States through multiple ports of entry spread across the nation; however, New York has long served as the preliminary and primary destination for new Caribbean-America migrants. Legal African-Caribbean immigration accounted for some 8.5 percent (or approximately 850,000) of the total immigration from 1969 to 1987.<sup>53</sup> In fact, including legal immigrants, approximations of illegal immigrants, and domestic born children, New York currently (2011) harbors some 1.9 million African-Caribbeans and is the single largest Afro-Caribbean city in the world; larger than any Caribbean counterpart. The variety and quantity of Caribbean culture exploding from concentrated populations of Caribbean neighborhoods in central Brooklyn, southwest

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<sup>52</sup>Dennis Hevesi, "Carlos Lezama, 83, Dies; Shaped West Indian Parade," *New York Times*, January 27, 2007 pg. 7.

<sup>53</sup>Remco Van Capelleveen, "The "Caribbeanization" of New York City: West Indian Carnival in Brooklyn," *Feast and Celebrations in North American Ethnic Communities*, ed. Ramon Gutierrez and Genevieve Fabre (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

Queens, and the north Bronx creates an atmosphere that, according to Caribbean novelist Paul Marshall, fools one's sense of place:

Whenever I walk along Fulton Street or Nostrand Avenue, I have to remind myself that I'm in Brooklyn and not in the middle of St. George's, Grenada, or Kingston, Jamaica, or on some other West Indian Island. Because there, suddenly, are all the sights and sounds, colors, smells, and textures of the entire Caribbean archipelago, transplanted intact to the sidewalks of New York.<sup>54</sup>

Entrenched in their new homeland, many Caribbean immigrants, determined to take a different path from their European predecessors, reluctantly began to integrate and assimilate into American life. Caribbean immigrants were more likely to identify themselves as Caribbean rather than American and entering a society where ethnic assertions often serve as a basis for gains in social, economic, and political power and independence, was a particularly rough transition. In this sense, many elements go into constructing the identity of the Carnival and J'Ouvert (a tradition of community parties where participants adorn themed costumes such as devils or naughty sailors) tradition in Brooklyn not the least of which is the struggle of Afro-Caribbeans to establish a sense of place within the black community of New York while preserving a sense of their former Caribbean heritage.

The current New York Carnival tradition is a remade tradition and the role of steel band in this tradition is complex yet paramount to the overarching narrative.

Interestingly, the American calypso craze of the 1950s is essentially unrelated to the formation of the New York Carnival. In telling the story of the remade New York Carnival tradition one must further separate this narrative from the early steel band and calypso traditions discussed earlier in this chapter (and in Chapter 3). Moreover, Kim

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<sup>54</sup> Paule Marshall, "Rising Islanders of Bed-Stuy," *New York Times Magazine*, November 3, 1985, 67.

Loy Wong and the United States Navy Steel Band, two agents of steel band propagation discussed in the following chapters, had little to do with the Carnival and J'Ouvert tradition in Brooklyn. Conversely, the style of so-called *Road March* steel band music initially practiced, and still practiced today, in Brooklyn is the same stylistically as the large group music played by Trinidadians in Port of Spain, Trinidad.<sup>55</sup>



**Sagicor Exodus Steel Band during a road march, Port of Spain (2008)<sup>56</sup>**

The above photo taken outside of the Queen's Park Savannah, Port of Spain, Trinidad, illustrates the enormity of personnel and equipment required to embark on a road march.

Due to a consistent lack of personnel and instrumental resources, the *Road March* style of

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<sup>55</sup> "Road March-style" steel band playing is different from Panorama or concert steel band playing in that tunes, or sections of tunes, are often endlessly repeated for added duration. Ensembles often spend in excess of four to six hours on road march and play continuously. Normal Panorama or concert tunes last approximately 6-8 minutes.

<sup>56</sup> This photo was taken by the Author on January 27, 2008 in Port of Spain, Trinidad.

steel band music was and is rarely attempted by American steel bands outside of New York. The following discussion focuses on the attempt by Afro-Caribbean New Yorkers to preserve their cultural roots by re-creating the Trinidadian Carnival tradition. Unlike the Manhattan calypso which is predicated on an exotic otherness, the remade New York Carnival tradition is based on sameness; a point that becomes increasingly apparent through an analysis of New York Carnivals past and present.<sup>57</sup>

### **Early Carnival in New York**

Although calypso music gained an early foothold in New York during the 1930s, Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago has a long and complicated history that dates back three centuries and includes elements of African spirituals, Shango and Yoruban religious rituals, Catholicism, and other French, English, and Spanish influences. Despite its liturgical roots, by the early 1900s the Trinidadian Carnival had evolved into a predominantly secular celebration with tent shows, masquerades, fetes, and parades dominating the festivities. The New York Carnival imported parts of this Trinidadian tradition and further secularized the events, retaining the spiritual and community aspects while conducting a general jettison of the religious rites still practiced in Trinidad and Tobago.

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<sup>57</sup> Perhaps the best works on the New York Carnival traditional and its pertinence to steel band are Ray Allen and Les Slater, "Steel Pan Grows in Brooklyn: Trinidadian Music and Cultural Identity," ed. Ray Allen and Lois Wilcken, *Island Sounds in the Global City: Caribbean Popular Music and Identity in New York* (New York: New York Folkloric Society, 1998), 119, and Ray Allen, "J'Ouvert in Brooklyn Carnival: Revitalizing Steel Pan and Ole Mas Traditions," *Western Folklore*, Vol. 58, No. 3, Studies of Carnival in Memory of Daniel J. Crowley (Summer – Autumn, 1999), 255-277.

The Carnival scene in New York developed over a series of decades beginning with the first wave of African Caribbean immigrants to New York between 1900 and 1930. Perhaps best known as the formative years of jazz, country, and American folk music, the 1930s witnessed, too, the residual influence of race-records, which were overtaken by the dominance of swing music across the American radio waves. This era was also a formative time for calypso as a genre, which, for Caribbean-American audiences and their small but adventurous white counterparts, proved to be a popular attraction for audiences already dancing to the infectious sounds of Don Apuzio's rumba and mambo orchestras. Though calypso would have to wait until the Andrews Sisters 1945 hit "Rum and Coca Cola" to enjoy widespread commercial success, the dancehalls of New York would prove to be important venues for Caribbean music scene of the 1930s.

The 1930s was an exciting time for live music in America as cities across the country sprouted a series of well-known ballrooms, many of which boasted capacities in excess of two thousand people. This was the age of the ballroom, and while American white and non-Caribbean black audiences enjoyed swing and jazz dances in the grand ballrooms of New York, many nostalgic (perhaps homesick) Caribbean West Indian immigrants also organized ballroom dances and socials replacing the swing bands with masquerades and calypso contests. The atmosphere was ripe and New York had no shortage of large ballrooms to house West Indian Carnival-themed musical shows. To this end, West Indian Carnival, or at least the Carnival atmosphere, thrived indoors. Impresarios of these West Indian shows held events and parties at many of the most lavish and prominent ballroom venues in New York including the Savoy, Renaissance,

and Audubon.<sup>58</sup> Popularity of the Caribbean-style ballroom events spread throughout the tri-state area. Moreover, the gradual decline of the colonial Caribbean economic model, one based on an outdated agrarian and plantation style economy, among the Caribbean motherlands of Trinidad and Jamaica resulted in a steady increase in New York's immigrant Caribbean American population as unemployed laborers traveled North in search of factories and steady employment. Soon the spacious ballrooms of New York exceeded capacity and were rendered too small to host the Caribbean-themed events.

The logical conclusion, moving these Caribbean-themed events to their traditional space outdoors, posed a serious problem for the northern geographic location of New York City; Carnival in the Caribbean is tied to the church calendar and is traditionally held the days leading up to Ash Wednesday in February—a blissful start to the dry season in the equatorial Caribbean, but a snowy, frozen, hinterland in New York state. A compromise was struck and the two primary organizers of the most popular early ballroom shows—Rufus Gorin and Jesse Wattle, who were already experienced in booking and hosting West Indian events—planned a series of outdoor festivities and parade to be held over the Labor Day weekend in late August. A popular travel weekend, Labor Day had offered Americans a paid holiday since 1894 as a result of the fallout from the bloody Pullman Strike in Pullman, Illinois. The Labor Day holiday also celebrated the struggle of the lower class laborers in their fight for legitimacy, and this was a fight that resonated with Trinidadians and Caribbean residents alike who struggled with the restrictions of colonialism. Despite the serious calendar shift, the move pleased

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<sup>58</sup> Dennis Hevesi, "Carlos Lezama, 83, Dies; Shaped West Indian Parade," *New York Times*. January 27, 2007 pg, 7.

many Trinidadians, including Lord Invader (Rupert Grant), who in 1956 composed the calypso “Labor Day” in honor of the new venue and modified date of celebration:

Labor Day I felt happy  
Because I played Carnival in New York City,  
From 110<sup>th</sup> to 142<sup>nd</sup>, we had bands of every description,  
This is the first time New York ever had  
Carnival on the streets like Trinidad<sup>59</sup>

A festival date held on the calendar opposite of the homeland Carnival was a compromise due to weather, yes, but a compromise that also, through the entrepreneurial vision of Gorin and Wattle, facilitated the creation of an international Carnival circuit.<sup>60</sup> The New York Carnival, and those in Toronto, Canada, and Notting Hill, London, formed a newly conceived Carnival circuit and the added bedlam and parading created a massive spike in demand for costumes and floats throughout North America. This increased demand led to an economic boom for profiteers of the Carnival industry (costumers, dancers, moko jumbies (stilt walkers), steel pan leaders and tuner/builders, calypso singers, etc.), who now had a second (New York), third (Toronto), and even fourth (London) season in which to create, perform, and/or sell their once annual wares.

The first official outdoor New York Carnival was organized by Gorin and Wattle and closely resembled the traditional outdoor Trinidadian celebration. The event parade followed a path down Lenox Avenue during the late summer of 1947 and found a home in the quintessentially Caribbean-rich neighborhoods of Harlem. Early accounts of the annual West Indian-style parade indicate, or at least appear to suggest, that the event was

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<sup>59</sup> Lord Invader (aka Rupert Grant) *Calypso*, FP914 (Folkways Records: New York, 1955).

<sup>60</sup> The “circuit” represents various concentrated enclaves of West Indian Immigrants scattered throughout the former reaches of the British Empire. Annual activities begins in Trinidad during the late-winter Lenten season, then moves to Toronto for the Caribana festival during the latter half of July into the first week of Augusts. At this point the circuit is split with some participants going to Brooklyn for the Labor Day Carnival and parade, and others crossing overseas to London to attend the Notting Hill Carnival which falls annually on the last weekend in August, usually the 30-31.

large in scale. Under the heading “2000 Join Parade of West Indians” a *New York Times* reporter chronicled the events of the 1954 parade hosted and organized by the then West Indies Day Association:

150, 000 in Harlem Cheer 7<sup>th</sup> Annual March, Sparked by Bands, Mambo Dancers: Two thousand citizens of West Indian descent marched, danced, and cavorted up Seventh Avenue in Harlem yesterday in the seventh annual celebration of West Indies Day.

Cheered by 150, 000 spectators, the paraders, attired in the colorful native costumes of the islands of the caribbean, staged a gay, Carnival-like procession along the two-and-one-half mile route between 110<sup>th</sup> and 155<sup>th</sup> Streets.

Hundreds of calypso and mambo dancers hopped and stepped to the tropical rhythms of twenty small bands. Fifty units representing clubs and other organizations of Americans born in the West Indies or descended from West Indian Stock took part in the two-hour procession.<sup>61</sup>

The reliability of the number of estimated spectators is certainly questionable, considering that five years later, in 1959, the estimate was 115,000, some 40,000 fewer than 1954. Regardless, even with conservative estimates the event was an explosion of West Indian culture and according to many eyewitnesses, the 1954 Harlem parade and mas resembled its Trinidadian counterpart in every way except for overall size and, interestingly, a noticeable lack of steel drums—which played only a minor role in the Harlem event. This a point to which I will return. Furthermore, several important foreign dignitaries, and local government officials attended the parade, including Manhattan Borough president Hulan E. Jack, British Consulate General to New York Thomas Shaw, and others.

By 1959, participation in the West Indian Day Carnival was at an all-time high with reports estimating the number of actual parade marchers and participants at or near 5,000, though the spectators had shrunk to some 115,000. *New York Times* reporter

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<sup>61</sup> Staff Writer, “2000 Join Parade of West Indians,” *New York Times* September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1954, pg 39.



Michael James captures the spirit and revelry of Carnival under the heading “Spectators Join Calypso Parade” while also illuminating the active participation of spectators in the march:

The wonder of the parade, however, was that it rapidly became an audience-participation affair. Once it got properly started there was no way of distinguishing the official paraders from the spectators who had joined the march after succumbing to the irresistible calypso tempo of the steel bands. It was, in effect, a mass demonstration of neighborhood joy.<sup>62</sup>

Unlike the 1954 Carnival parade, the above account of 1959 provides mention of steel drums signaling the progress of the Carnival committee to remake the Trinidad-style traditional while also marking the newfound availability of steel drums and players. Even though Caribbean immigrants had enjoyed residence in New York for more than a century, the mass scale of an outdoor Carnival was something new to the city. Carnival was, however, not an entirely new cultural experience to Caribbean New Yorkers and in this sense these party revelers were simply exercising their traditional rights as Caribbeans and now New Yorkers to participate in this community event. Public outpourings of cultural and civic pride are common during Carnival in Trinidad, and the “mass demonstration of neighborhood joy” should also be considered cultural demonstrations very much in line with tradition.

Early New York steel panist Rudy King once commented that the impromptu nature of “jump up” in Carnival in New York surprised many New Yorkers, recalling that in the late 1950s extra masqueraders, steel bands, etc. would show up “in the spirit of Carnival” and that these unaffiliated participants did so to the chagrin of parade organizers and security.<sup>63</sup> Considering that parade organizers were ultimately responsible

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<sup>62</sup> Michael James, “Spectators Join Calypso Parade,” *New York Times*, September 8, 1959.

<sup>63</sup> Allen, “J’overt in Brooklyn”, pg. 123.

to the city for the parade permit, the uninvited participants posed a serious problem and blurred the boundaries between audience and performer. In this way the tradition of New York Carnival was remade in a way closely aligned to its Trinidadian counterpart where the practice of spectators jumping into a parade procession is one of the most basic and essential activities of Carnival.

In his piece for the *New York Times*, James further chronicles the events and impact of the 1959 Carnival while capturing a unique insight into early interplay and public reception of this large-scale Caribbean cultural display.

March by 5,000 becomes a Carnival for 120,000 Upper Seventh Avenue: There was another parade in town yesterday—one up Seventh Avenue from 111<sup>th</sup> to 145<sup>th</sup> Street—and man, what a parade it was.

The occasion was West Indian Day and the parade was the eleventh in what has become an annual affair. The somewhat distraught police put the number of marchers at 5000—the official marchers that is—and the spectators at 115,000. . . .

. . . It was, in effect, a mass demonstration of neighborhood joy. The parade was to have started at 2:45 P.M., and it got under way just about an hour late. That waiting crowds were deep along the east side of the avenue.

At first the police tried to keep people off the center stripe of the avenue, a slender strip of grass and trees and shade. But the crowd broke and charged the strip. The police shrugged their shoulders and smiled—the cheer of the occasion was infectious.

There was no form to the march. It was led off by a steel band. Other steel bands marched at intervals in the parade, which took about an hour to pass the reviewing stand. Much of the audience fell in behind the first group of young men and women in Caribbean costumes banging away on converted oil drums.

There were some conventional drum and bugle bands, too, but no one paid much attention to those. When the last of the calypso ensembles had passed the great majority of the audience was in the street, dancing to the general joiner to “shake it, man, shake it.”<sup>64</sup>

This “mass demonstration of neighborhood joy” was both a blessing and a curse for parade organizers, who on the other hand, sought to capitalize on the authentic displays

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<sup>64</sup> Michael James, “Spectators Join Calypso Parade,” *The New York Times*, September 8, 1959, pg 31.

of culture and spirit provided by the affiliated and unaffiliated participants. Yet, the security and pacing issues inherent in such a chaotic process were apparent in the failed attempt to blockade spectators from the center of the boulevard.

Unlike Trinidad, where Carnival halts the daily functions of the country for three days every February, New York resumed business as usual the day following the Carnival. Moreover, timing for the New York Carnival was a serious issue and severely limited with hard deadlines that, unlike Trinidad, were actually enforced by the police. The New York Carnival already received, in the mind of organizers, too much negative attention directed at the overall length of the parade and the disruptions of the parade progress by Carnival revelers and unaffiliated participants jeopardized future permits. Moreover, the idea that “spectators had joined the march after succumbing to the irresistible calypso tempo of the steel bands” paints a fascinating picture of the intangible spirit, the pan jumbie, that inspired the event participants. Early steel panist and Afro-Caribbean immigrant Caldera Caraballo comments that organizers often feared that spectators and unaffiliated participants would severely slow the tempo of the parade or, worse, truncate or alter the planned route, either of which would result in fines for parade organizers. According to Caraballo the cultural disconnect between the Caribbean and the United States was glaringly apparent in the lack of regard to the gravity of the prescribed event route and the restrictions of the permit. According to Caraballo “You see this was a real parade that was trying to start at point A and end at point B.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Allen, “J’Overt in Brooklyn”, p 123.



**Carnival In New York, Labor Day 1973<sup>66</sup>**

### **Carnival Moves to Brooklyn**

Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s the West Indian Day Carnival was a much anticipated annual event in Harlem. However, despite the general success and enthusiastic support of the general public the Harlem Carnival had its share of detractors. The Carnival was loud and congested, and clean-up efforts were often poorly financed by officials. To make matters worse, on rare occasions incidents involving hoodlums and vandals complicated matters. Regardless, event organizers and zealous Carnival participants sought to dash bad publicity and reconcile complaints from local officials and law enforcement agencies.

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<sup>66</sup> Photo Courtesy of Newton Kirby, Jr.

The Harlem Carnival was held annually in an area encompassing Lennox Avenue and 115<sup>th</sup> street from 1947 until 1964 with only two major incidents. The first incident was a small riot in 1961 and following the second incident of similar violence in 1964, the fears of organizers was realized and the Lennox Avenue Carnival permit was revoked by the City. The following year permit requests for the Carnival were denied due in part to the rise of several civil rights organizations such as the Black Panthers and Nation of Islam (headed by Afro-Caribbean and former calypsonian Louis Farrakhan), who opposed the celebration and accused it of perpetuating colonial stereotypes. By the end of 1964, organizers had made little progress in attaining a new permit and the Harlem Carnival was suspended indefinitely. Gage Averill suggests that the radicalized and energized agenda of African Americans struggling through the dark days of the civil rights movement found the joyous celebrations of the West Indian Carnival too festive and positive; an idea detrimental to their political capital and overall image of struggle and oppression.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, these black civil rights groups were attempting to unify all African Americans to a common cause and saw the Carnival as a perpetuation of a dark colonial past. In a fascinating reversal, former calypsonians such as Louis Farrakhan came to denounce the music and cultural celebration that in decades prior propelled him to minor stardom and a notable singing career.

Despite feeling the alienation of their Black counterparts, many pro-Carnival supporters organized and formed the West Indian American Day Carnival Association (WIADC) in late 1964. This organizing body was headed by Gorin and was intended to

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<sup>67</sup> Gage Averill "Caribbean Musics: Haiti and Trinidad and Tobago," ed. John Schechter, *Music in Latin American Culture: Regional Traditions* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1999).

directly resemble a combination of the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival Commission and the Trinidad and Tobago Steel Bandsmen Association. From 1964-1969 WIADC spawned a seemingly endless number of attempts and plots to revive the New York Carnival, many of which involved relocating the event to different areas in the greater New York region. Finally, in 1969 Carlos Lezama, then the sitting president of WIADC, succeeded in moving the official parade route to Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn and obtained a permit for the new parade route to begin again in time for the 1971 Carnival. The new route down Eastern Parkway was significantly more visible than previous routes in Harlem and was a major thoroughfare through the heart of central Brooklyn which boasted a concentrated West Indian population.<sup>68</sup>

By the time of the New York Carnival's relocation to Brooklyn in 1971, the borough had long since emerged as a hub for New York's West Indian population, especially those with Trinidadian and Jamaican heritage, and was welcoming to the idea of a Caribbean-style Carnival in New York. Following the move to Brooklyn, the floats and participants of the parade portion of the former Harlem Carnival continued as usual, and the mas tents (large tents which house food vendors, bars, and live music) began to resemble their current form stretching from street-to-street forming a series of massive block parties spread throughout the borough and surrounding neighborhoods of Brooklyn. These parties resembled closely the calypso tents and mas camps of their Caribbean homelands such as Trinidad and Jamaica and small side streets housed neighborhood-sponsored parties hosting many of the most popular calypsonians and

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<sup>68</sup> Currently, the Brooklyn Carnival and parade is held annually over the Labor Day weekend and the parade follows approximately the same route as outlined in 1969 down Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn.

musicians imported specially from the islands; a process common throughout the history of American/West Indian relations and immigration.



**New York Despers 1973<sup>69</sup>**

### **Steel Pan Enters the New York Carnival Parade**

In Trinidad during the 1950s and early 60s, the public strongly felt that Carnival was, or had evolved into, a symbol of freedom from colonial powers.<sup>70</sup> Despite the efforts of a few isolated Black civil rights leaders—Farrakhan et al—this spirit carried over into the remade traditions of New York, London, and Toronto respectively.<sup>71</sup> As we have seen earlier in this chapter, Carnival has been a part of New York since the first wave of Caribbean immigrants began to celebrate it in ballrooms during the 1920s. However, for

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<sup>69</sup> Photo Courtesy of Newton Kirby, Jr.

<sup>70</sup> Errol Hill, *Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972), 24.

<sup>71</sup> It should be noted, however, that the Notting Hill Carnival in London was a middle to upper-middle class celebration whereas the New York Carnival was largely working and immigrant participants.

several key reasons steel pan was not part of the early festivities of the indoor and outdoor New York Carnival events. First and foremost, the instrument family was formed in the 1930s but was not fully developed in its native Trinidad until the early 1950s with advent of the chromatic spider web tenor steel pan. Other Trinidadian traditions, such as steel pans accompanying calypsonians, did not reach New York until the late 1940s leaving very little time for the practice to take hold in Trinidad let alone New York. Second, given the cold weather of New York and the relative size of traditional steel bands in Trinidad (often exceeding 100 performers), finding adequate rehearsal and performance spaces was a major issue for any steel band and a prohibitive factor for ballroom fetes held indoors. Third, timing is a key problematic issue here. During the winter months in New York, indoor fetes and ballroom parties were at their height of popularity. Yet, the winter months are also a time in which many Trinidadians travel back to Trinidad for Carnival leaving a steel pan brain drain that, in order to be remedied, necessitates moving the calendar date; in this case to summer.

Finally, sites for the creation of the requisite immense panyards had to be found in New York and necessary structures and facilities erected in order to store and care for the steel pans.





**Sonatas Steel Orchestra Panyard, New York (2009)<sup>72</sup>**

In Trinidad and Tobago, the task of acquiring or commandeering a space for a panyard was historically a common undertaking for aspiring panists, and squatting in run-down tenements was commonplace.<sup>73</sup> Trinidadian steel bands tend to represent neighborhoods, and the panyards normally became permanent tenants in these areas. If a band folded financially or organizationally, the panyard remained and was overtaken by a newly formed steel band; thus the space was perpetually occupied.<sup>74</sup> In New York, however,

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<sup>72</sup> <http://befog.org/photos/768/> <accessed May 12, 2010> In 2009, Sonatas Steel Orchestra USA's panyard was located between 1252-54 Sterling Place (between Troy and Albany Avenues), Brooklyn, New York.

<sup>73</sup> It should be noted that as Port of Spain modernizes and becomes more concerned with tourism it has become increasingly difficult for panyards to maintain their sovereignty and squatting rights. Moreover, some panyards are being reclaimed by original property owners. The most famous of these is the reclamation attempt by the owners of property where the famous Phase II Pan Groove panyards resides in the John John neighborhood of Port of Spain, Trinidad.

<sup>74</sup> In more extreme cases, business developers attempted to relocate panyards to other less desirable areas. In 2006, Phase II Pan Groove was paid a large sum of money by a condo developer to relocate their panyard. In a classic move of Trinidadian defiance, leaders of the group took the money in good faith, refused to leave by the agreed upon date, and then waged a public campaign to have their panyard listed as

acquiring a site for the panyards was an entirely different situation, more easily said than done. Considering the value of property in Brooklyn and, in comparison to Trinidad, a significantly elevated enforcement of property rights, steel bands in New York often nomadically drift across the city in temporary or seasonal panyards storing equipment in warehouses over the Carnival offseason.

Third, although Brooklyn had a vast number of enthusiastic steel pan participants there was an absolute lack of qualified instructors and arrangers to create music and rehearse the bands. The skilled early steel panists of Trinidad were also in many cases poor young vagrants and other than a select few—the original 1951 TASPO (Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra) members for instance—few steel band makers and arrangers traveled outside of Trinidad, let alone relocate to the New York area, until the late 1950s and early 1960s. In light of this reality, hiring qualified arrangers and instructors for Carnival was a real hindrance to the growth of the steel pan in the early New York Carnival scene. This made qualified individuals such as Rudy King invaluable to the development of the Harlem Carnival parade. King was a steel pan builder/arranger/leader who was born in Trinidad and learned the craft of steel pan as a child alongside Ellie Mannette, Anthony Williams, and other Trinidadian steel pan pioneers. Following his immigration to the United States in 1949 King immediately began forming steel bands in New York and performing around town.

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national historic site. The strategy worked and Phase II is still located in the John John neighborhood as it has been for some forty years.



**Rudy King, center of the front row, 1960<sup>75</sup>**

King formed a small steel pan group and performed concerts throughout New York during the 1950s (Above). A skilled tuner and player of steel pans, King built and played his own instruments. King was the first steel panist to join the musicians union in New York and had to do so as a “percussionist” as the steel pan was not an instrument recognized by the organization. Despite his significant performing and efforts to create a steel pan scene, King was only one individual, and before a steel band tradition of any substance could be formed in New York it would take several more individuals educated in the art of steel band to meet the growing demand.

In the 1950s and 1960s the reputation of violence and hooliganism that accompanied steel band’s in Trinidad had never become an issue in New York; however, the threat of violence surely worried parade officials seeking to organize a crisis-free celebration plagued by the shenanigans of other revelers discussed above. A real problem back in Trinidad and Tobago, violence between clashing steel bands often led police to target the steel bands in their policing efforts, and often casted a shadow over the

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<sup>75</sup> [http://www.panonthenet.com/news/2010/mar/img/rudy\\_king\\_1960.jpg](http://www.panonthenet.com/news/2010/mar/img/rudy_king_1960.jpg) <accessed May 12, 2010>

Carnival celebrations. Yet the spirit of Carnival and desire to recreate the New York Carnival with the sameness of the Caribbean prevailed and as mentioned above steel bands began joining the parade in “jump up” fashion as early as 1959. Rudy King and his group the Harlem All-stars are perhaps the first steel band to have accompanied the West Indian American Day Carnival in Harlem, occurring sometime in the mid-1950s. Interestingly, despite lobbying the steel bands and soliciting their participation for nearly forty years, it was not until later in the 1980s that steel bands were officially recognized as part of the New York Carnival. Similar to their Trinidadian counterparts, the New York Carnival steel bands were truly community ensembles maintained as sources of community pride. Unlike their Trinidadian counterparts, the New York steel bands were offered no appearance fees for road marching, there was no steel band competition (Panorama), and organizers relied on the steel bands simply showing up.



**Mas participant 2009<sup>76</sup>**

### **The New York Carnival Today**

The Brooklyn Carnival remains on this Eastern Parkway route today (2010), despite efforts to move the celebration to Manhattan. The Carnival has survived other conflicts including a call by Jewish officials to cancel the entire Carnival in 1994 when J'Ouvert Monday (the traditional start of Carnival and beginning of impromptu steel band road marches) and Rosh Hashanah fell on the same day. Moreover, the economics of the event are substantial, and by the 1990s the WIADCA Carnival was drawing close to two million spectators annually and collecting millions of dollars in net revenues.

The Brooklyn Carnival has faced many of the same issues that plague the Trinidadian Carnival celebration. Mainly, this means conflicts between live steel bands and soca floats touting massive sound systems blaring ear shattering soca music. As the

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<sup>76</sup> [http://www.wiadca.com/index.php?option=com\\_igallery&view=gallery&id=6](http://www.wiadca.com/index.php?option=com_igallery&view=gallery&id=6) <accessed May 12, 2010>

rock'n' roll group The Buggles suggested in 1981 at the dawn of the MTV era, "Video killed the radio star," and beginning in the early 1970s, many of the parade steel bands in Trinidad, and in Brooklyn, were replaced by trucks carrying massive sound-systems blasting the latest soca dance tunes and nearly ending the steel band tradition at Carnival. The transition was gradual, but by 1990, Deejays in Trinidad and Brooklyn dominated Carnival and steel pan was on the verge of being pushed out of existence. Scholar Ray Allen suggests that heritage was the main reason for this progression in Brooklyn. The Brooklyn Carnival belonged equally to the Jamaicans, Trinidadians, Barbadians, a pan-Caribbean celebration, and did not have the strong nationalistic ties to steel band that ultimately saved steel band in Trinidad Carnival several years prior. In this sense, the electronic dominance of Jamaican reggae and Haitian meringues certainly appealed to the multinational nature of the Carnival crowd. However, in the early 1990s an effort was made to reclaim the steel band tradition at Carnival and WIADC and other Caribbean organizations began a campaign to limit soca trucks and promote the participation of steel bands. The result is a vibrant steel band community in Brooklyn and more than one thousand panist from an excess of forty steel bands participate in the Brooklyn Carnival.

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### Conclusions

In the Brooklyn Carnival, J'Ouvert is perhaps more important in the overall Trinidadian identity and spirit of the Carnival than any other aspect. Allen comments that "J'Ouvert affords moments of deep mas (seemingly trance-like dancing and partying to endlessly cycled steel band tunes performed on the road during parades), is the essence of street Carnival. This feeling of communal transcendence is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve during the more formal Panorama Competition..."<sup>78</sup> Reports of J'Ouvert are relatively sparse until the 1980s in Brooklyn, and the first official J'Ouvert competition was established in 1994. Since then, J'Ouvert has become one of the most important steel band performance venues of the Brooklyn Carnival and many steel bands actually boycott the WIADCA parade to focus energy on J'Ouvert. Allen speculates that the popularity of the J'Ouvert tradition in Brooklyn represents the desire for a return to the

<sup>77</sup> [http://www.panonthenet.com/calendar/img/inv\\_bfast\\_ind.jpg](http://www.panonthenet.com/calendar/img/inv_bfast_ind.jpg) <accessed May 12, 2010>

<sup>78</sup> Allen, "J'Ouvert in Brooklyn", p 123.

“authentic” or traditional Carnival: a chance for steel band enthusiasts to experience the acoustic sound of steel band.

Today there are approximately forty steel bands that actively participate in the WIADCA Carnival parade and J’Ouvert, many of which are stateside versions of famous Trinidadian steel bands such as the New York Desperados. However, the New York Carnival is essentially a regional celebration and my research suggests that a majority of students in the steel bands across the country have little understanding of the event and festivities. Indeed many have no idea it exists. The influence of the New York steel band scene is not as nationally impactful as one may think and many leading figures in American steel band do not consistently participate in this tradition in New York or at their respective steel pan enclaves. Yet, many Trinidadians consider this celebration an extension of their tradition, and given the significant history of the Brooklyn Carnival, its influence among other black diasporic music traditions in the United States is an area in need of further scholarship. Perhaps one of the larger questions surrounding the Brooklyn Carnival is the ambiguous and sometimes contentious relationship of Afro-Caribbean West Indians in New York with the rest of Black America. According to Philip Kasnitz:

Despite frequent talk of Black unity and allusions to the common experience of slavery, Carnival [in Brooklyn] dramatizes a West Indian identity and thus distinguishes islanders from North American Blacks.<sup>79</sup>

Kasnitz’s statement has significant bearing on the early developments of steel pan in America. However, this chapter is a discussion of sameness just as much as difference and the struggle of Afro-Caribbean West Indians is also the same struggle of the African-Americans of America: they fought for the same civil rights, strove for economic

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<sup>79</sup> Philip Kasnitz and Judith Freidenberg-Herbststein, “The Puerto Rican Parade and West Indian Carnival: Public Celebrations in New York City,” ed. Constance Sutton and Elsa Chaney, *Caribbean Life In New York City: Socio-cultural Dimensions* (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1987), 344.



prosperity, and cultivated unique and meaningful cultural and artistic endeavors. Despite being briefly upheld as an American cultural favorite, the early American calypso craze, New York Carnival, and New York steel band activity have a complicated long-term identity.

## Chapter 3

### **A Voice of Steel through the Iron Curtain: Pete Seeger's contributions to the Development of Steel Pan in America**

[I]t seems probable that the steel drum is destined to spread through still other parts of the world than the West Indies, perhaps in each country adapting itself to local popular-folk traditions.—Pete Seeger<sup>80</sup>

In 2009, the legendary singer, political activist, and folklorist Pete Seeger celebrated his 90<sup>th</sup> year on this earth. Seeger is still singing, still an avid activist (most recently with the Clearwater project), and recent years have provided no shortage of tribute, homage, and celebration of his life and work. Seeger is a champion of all varieties of American folk music though this chapter is particularly interested in his work with the folk music of Trinidad. Moreover, as the fiftieth-fifth anniversary of Pete Seeger's research trip to the island of Trinidad approaches, it is worth reflecting on the current realities of his above proclamation and their ramifications regarding the development of steel pan in America.

Currently (2011) the steel band sound has firmly asserted itself as the signifying voice of the Caribbean on a global scale. Moreover, steel band ensembles have become increasingly popular in school curriculums throughout the United States. Seeger's contributions to the development of steel pan in America are vast in scope and significant in their reach. Seeger's work with steel pan spans written, oral, and live performances transmitted through mediums that include scholarly journal articles, magazine articles, the documentary film *Music from Oil Drums* (1956), several steel band records released by the Folkways Record Company, and a steel band-themed episode of his folk music

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<sup>80</sup> Pete Seeger, "The Steel Drum: A New Folk Instrument," *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 71, No. 279 (January-March, 1958) : 52-57.

television program *Rainbow Quest*. Seeger also facilitated the successful immigration of native Trinidadian steel band pioneers to the United States (this includes most notably Kim Loy Wong, founder of the Hi-landers Steel Orchestra of Trinidad, who, with Seeger's help, established a steel drum band and manufacturing facility in University Settlement, New York).

Seeger's influence on the development of steel pan in America transcends his public persona as a folk singer, organizer, and political activist. This is nowhere more evident than in his unlikely collaboration with Admiral Daniel Gallery, founder of the United States Navy Steel Band, during the heart of Seeger's House Un-American Activities Committee (hereafter referred to as "HUAC") congressional trials. From 1957 to 1961 Seeger corresponded with Gallery, functioning as a consultant on all matters steel band, including methods for steel drum construction, opinions on proper repertoire for the United States Navy Steel Band, and the contemporary state of folk and popular music in the United States.

Because of his work with Gallery and others, steel band emerged as one of many side projects that occupied Seeger during 1950s and 1960s. However, from roughly 1942 to 1950, Seeger was a member of the American Communist Party, and this affiliation, along with his outspoken anti-war sentiments, led to the un-official sanctions. Although never fully accepted by the American Communist Party brass, Seeger was nonetheless motivated by elements of the party's mission and spoke out constantly as a labor activist and peace advocate. Increasingly disenchanted with the organizational instability of the Communist Party, Seeger campaigned for Progressive Party candidate Henry Wallace in 1948. Seeger—unfortunately following in the footsteps of other activist-artists, such as

Langston Hughes in 1953—was subpoenaed in 1955 by the HUAC. In the spring of 1957, he won on appeal an overturn of his conviction for “contempt of Congress” and the accompanying one-year prison sentence. Despite his legal troubles, Seeger had many successes in the 1950s, including commercially popular folk recordings as a solo artist and with the Weavers. From the beginning of the decade, however, Seeger saw the consequences of his political affiliations strangle his career, as he was increasingly blacklisted by major performance venues. Largely responsible for the folk revival of the 1950s, Seeger found himself less and less able to participate as an artist, and consequently shifted his energy to civil rights issues and several folkloric preservation and dissemination projects, such as “how to build and play” manuals for the banjo, steel drum, and many other instruments.

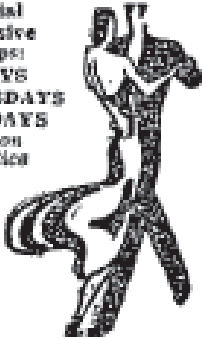
The goal of this chapter is twofold. The first is to explore Seeger’s activities within the early development of steel pan in America, including the love of calypso music that steered him towards the culture of Trinidad. Steel band had a profound effect on Seeger, and this chapter will investigate these steel band activities and the role they played in Seeger’s career. Second, this chapter aims to illustrate Seeger in action; that is, to explore a case study in which Seeger employs his unique skills as a folklorist, organizer, political activist, and musician. For this case study, I focus on Seeger’s work with the United States Navy Steel Band, presenting largely unpublished personal correspondence between Seeger and Admiral Gallery. Among other issues, this correspondence offers a unique insight into Seeger’s life as a folklorist during this particularly tumultuous period. Both Admiral Gallery and Seeger recognized the inherent potential of the steel drums, the national folk instrument of Trinidad and Tobago, to serve

as a musical and cultural ambassador for the United States Navy. This correspondence uniquely illustrates the process by which both men pursued their goals, and offers an example of precisely how Pete Seeger so forcefully shaped American music and culture during the twentieth century.

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**Advertisement for Calypso Dance Lessons (1957)<sup>81</sup>**

### **Calypso and Pete Seeger**

Pete Seeger discovered calypso music during the early 1940s, approximately five years before the rest of the United States, and the genre has remained an integral part of the folklorist's performing oeuvre ever since. Like Afro-Caribbean folk music before it, the rumba and mambo for example, calypso is a Trinidadian vernacular music style that

<sup>81</sup> *New York Times*, February 16, 1957pg. X-6

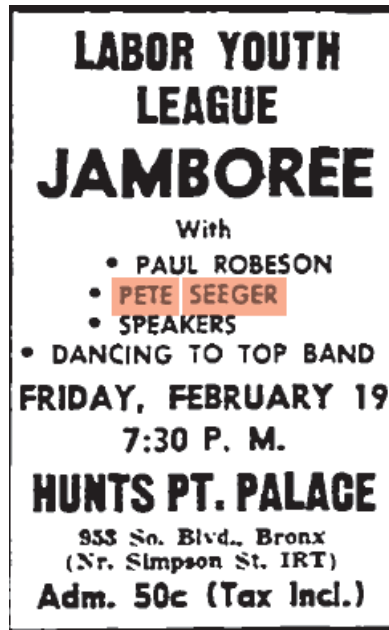
was momentarily adopted, altered, and exploited by Tin Pan Alley and the forces of American popular music during the late 1940s and 1950s. Seeger appreciated Trinidadian-style calypso for its rich protest tradition and he enjoyed witnessing the use of song as a medium for social change. However, he was also cautious of the process, as he knew all too well the fate of exploited folk music styles once their usefulness to the American mainstream waned. Seeger witnessed this process during the rise and subsequent fall of the Almanac Singers from 1940 to 1943, and he despised the calculated way in which American record companies stripped calypso of its political urgency. In a retrospective review of the era, Seeger commented that:

In the twentieth century the waves of enthusiasm for this or that idiom have come and gone more suddenly, perhaps because of quicker trans-continental communication. Thus one year it was the tango, another year the rumba, another year the mambo or the calypso song. The weakness in all of these fads was that Tin Pan Alley was only interested in exploiting the superficial or sensational characteristics. The subtleties were ignored. . . The calypso boom of 1956 ignored the real meat of calypso music, which is its powerful sense of social satire.<sup>82</sup>

Building on the discussion of calypso from Chapter 2, it is important to recognize the influence that Caribbean music had on the musical climate of the 1950s in order to fully understand Seeger's involvement with steel band.

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<sup>82</sup> Pete Seeger, *The Incomplete folk Singer* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1972), p 25.



New York Amsterdam News 1954<sup>83</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 2, America had several important calypso figureheads in the 1950s including Harry Belafonte and Louis Farrakhan; however, other notable American-style calypso singers include the singer and political activist Paul Robeson, with whom Seeger would enjoy a lifelong relationship as both friend and fellow activist.<sup>84</sup> By the early 1950s, Robeson's well-known film and stage career could not transcend the entertainment industry blacklist and Robeson proceeded in a new direction, dedicating his energy to political activism and speaking out against fascism and racism. Furthermore, his association with the governments of Cuba and the Soviet Union fostered an interest in socialism. Robeson, in his basso profundo voice, offered a unique sound to calypso and is also widely credited as the first major recording artist to regularly perform Negro spirituals for public audiences. In the United States, Robeson developed a love of

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<sup>83</sup> *New York Amsterdam News*, February 19, 1954, pg 26.

<sup>84</sup> Perhaps the most notable of the pair's protesting collaboration was with Woody Guthrie and others at the infamous Peekskills concert of September 4, 1949. The concert was picketed by angry anti-communist protesters who destroyed the vehicles of the fleeing folksingers by throwing rocks and sticks.

union songs, resulting in frequent collaborations between Seeger and Robeson at union events throughout the country.

The enthusiasm for steel pan and calypso in New York discussed in Chapter 2 transcended the ethnic neighborhoods of the city. Despite the decreasing popularity of calypso records from its pinnacle in 1958, the Caribbean cultural capital was firmly established as an American popular cultural item of interest by the 1960s. Similar to many of its predecessors, the calypso obsession would not, perhaps could not, last forever, and within four years of the 1956 ascension of Belafonte's *Calypso* album, the calypso supernova imploded. For Seeger, however, the implosion of calypso music within the American cultural mainstream did not mark the beginning of the end for his performance of calypso music; he continued to sing calypso songs for the next sixty years. As a folk and/or popular music, calypso remains an important vehicle for social commentary and political dissent, and in the decades following the calypso craze Seeger also continued to collect new calypso songs.

In his book *The Incomplete Folksinger*, a series of essays and musings penned over the course of his life and published in 1972, Seeger identifies calypso music as critical to the identity of Trinidad. According to Seeger "The Island exports petroleum products, foodstuffs, Angostura bitters, and Calypso music."<sup>85</sup> Yet, despite the export of its heritage product, the Trinidadian calypso music known to Seeger is markedly different in lyrics, meaning, and image from the calypso music fad created by Belafonte et al in the mid to late 1950s. Mainly, Trinidadian calypso is fundamentally based on traditions of social and political commentary, that which is integrally important to the Afro-Trinidadian people of this culture. The contextual and musical disparity between

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<sup>85</sup> Seeger, *The Incomplete Folksinger*, p 165.



Trinidadian and American calypso was an issue that angered many Trinidadians who considered the two calypso styles vastly different entities. This dichotomy, and resulting friction, was not lost on Seeger who, from prior experience in the folk music business, was keenly aware of how traditional music could be commercialized and exploited.

I'd say there is very, very little difference between commercialized folk music and pop music. The name of folk music has been attached to a particular type of traditional music which was popularized. Calypso was attached to another type of traditional music which was popularized. Blues was attached to another type. Soul was attached to another type of traditional music that was popularized; and that's really about the only difference. It was a label attached to a particular type of traditional music that was popularized.<sup>86</sup>

Over the course of the American calypso craze Trinidadian calypsonians sharply criticized their new American counterparts in the calypso tents of Port of Spain, calypso clubs in New York, and Trinidadian and American newspapers. Perhaps one of the most important of these attacks was penned by Trinidadian dancer, musicians, and artists Geoffrey Holder. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this study, in a 1957 *New York Times* article titled "That Fad from Trinidad" Holder confronted what he felt was the desensitization of calypso music in America and blatant disregard for the calypso tradition in Trinidad.<sup>87</sup> In this article, Holder details the history of calypso and attempts to educate the reading audience of the true nature of calypso performance; complete with a synopsis of the annual Carnival celebration.

Armed with sensitivity to the musical culture of Trinidad and New York Caribbean-Americans, Seeger, perhaps harkening back to his youth and the days of working with his father Charles Seeger and the Lomax family, developed a passion for Caribbean folk music and began singing these songs at his concerts. Moreover, although

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<sup>86</sup> Dunaway, *Seeger Interviews*, Dec 17 1977.

<sup>87</sup> Geoffrey Holder, "That Fade From Trinidad," *New York Times*, April 21, 1957, pg 192.

he primarily sang traditional calypsos, Seeger appears to have struck a delicate balance in performing both Manhattan and traditional calypsos throughout the early part of his career. Early examples of his calypso singing date back to the WWII era when Seeger was a private in the United States Army. One particularly charming story found Seeger singing as the only available entertainment on a military transport ship steaming towards the South Pacific. As Seeger recalls:

I sang every night for about a half an hour for about two weeks and didn't repeat myself hardly once. I sang Latin songs, I sang calypso songs, I sang blues, I sang old pop songs, Hill-Billy songs, a great variety, even making up a few songs.<sup>88</sup>

If the above anecdote is any indication, the breadth of young Seeger's folk music repertoire was impressive, and it is clear that even at this relatively early point in his life Seeger was, in a sense, an amateur ethnomusicologist who, despite working without a university affiliation, relentlessly collected songs; a trait which he continued throughout his entire life. Though we should also temper the enthusiasm by at least acknowledging the fact that many performers of the period had eclectic song repertoires, minus calypso songs, and long performances with endless variety were often par for the course. Regardless, by the early 1950s Seeger had some 300 songs committed to memory and hundreds more preserved in notebooks and loose bits of paper.<sup>89</sup>

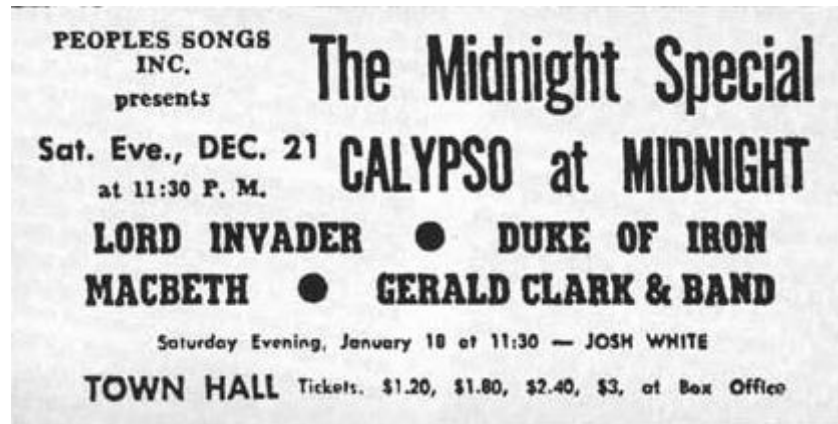
Seeger was drawn to labor unions and leftist politics at an early age, a social and political affiliation often discussed in Trinidadian calypso songs, and therefore was understandably drawn to calypso songs. One of his early introductions to Trinidadian style calypso music came while working for People's Songs, the leftist pro-union

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<sup>88</sup> Dunaway, *Seeger Interviews*, March 10 1977.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

organization that, among other activities, often organized and promoted calypso concerts in New York.



**Advertisement from *Sing Out* magazine (1946)<sup>90</sup>**

The “Calypso at Midnight” concert was part of the “Midnight Special” concert series run by People’s Songs. The concerts included a collection of leading Trinidadian and New York-based calypsonians intermixed with American leftist folk singers. The tenor of concert was markedly pro-union and performers focused their lyrical attacks on the political and social issues of Caribbean, Caribbean-American, and other minority classes in America. The “Calypso at Midnight” concert took place in 1946, and the December 21<sup>st</sup> concert concluded with Lord Invader singing the pro-civil rights calypso “God Made Us All,” which by then had become a rallying cry for anti-colonial and pro-civil rights crusaders in Trinidad and served as a de facto national anthem for Trinidadians spread throughout the globe.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> [http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.calypsoworld.org/us/ss006-t.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.calypsoworld.org/noflash/us-4.htm&usq=\\_\\_QQkcwCECQdVUC4odm5y\\_pU5W7Ik=&h=76&w=150&sz=5&hl=en&start=6&um=1&tbid=PqWa22GC8Bw04M:&tbnh=49&tbnw=96&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dcalypso%2Band%2BPete%2BSeeger%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den%26newwindow%3D1%26rlz%3D1T4DKUS\\_enUS245US247%26sa%3DN](http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.calypsoworld.org/us/ss006-t.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.calypsoworld.org/noflash/us-4.htm&usq=__QQkcwCECQdVUC4odm5y_pU5W7Ik=&h=76&w=150&sz=5&hl=en&start=6&um=1&tbid=PqWa22GC8Bw04M:&tbnh=49&tbnw=96&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dcalypso%2Band%2BPete%2BSeeger%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den%26newwindow%3D1%26rlz%3D1T4DKUS_enUS245US247%26sa%3DN) <accessed May 16, 2009>

<sup>91</sup> Phone interview with calypso scholar Ray Funk, July 25, 2010.

By the late 1940s Seeger had become one of America's leading proponents of union singing, and the political rhetoric so traditionally entwined within the nature and history of the Trinidadian calypso genre resonated with the folk singer. Seeger regularly performed a core of approximately ten calypso songs and had many more committed to memory. In the late 1940s Seeger encountered audiences unfamiliar with calypso but very familiar with Tin Pan Alley songs. American popular music scholars Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman refer to the Tin Pan Alley song era (1890 to 1950) as a "singing" genre, and most audience members actually sang along, as opposed to dancing or passive listening, to recordings and live performances.<sup>92</sup> To this end, Seeger often sang *with* his audience rather than *at* them, and calypso songs were a tool particularly useful at the countless union rallies and meetings the singer frequented across the United States. These songs proved valuable to the folk singer's repertoire and Seeger utilized the political nature of calypso rhetoric to energize and unify his audience (both union and non-union) during lulls in evening concerts and rallies.

Guest and solo appearances represent one avenue in which Seeger performed calypso songs. Another was as a member of the folk music group the Weavers (1950-1953 and 1955-1957). From its inception, the group quickly garnered national attention with the commercially popular singles "Goodnight Irene" and "Tzena, Tzena, Tzena." The two singles climbed the popular music charts and in late 1950 "Tzena, Tzena, Tzena" sat in the number two position, right behind "Goodnight Irene" at number one, on the *Billboard Top 100*. The group enjoyed this popularity despite their pro-union affiliations and their leftist political activism. Regardless of the hindrances to the group's mainstream

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<sup>92</sup> Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman, *American Popular Music: From Minstrelsy to MTV* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1-17.

conformity, their improbable success trumped the critics. Riding the steam of popularity created by their commercial hits, the Weavers were able to establish a wholesome, pro-American image. With this firmly in place, Seeger carefully and craftily implanted calypso music into the group's repertoire as a de facto call-to-arms for the ailing Left under scrutiny for anti-American and pro-communist sympathies. Seeger biographer David King Dunaway suggests that, following the early success of the Weavers' more conservative folk repertoire:

The Weavers began throwing in radical material, Spanish Civil War songs. No one noticed. In fact, the wealthy patrons liked the Spanish tunes so well, they would ask for them as encores. The Weavers' music operated on two levels: commercial pop songs, accessible to all listeners; and a symbolic, encoded music (available only at live concerts) that reminded the Left of its existence: calypso, peace, topical songs.<sup>93</sup>

Following the Weavers wildly successful reunion concerts in 1955 Seeger was looking forward to the next project. As the group became more commercially popular, their viability as a brand for advertising improved and Seeger became increasingly pressured by the other members of the Weavers to endorse products. The turning point was a dispute between Seeger and the Weavers over the group's work in performing a cigarette commercial jingle. Citing his Quaker upbringing Seeger, a non-smoker and drinker who abstained from any sort of mind-altering drug, refused to perform the gig, and instead resigned from the group.<sup>94</sup>

Along with his live concerts and recordings with the Weavers, Seeger also recorded a small number of calypsos for solo projects and sprinkled them throughout various albums during the 1950s. Many more of these early calypso recordings went

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<sup>93</sup> David Dunaway, *How can I keep from Singing? The Ballad of Pete Seeger* (New York: Villard Books, 2008), p. 171.

<sup>94</sup> Pete Seeger, *Pete Seeger: The Power of Song*, DVD, directed by Jim Brown (Los Angeles: Miriam Collections, 2007).

unreleased initially and have subsequently been released in later decades as Seeger's popularity continued into future generations. One of the more interesting cuts of these early calypso recordings was "Bimini Girl," a banjo calypso recorded in 1955 and released on the album *Folk Music of Four Continents* released by Folkways in 1956. Despite his connection to the hard-hitting lyrics of traditional Trinidad-style calypso songs, throughout his life Seeger often pined for the light Tin Pan Alley pop tunes of his youth. The commercialized nature of "Bimini Girl" highlights the reality that Seeger also recorded and performed some Manhattan style calypso tunes; it should perhaps be further noted that Seeger often did so amid objections from his folk music colleagues.<sup>95</sup>

The above duality reaches straight to the heart of traditional calypso music as it was, and still is, practiced in Trinidad. That is, pointed and scathing political and social commentary lodged in the feel-good tuneful music that often masks the harshness of the lyrics. Throughout his long career Seeger has always been wary, and even ashamed, of his commercial success, embracing it as a means to an end, a necessary evil in order to spread his message further.<sup>96</sup> With the passing of the 1950s, the complexity of Seeger's professional and personal life—and his tangential connections to the American communist movement—led to song choice becoming an increasingly volatile and risky endeavor. As the pressures of the blacklist increased, Seeger's dabbling in calypso music

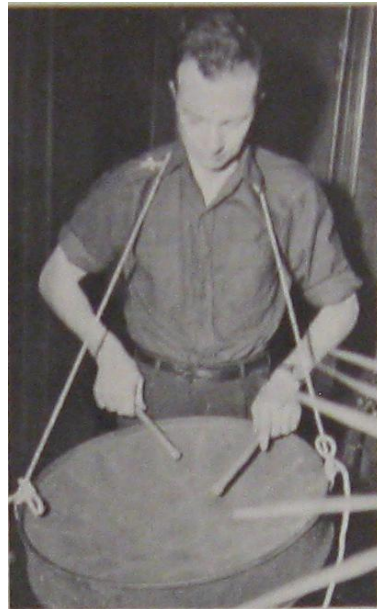
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<sup>95</sup> In this case, Seeger's "colleagues" refers to Woody Guthrie who according to Seeger despised Manhattan-style calypso tunes and many pop/jazz tunes of the 1950s. Seeger often cites the example of Guthrie objecting to the jazz song "No More Business as Usual," suggesting that "Woody didn't think much of that song (No more business as usual). It was a little too Jazzy, maybe, for his taste. I don't remember his really objecting to it like he objected to the calypso-type songs." Dunaway, David. *Seeger Interviews*, March 10, 1977.

<sup>96</sup> During his interviews with David Dunaway, Seeger recalls a particular incident during the 1950s when the concert manager broke protocol and mistakenly paid Seeger directly for his concert performance, bypassing his manager. Seeger, in realizing for the first time how much he was actually earning for his concert performances, immediately contacted his manager Albert Grossman and asked to reduce his concert appearance fees for future performances.

illustrates one way in which he was able to retain his integrity as a culturally sensitive activist while navigating a path through the commercial music industry that was quickly closing its doors.

### **Pete Seeger and Steel Drums**



**Seeger playing Pan-Around-the-Neck,  
Folkways Promotional Brochure 1960s<sup>97</sup>**

Seeger's gravitation towards the steel drum and his role as a steel drum advocate was likely born out of his experience singing calypso songs with the Weavers and at union gatherings, and his work with the United States Navy Steel Band indirectly emerged from these earlier experiences. As I argue throughout this chapter, a long series of events and the influence of several Caribbean artists led Seeger to embrace Caribbean music; yet, Seeger's love for calypso music and steel pan, firmly established prior to his introduction to Admiral Daniel Gallery, was certainly fostered by his relationship with

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<sup>97</sup> This photo is courtesy of "Pete Seeger 1960s" subject files, Pete Seeger Archives, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

Gallery and the United States Navy Steel Band, a relationship that I will explore later in this chapter.

The exact point at which Seeger first encountered steel drums and steel band music is not known. However, we do know that Seeger's steel pan work predates his work with Gallery and probably started in earnest during the winter of 1955, when Seeger began regularly performing on a steel drum as part of his normal concertizing folk instrumental repertoire. Furthermore, little written or oral historical record of this time period exist that would suggest otherwise. The earliest known document that dates Seeger's steel pan activity is the steel pan manual he sent to Admiral Daniel Gallery dated July 28, 1956.

At long last I get this off to you [Gallery] – directions for making Trinidad steel drums. As you know, for the last six months I have been taking a steel pan with me wherever I put on a concert, and have demonstrated – as well as I could – what it sounds like. Though I only knew “Three and a half tunes” I rashly promised a number of people that I would write and tell them how to make one.<sup>98</sup>

Sometime during 1955, Seeger attended a dance recital in New York held by famed Caribbean-American dancer Geoffrey Holder and his dance troupe. Holder had recently finished performing as the lead role in a run of the Broadway musical *House of Flowers*, a Caribbean-themed show set in a bordello (discussed in Chapter 2). The dance recital included musical accompaniment by a steel pan trio featuring Holder's brother Boscoe, and Seeger cites the Holder recital as his first experience hearing steel drums.<sup>99</sup> This assertion directly contradicts the Folkways promotional material for the film *Music from Oil Drums*, which states that it was a chance encounter with Anthropologist and

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<sup>98</sup> *Papers of Admiral Daniel V. Gallery*, Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

<sup>99</sup> Seeger, *The Incomplete Folksinger*, p. 165.



Trinidadian scholar Dr. Andrew Pearse that led the Seegers, Toshi included, to discover the steel pan and embark on the film project.<sup>100</sup> Regardless, it stands to reason that Seeger encountered steel pan sometime after 1950. This milestone marked the first year in which steel bands emerged from the New York Caribbean-American dance hall party scene and steel band leader Rudy King led a road steel band that marched in the West Indian Carnival parade down Lennox Avenue in Harlem.

During the lost decades of his blacklist from 1950 to 1967, Seeger sought alternate venues to channel his advocacy and efforts. As in his work with American folk music, protest music, and union singing, Seeger functioned as a vehicle of awareness and advocated for the music and culture of Trinidad in mediums besides television and film. These included giving lectures while performing on college tours in the United States, and helping start steel bands at Cornell, UCLA, Michigan State University, and with his family and neighbors in New York.

During his personal blacklisting, Seeger, an entertainer by trade, was severely limited in his financial prospects and, with no savings, was forced to embark on long college tours throughout the United States. Money was very limited for these engagements, often grossing less than twenty-five dollars per day, and Seeger often commented that a three-week tour would net negative money unless he was very tight in his budgeting.<sup>101</sup> Yet, these were also very fertile years of experimentation as Seeger brought a variety of instruments with him on the road. Seeger describes what he considered a typical performance below using a concert at Cornell University as an example:

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<sup>100</sup> Pete Seeger, *Music from Oil Drums*, Promotional Brochure (New York: Folkways Records and Services Corporation, 1956).

<sup>101</sup> Dunaway, *Seeger Interviews*, March 10, 1977.

I arrived to sing at Cornell and I had a steel drum with me and I had a mandolin, two kinds of banjos, two or three kinds of guitars. It seems that I was a travelling music store. . . .<sup>102</sup>

Although Seeger's fluency on the steel pan is formidable, he never reached true mastery of the instrument. Moreover, he continually refers to himself as a jack of many instruments and a master of none, even the banjo which by all accounts Seeger has attained considerable dexterity. Seeger sought more than simply the mastery of the instrument; in a sense he brought the culture of Trinidad with him and a hope of unifying and inspiring young Americans at his performances on these college tours.

To bookend the Seeger steel drum discussion and to perhaps lend perspective to the range of his activities, Seeger states unequivocally that, due to the difficulties of maintaining dexterity and competence for performing the instrument, he himself had given up playing the steel drum by 1977.<sup>103</sup> In fact, it remains unclear whether Seeger was involved with teaching, consulting, and/or organizing steel bands much beyond 1964. Regardless, the years 1955 to 1964 clearly witnessed the bulk of Seeger's contributions to the development of steel pan in America, the first coming in late 1955 in which he wrote a manual for steel band construction, embarked on a trip to Trinidad, and created the film *Music from Oil Drums*—to be released by Folkways. Later, in 1957, Seeger contributed greatly as a steel band consultant to the intrepid Admiral Daniel Gallery and the United States Navy Steel Band. Seeger followed this effort with several recording projects with American-based steel bands from 1959 to 1961 and finally, in

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 1983.

<sup>103</sup> In one particular exchange during their interviews, Seeger lamented being a jack-of-all trades and master of none, and cited his brother Mike as a far more accomplished banjo player. In further response to an interview question prodding him for a reputation of attempting to learn too many instruments, Seeger responded "I purposely stopped playing the steel drum, although I love it. But to be a steel drummer you've got to concentrate on it." Dunaway, *Seeger Interviews*, December 15 1977.

1964, Seeger formally published his steel drum “how to” manual. The following, then, is a discussion of each of these in turn.



**Pete Seeger in Beacon, New York (1957)<sup>104</sup>**

***Music from Oil Drums***

It is no secret that the Red Scare of the 1940s and 50s succeeded more in compromising the constitutional rights of American citizens and destroying the careers of aspiring public figures than in rooting out threats to American security. By the mid 1950s Seeger too was feeling the pinch of McCarthy’s anti-communist crusade, forcing the folk singer to pursue other projects out of the media spotlight. One such project was the filming of a short sixteen-minute film *Music from Oils Drums*, shot by Seeger and his wife Toshi when they traveled to Port-of-Spain, Trinidad in January of 1956. The film features a group of Trinidadian teenagers who, led by Kim Loy Wong, comprised the Highlanders Steel Orchestra, stationed on Observatory Street near the Belmont neighborhood of Port of Spain, Trinidad.

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<sup>104</sup> Seeger, *Music From Oil Drums*, 1956.



**Hi-landers Panyard, Trinidad (1956)<sup>105</sup>**

Seeger created the film, in conjunction with Folkways Records & Services Corporation (hereafter “Folkways”), as the initial installment of a larger project intended to help Folkways fill a perceived void in the company’s mission. Folkways felt a need to complement their catalog of folk music documentary records with documentary films that captured contemporary performers and craftsmen in the process of creating their music and instruments. The film was released by Folkways in 1959 and captures the entire process of making a steel drum, a time intensive process which normally requires approximately one week from start to completion. Seeger captures the step-by-step steel pan construction process, time-lapsed to expedite the process and present it to the viewer in a few short minutes. Despite the academic tenor of the early Folkways documentaries, *Music from Oil Drums* was intended for a broader audience and perhaps even possible commercial success. However, the initial marketing focus of the new films sought a target market of ethnomusicologists, folklorists, and anthropologists, and Seeger and

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

Folkways had ambitious—perhaps unrealistically so—visions that his film would transcend the narrow audiences of academia and reach a layman or general audience.<sup>106</sup>

Seeger's agenda in making this film is complex and probably extends from his desire to reach and educate a large section of American youth. However, parsing out the outside forces at work—the tightening fist of the entertainment industry blacklist—and reconciling this with Seeger's genuine interest in music education and folkloric preservation and dissemination is complicated. The official statement released by Folkways on a promotional brochure for the film reads as follows:

Music from *Oil Drums* modestly attempts but one thing; to show in detail how the instrument is made, by tempering and hammering, and how it is played in Trinidad. The scenes were shot mostly in the streets and backyards of Port of Spain. No actors were used, no scenes formally posed, nor did we proceed from a written script.<sup>107</sup>

The above statement is true in the sense that the film was indeed shot without actors on basic film equipment using the actual panyards and city of Port of Spain as scenic backdrops. Yet, it should be noted that the final three minutes of the sixteen-minute film were actually shot in a makeshift panyard Seeger constructed in Beacon, New York. Moreover, although the film proceeded rather loosely and haphazardly from a written script, some type of script or narration certainly did exist and served as the basis, verbatim, for parts of the prose found in Seeger's steel drum "how to" manual written follow this Trinidadian sojourn. I will return to this manual for further discussion later.

Interestingly, beyond the film's appeal to the Folkways catalog, Seeger saw *Music from Oil Drums* as the ideal ethnomusicological endeavor, that is, an educational film able to capture a folk music and its agents in their natural element that was presentable to

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

an American audience. Moreover, the folklorist felt that, of all the different folk preservation and education projects he undertook during the 1950s and 1960s, the on-site films—such as *Music from Oil Drums*—remain his most important work,<sup>108</sup> even more so than the thirty-nine episodes of the *Rainbow Quest* television series.<sup>109</sup> The following synopsis of the film lends a fascinating insight into Seeger’s conceptions of representation in an ethnographic sense.

*Music from Oil Drums* opens with the credits superimposed over a steel pan yard which is later revealed to be Seeger’s home in Beacon, New York. The entire film is shot by Seeger and his wife Toshi, and the film shares the cinematic look and feel of other documentary films from the 1950s shot on 8 millimeter cameras. Seeger himself is narrating with steel band music in the background, and he leads with the following:

The music you are listening to comes from a new kind of musical instrument. Invented nearly a dozen years ago, and made out of the same barrels you may find rusting in any junkyard. It’s called a steel drum.<sup>110</sup>

From the start, Seeger attempts to establish the educational premise of the film and the general tenor of the spoken narration is focused on unveiling the mystery of steel drums and their creation. Moreover, throughout the film Seeger aims to inspire the viewer, a de facto call-to-arms in which the theme appears to be assuring the audience that the steel drum is something they too can make and play. To this end, the first substantive scene after the opening credits finds Seeger alone actively explaining a ping pong (tenor steel pan) to the viewer with a description of the pitch layout and short performance of a tune.

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<sup>108</sup> The other films Seeger made range from Ghanaian drummers to instructional videos for learning the banjo and other instruments.

<sup>109</sup> Dunaway, *Seeger Interviews*, December 15 1977.

<sup>110</sup> Pete Seeger, *Music From Oil Drums*, film (New York: Folkways Records and Services Corporation, 1956).

He appears accessible to the viewer and the backdrop for the scene is a barren wall or building, probably in or near his home in Beacon.

Following his brief melodic demonstration, Seeger suggests to the viewer that in order to fully understand this instrument one must understand its people and their traditions. The scene immediately shifts to the Belmont neighborhood of Port of Spain, Trinidad for some panoramic shots of the capital city from the neighboring hills. Following this brief stop the scene shifts to the Hi-landers steel band panyard, also located on in the Belmont neighborhood. In the panyard scenes that follow, Seeger captures the excitement of the young steel band players as they rehearse and prepare for the upcoming Carnival parade. However, while shooting the merriment of the panyard, the background also includes images of the squalid living conditions here replete with laundry hanging out to dry, children playing in a trash littered clearing, and a woman washing a pot on the steps of her home which resembles a lean-to outfitted with a tin roof. Interestingly, along with the process of steel drum creation, the film captures the bleak living conditions of the lower-class Trinidadians; an interesting secondary agenda which Seeger subtly presents to the viewer.

The steel band chronicled in this film is the now-defunct Hi-landers of Belmont, which during the time of this film boasted many of the pioneering icons of the Trinidadian steel band movement including the late Bertie Marshall (inventor of several steel pan models adapted as universal standards). In 1956 the leader of the Hi-landers Steel Orchestra was Kim Loy Wong, who at age nineteen was already considered an accomplished steel band performer and band leader. According to the film script:

After the rehearsal I [Seeger] went over to the leader of the band, I told him how interested I was in his music, and asked him if he would be

willing to make six steel drums which I could take back to America. We went down to the Esso gasoline depot, got the six barrels, and took them back to the yard.<sup>111</sup>

Perhaps not evident in Seeger's narration in the film is the arbitrary nature of his introduction to Wong. Seeger was essentially roaming the streets of Port of Spain looking for a steel band he could film (foreigners filming steel bands was a rare occurrence in the 1950s but became commonplace in later decades), and the Hi-landers were the first steel band to agree to the filming. Wong later recalls this chance meeting between the two men stating that a white man (Seeger) wandered into his panyard and began asking questions about how to build steel pans and the rest is history.

Although *Music from Oil Drums* is a documentary film, Seeger also sought to tell a story, and he recreates the meeting scene with Wong early in the film. In this particular recreation we see Seeger sitting among a group of steel band members with a microphone discussing the process and craft of steel pan construction. In this instance, Toshi Seeger is operating the camera while Pete is interviewing the panists as they mill about the panyard. For most of the Trinidad scenes, Toshi was the camerawoman. Although she never actually appears in the scenes of the film shot in Trinidad, she does make an appearance later in the New York panyard scenes. The subsequent scenes, approximately six minutes of the film, contain Seeger, Wong, and other panists demonstrating the various steps of cutting, firing, sinking, punching, and tuning the steel pan in a pragmatic and documentary fashion. The steel pan building process takes place in the same panyard as the previous meeting and rehearsal scene. Here the steel band action is surrounded by a background of third-world living conditions consisting of lean-to shacks, dirt floors, and shoeless children running about unkempt streets. The latter is most apparent in a ten-

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.



second scene in which Wong is hammering a steel pan with a metal punch while the bare toes of a young child, who is standing on the steel drum, drift perilously close to the hammer blows. The viewer can clearly see two children standing on the drum, their shoeless feet only inches from the pounding hammer. Through all of this, Seeger locates the genius of the instrument's creators and is never short on praise, narrating that:

It's a hard job to do you will find if you ever try to make one [steel pan].  
A man has to have a good ear if he wants to tune it correctly, and an awful  
lot of patience.<sup>112</sup>

Consistent with early sections of the film, Seeger juxtaposes visual scenes of abject poverty while praising the skill and patience of the steel pan tuners in an attempt to elevate and support the complexity of their craft.

During the conclusion of the steel drum construction scenes shot in Trinidad, Seeger gathers the members of the Hi-landers to perform for him on location, after which he recites the following proclamation:

I want not just to thank you, because thanks is not enough for all the things that Trinidad has given the United States and the world. But I'd like to give you my pledge that wherever I go with these pans, I'll tell the story of Trinidad as true as I can tell it. As you know, I can only be here about one day more, but, your pans will be playing, I hope, all through the United States.

Without missing a beat, Kim Loy Wong reached towards the microphone and challenges the sincerity of the Seeger's words in a move that undoubtedly broke with the script. Furthermore, his words encapsulate the sentiments of thousands of struggling Trinidadian youth:

Instead of taking up de pans, you take me up instead of de pans. Put me in a box instead of de pans. I would like to go up to de United States, you see?

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

Temporarily speechless, Seeger then gathered himself and reasoned that he would in the future work towards this conclusion; a promise he would later honor.

Having aptly captured the process of steel band construction, the film immediately shifts gears and cuts to a provisional panyard in Dutchess Junction, New York, near Seeger's Hudson River valley home. Seeger was convinced that the steel band would be very popular in the United States, and at this moment in the film, he offers proof of his hypothesis:

Well of course this isn't the end but the beginning, and we brought the drums back to New York [Beacon] and you can guess what happened; all the children in the school where I teach [Dutchess Junction] want to know how to make them, and this is the scene in our backyard.<sup>113</sup>

The film transitions to a makeshift panyard at Seeger's home where chaos and pandemonium of the panyard comes alive from an overhead camera angle. Here we see both Pete and Toshi Seeger among a horde of eager children and cautiously curious community members. Seeger's panyard in New York captures the spirit of contemporary Trinidadian panyards, complete with a general lack of safety precautions and lack of infrastructure common in Trinidad. For instance, the first twenty seconds of the scene show Seeger heating a steel pan over a fire, which is loosely contained by cinder blocks, and as he lifts the flaming hot steel pan out of the embers with two tree branches, the smoldering instrument slips to the ground, and precariously begins to roll several feet towards a parked truck and several on-looking children. The runaway steel pan rolls to a stop near a wood pile before causing any real harm but the incident illustrates the dangers inherent in steel pan construction unmitigated in Seeger's newly remade panyard tradition.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

Encompassing approximately two-thirds of the film, the panyard scenes in New York and Trinidad capture the same basic process of steel pan creation, but in different locations. Moreover, the film's New York panyard scenes are further crafted to target and capture the youth movement by showing children hard at work in each phase of the steel pan creation process. For instance, directly following the scene in which the steel pans are fired, the film cuts to a young girl attempting to sink (i.e., create the initial note face) of a steel pan. The girl, intently hammering, is presented alone in the scene—which is devoid of any narration in order to allow the ambient sounds of hammers pounding on steel pans to overtake the soundscape—periodically inspecting her progress on what will become the playing surface. The film then cuts to scene in which a sea of young arms and hands surround the face of a steel pan and attempt to groove the surface (tapping the surface with a metal punch to outline the note playing areas). No adults are present and the children, who appear no older than ten to twelve years of age, appear completely capable of starting and finishing the process.

From these collected shots of children in various stages of the steel drum building process, the film cuts to the final scene culminating with the presentation of the finished steel pans for inspection. An entire ensemble of steel pans of all shapes and sizes has been created by Seeger and the children of Dutchess Junction, and as Seeger states “it is time for the first rehearsal.” Seeger counts off a calypso tune in traditional Trinidadian style (tapping out a rhythmic call pattern with his sticks on the side of the steel pan) and the group begins to play. The panoramic shots of the panyard capture several children of varying ages, Seeger, and a collection of adults (the parents of the children) all performing their assigned parts of the tune. As the tune comes to a close, the camera pans

to a ground shot in which Seeger's youngest daughter Tinya, who at the time was approximately two years old, is seen crawling on top of the sunken face of a tenor steel pan. As the toddler falls out of the steel pan, the words "the end" appear on the steel drum's playing surface and the film ends.

### **Reception of *Music From Oil Drums***

Overall, the reception of Seeger's steel band film venture was mixed, and it never reached wide-spread popularity or distribution. However, in both leftist and academic publications *Music from Oil Drums* enjoyed, not surprisingly, resoundingly positive support. For many academics the educational and instructional benefits of the film were lauded; moreover, due in part to Seeger's anthropological skills, the film also captures the contemporary methods of ethnomusicological fieldwork of the 1950s. Commercially, the film was by every means a failure, selling very few copies and garnering few institutional rentals.<sup>114</sup> Yet, as an educational picture, the film could be considered a success as it did make its way throughout select portions of the academic circuit and was received positivity by those who actually viewed the limited release. *Music from Oil Drums* enjoyed reviews in several scholarly journals including the journal *Ethnomusicology*. Caribbean music scholar Daniel Crowley praised Seeger's efforts in the above journal in keeping a true documentary angle:

At a time when such commercial movies as "Fire Down Below" and "Island in the Sun" are seriously misrepresenting West Indian music and

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<sup>114</sup> To the extent of the author's knowledge, aside from the Folkways Collection at the Smithsonian Institute, Washington, DC, currently, as of December 2010, there are only four other copies of the film *Music For Oil Drums*, held privately. One of these sources includes the Historic Films Archives which can be found online <http://www.historicfilms.com/>.

dance forms, Seeger promises the steel bandmen that he will use their instrument to “tell the true story of Trinidad, as true as I can tell it, wherever I go.” Those who have seen his engaging stage presentation of the steel drum and its music know how well he has kept his word.<sup>115</sup>

Considering Crowley’s comments it is important to note that his perspective is that of a Caribbean scholar, an insider who showers the film with resounding praise that is directly informed by the intimate knowledge of the subject matter and, in particular, the issues and struggles within contemporary Trinidadian society. Crowley is also confirming what I argue is the subtle sociologic angle of this film, applauding Seeger for telling the “true story” of Trinidad. It seems as though Seeger’s thinly veiled statement that *Music from Oil Drums* “modestly attempts but one thing; to show in detail how the instrument is made, by tempering and hammering, and how it is played in Trinidad” is transparent in the eyes of the academic audiences who adeptly translated the film’s competing messages of musical instruction and cultural awareness.

Praise for the film was also elicited from other academic audiences who applauded the instructional value of the film. In particular, a positive review by Anthropologist David McAllester of Wesleyan University suggests that:

*Music from Oil Drums* was particularly satisfying for my class because they had a technical as well as appreciative interest in the music. The film is a pleasure musically and it is also of real value to the serious student who wants to know the background and the technique of the steel drums. In my course on folk and ethnic music we all felt that your film was the most nearly complete exposition on a particular instrument that we could have had.<sup>116</sup>

Here McAllester refers to the holistic nature of the film which is equally balanced in conveying the techniques of steel band creation with the corresponding cultural background. As McAllester suggests, Seeger sets a new standard for folk/ethnic

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<sup>115</sup> Daniel Crowley, “Music from Oil Drums,” *Ethnomusicology*, Vol.3, No. 1 (January 1959), p. 33-34.

<sup>116</sup> Seeger, *Music from Oil Drums*, Brochure, 1956.

instrument instruction in this film and further cements the understanding in ethnomusicological circles that music and society are inseparable and codependent streams.

The positive reception of the film by academics is evident in the above reviews; however, the reception of the film in contemporary leftist publications is even more glowing. In particular, reviews of the film appear in two separate issues of *Sing Out!*, a publication that had its own role to play in the early reception of calypso. The magazine was a leftist periodical for which Seeger was a regular contributor, sharing political affiliation and/or close personal friendships with many of the magazine's other contributors and editors. The intention of the magazine was to offer folk singers and the political left a forum to meet and network, as well as to disseminate folk songs in the form of lyrics and sheet music to a mass audience. At *Sing Out!* Seeger found a collection of individuals interested in similar social issues and the music that inspired their work.

He describes the readership as:

A number of us who loved to sing folk songs and union songs thought it the most natural thing in the world to start an organization which could keep us in touch with one another, which could promote new and old songs and singers. We called our organization People's Songs to distinguish it from the scholarly folklore societies and started a bulletin.<sup>117</sup>

People's Songs had at one time a robust membership and circulation of approximately 3,000 subscribers; however, by the late 1940s readership began to dwindle as the growing tide of America's pro-socialist proponents, Seeger for example, began to wane and the anti-communist hysteria stoked by Senator Joseph McCarthy and others increased.

Following the reorganization of People's Songs in 1950, *Sing Out!* was re-launched and once again became the official publication of People's Songs. Throughout the

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<sup>117</sup> <http://www.singout.org/sohistory.html> <accessed July 4, 2009>

organization's history, the publications of People's Songs were an important outlet for the spread of protest music in the United States and the inclusion of calypso songs and reviews of steel band helped to expose the America, outside of New York in particular, to these elements of Caribbean culture.

The first *Sing Out!* review of the film—written by Ed Badeaux—appeared in the Winter 1958. Badeaux's review is some 1,000 words, and offers, in comparison to contemporary descriptions discussed thus far, the most in depth description of the film available. The overall tone of the review is enthusiastically supportive of Seeger and the mission of the film. Although the partisanship of Badeaux towards Seeger's work is not overtly mentioned, the prose clearly has a positive tenor and provides little in the way of negative criticism. The unabashedly positive nature of the review is evident in the language of the first paragraph which leads:

In a short film entitled Music From Oil Drums, Toshi and Pete Seeger have given us a remarkable insight into a unique musical instrument, the West Indian steel drum, and glimpses into the people who make them and the Island where they are produced. At once the film is an important Anthropological contribution, a well-photographed and edited film in its own right, and a real educational assist to anyone wishing to make their own steel drum.<sup>118</sup>

The only remotely negative comments in the glowing review that unfolds from there appear in reference to the sound quality of Seeger's field recordings captured in Trinidad. Badeaux suggests that the "chief limitation is the sound quality of the on-the-spot sound recordings in Trinidad." He excuses the matter, writing off the limitation as understandable considering the circumstances of the film and further suggesting that these are "of a minor nature and are not a serious handicap to the film."

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<sup>118</sup> *Sing Out!*, Vol. 7, No. 4, (Winter 1958), p 28.

Like other contemporary film reviews found in *Sing out!*, Badeaux's review comprehensively chronicles the plot of the film, including the scenes in Trinidad, United States, and the steel pan creation process. Badeaux does not spare the minutia, and the review summarizes all aspects of steel pan creation process demonstrated in the film, including accurate designs of individual pans and the hammer sizes. The meticulous descriptions and positive language are not, however, the only notable feature of the review and Badeaux's work raises some issues worthy of further discussion.

From the onset of the review Badeaux establishes the anthropological and educational value of *Music from Oil Drums*, and throughout the entirety of the prose he supports this value while continually sounding praise of Seeger's efforts. However, Badeaux makes a peculiar statement following the Trinidadian section of the film, stating:

Although anthropological interests in the film ends with its return to the U.S., those wishing to try making the drums themselves will draw much aid and inspiration from the final section.<sup>119</sup>

Badeaux seems to indicate that the film is both intellectually important *and* useful in a practical sense. Although Badeaux's review is clearly supportive of Seeger and his steel band endeavor, this statement speaks to a larger contemporary practice within the field of early ethnomusicology which sought the "other" as the only worthy enterprise for research, often at the expense of domestic and regional musical cultures. Seeger attempted to recreate a Trinidadian panyard at his home in New York and the transfer and recreation of this tradition from Trinidad to Dutchess Junction, New York, would constitute something of serious ethnomusicological interests. The provincial nature of the above assumption is decidedly antithetical to Seeger's life-long work with American

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p 29.



folk/ethnic music and his constant promotion and preservation of this music even under duress and blacklist. Directly preceding the above Badeaux quotation is a passage that states:

A touch of real pathos enters the picture when, in an interview, the bands leader Kim Loy tells how he wishes it were he and not the steel drums which were being crated and shipped to the States.<sup>120</sup>

Kim Loy's wish came true in 1959 when, with Seeger's help, he immigrated to the United States; however, at the time the review was written Wong was still in Trinidad and Badeaux leaves the issue hanging without closure. Throughout the review, Badeaux fails to comment on the history of Caribbean immigration to the United States, the struggles of lower-class Trinidadians, or the desire for many contemporary Trinidadian panists to work in America that is characterized by Wong's comments within the film. This could perhaps be explained by Badeaux's contemporary understanding of anthropology or it could also be a subtle dose of cultural imperialism. In any case, Wong's statement within the film was a missed opportunity in what was for Seeger and Badeaux a successful film review.

The Badeaux appraisal is the only *Sing Out!* review aimed squarely at *Music from Oil Drums*; however, it is not the end of Seeger's project on steel drums or the end of steel pan discussion in *Sing Out!*, as the magazine would later publish a review of panist Kim Loy Wong's work. In fact, granting the wish of the Trinidadian steel band leader, Seeger arranged for Kim Loy Wong to immigrate to the United States in 1959. Seeger often saw Wong, who was married to an East Indian woman and had parents of African and Chinese heritage, as sharing in the immigrant experience in America. This blending of culture may explain the ease by which Wong transitioned into his new American home

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

where he promptly set up a panyard at University Settlement, New York. Here Wong immediately initiated the production of steel pans, launched steel pan pedagogical outreach to the children of the area, and formed a performing ensemble with newly trained American steel pan members. Beneath all of this was Seeger and the culmination of both men's efforts was the album *The Steel Drums of Kim Loy Wong* recorded for Folkways and released in 1959. To accompany the album, Seeger edited and expanded the "how to make and play steel drums" pamphlet he had written for Admiral Gallery in 1956. The pamphlet was expanded into a full length instructional manual and published/distributed by Oak Press (the publishing arm of People's Songs). The connection between Seeger, steel drums, and *Sing Out!*, continued when the manual *The Steel Drums of Kim Loy Wong: An Instructional Book* was released in 1961 and was reviewed in *Sing Out!* by frequent magazine contributor Gene Bluestein.

Bluestein and Seeger enjoyed a close relationship, established long before this review. Like Badeaux's critique, Bluestein takes a decidedly enthusiastic tone. Nestled within the prose of Bluestein's review is a reflection that connects the instructional manual with Seeger's previous steel band work, in particular, the film *Music from Oil Drums*.

Folkways Records has also released a recorded performance by this band [Kim Loy Wong and the University Settlement Steel Band], with six songs on one side and examples, for instructional purposes, of each pan's part on the other side of the disc. With the 16mm film, "Music from Oil Drums," filmed by Pete and Toshi Seeger in Port of Spain, the steel band phenomenon is probably the best-documented folk technique in history.<sup>121</sup>

Despite the reference to *Music from Oil Drums*, the review is, of course, focused on the book and Kim Loy Wong, yet in one sense the Bluestein review completes the discussion of Seeger's work with steel pan, treating his output as an oeuvre, a body of work, rather

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<sup>121</sup> Gene Bluestein, "Music from Oil Drums," *Sing Out!*, Vol. 11, No. 5, Dec.-Jan. 1961-62.

than a flavor-of-the-month whim or new release. As Bluestein suggests, Seeger's coverage of the steel pan building process in the manual, including the musical, cultural, and pedagogical issues within, is relatively exhaustive and at the time was perhaps one of the most complete analyses of a folk technique.

### **Analysis and Intent**

Despite Seeger's connections to Badeaux, Bluestein, and *Sing Out!* the print coverage of his early steel band work was certainly beneficial, on many levels, to the development of steel pan in America. Yet, the question remains of why, among all the folk music and cultures in the world, did Seeger choose Trinidad? In the midst of the calypso craze overtaking the United States during the 1950s, Seeger certainly had Trinidad on his mind; however, the initial spark towards an active interest in steel pan appears to have been prompted by a chance encounter with Dr. Andrew Pearse. Born in England, Pearse was an anthropologist committed to the music and culture of Latin America and spent most of his life traveling and conducting fieldwork throughout the Caribbean, Trinidad in particular. Pearse was one of the first scholars to study calypso and steel band music in Trinidad, and his work on musical and lyrical themes of development and culture in this music laid the foundation for later scholars. Moreover, it was the white Englishman Pearse who presented Seeger with a steel drum in 1955 prior to the folk singer's world tour. As Seeger recounts:

Our enthusiasm ran high when Dr. Andrew Pearse of Trinidad brought us a first-rate steel drum and gave us direction on making ours. We planned a campaign to introduce the instrument and methods of making it to U.S. teenagers, with whom, we feel, it should be very popular since it is a

percussive instrument perfectly suited to many popular folk tunes, mambos, etc., cheap to make and loud.<sup>122</sup>

As stated above, prior to making *Music from Oil Drums* in 1955 Seeger was in the midst of his persecution as a suspected communist and with the introduction of steel pan Seeger once again saw a direction to channel his creative energy. As I will discuss later in this study, the blacklist severely constricted Seeger's audience, which was often limited to children, and the above comment explains his desire to create an educational film and an instructional manual aimed at engaging American youth. To this end, although *Music from Oil Drums* and the steel drum manual were positively received by academia and leftist media, these works were ultimately intended for a broader, lower class, and markedly younger audience. In this sense, *Music from Oil Drums* and the steel drum manual are classic examples of the duality of ethnomusicological work that explores both the cultural reality of the people (steel drum makers, tuners, and players) while providing detailed musical information of the actual music. The print advertisements of Folkways promotional pamphlet for *Music from Oil Drums* echoes Seeger's above comments touting the instruments ease of construction, loud volume, appeal to teenagers, and adaptive musical ability. However, the lingering question of why Seeger chose "Trinidad and steel drums in favor of the banjo or some other type of American musical instrument more ubiquitous than the steel pan" still lingers. Surely he met many people in his travels throughout the United States who, like Pearse, introduced various musical instruments to Seeger that they too believed could mobilize and inspire the youth of the time. To this end, further analysis is needed in order to tease out a plausible hypothesis.

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<sup>122</sup> Seeger, *Music from Oil Drums*, 1956.

## Rainbow Quest

*Music from Oil Drums* is a fine example of an ethnographic film and the only such offering from Seeger during the 1950s; however, Seeger also created a television show featuring steel pans in the mid 1960s. In 1965, as Seeger was still struggling through his network television blacklist, the folksinger leapt at the opportunity to create and tape a folk music television program to be aired on public television. Although television was his nemesis, it also enticed Seeger, and despite reservations he, Moe Asch, and producer Sholom Rubinstein began work on a new series of shows. The results of this labor were thirty-eight episodes of the series *Rainbow Quest* taped and aired during 1965 and 1966 in the studios of WNJU Newark, New Jersey. The station provided no financial support and the program was fully funded by Seeger. A modest stipend of fifty dollars was paid to each guest performer in exchange for their services and Seeger often relied on a pool of steadfast friends in the folk music community to appear as guests. Interestingly, the crushing grip of the entertainment blacklist also claimed *Rainbow Quest* as many public television affiliate stations outside New York refused to carry the program. Believing strongly in the mission of the series, Seeger depleted his own personal savings in order to keep the show running; however, because the decade-long blacklist barred him from performing in many of the more profitable musical venues, his coffers were low and the show went off the air as a result of funding deficiencies.

Throughout the two-year duration of the project *Rainbow Quest* enjoyed critical success and the show garnered positive reviews. The *New York Times* critic Jack Gould

speculated that *Rainbow Quest* was “Channel 47’s first certain Emmy Award.”<sup>123</sup> Yet, the national audience that Gould predicted and Seeger so coveted never materialized, and despite growing to thirteen stations from the initial launch of seven, the audience fizzled, leaving a frustrated Seeger searching elsewhere for creative outlets. Part of the problem, as Seeger biographer David Dunaway points out, was Seeger himself. Dunaway points to an interview for which Seeger sat on Canadian television in 1966:

What a little tyrant that little box can be [outlines TV frame with his fingers] . . . . How sad to think, in millions of homes, of a husband and wife sitting back woodenly on the sofa staring at the screen while an expert lover pretends to make love to another expert lover.<sup>124</sup>

As Dunaway argues, Seeger ironically was using television to dissuade Americans from watching television; an impossible pitch.

The guest list of *Rainbow Quest* reads like a who’s who of folk music with Seeger sharing the stage with the likes of Judy Collins, Ledbelly, the Stanley Brothers, and A-list entertainers such as Johnny Cash and June Carter, who had long been friends of Seeger. The show also featured exciting up and coming acts including the steel drummer Kim Loy Wong and the Hi-Landers Steel Orchestra. Wong’s performance aired as episode #37, which also included folk musician Herbert Levy and was the penultimate episode of the series. Episode #37 followed the same non-structured format as the preceding episodes, which consisted of Seeger seated at a table in a pseudo living room scene. Kim Loy Wong and the Hi-Lander’s performed several tunes most of which fall under the category of “Manhattan Calypso” as coined by Geoffrey Holder. The tunes included “Mary Ann, Love,” “Love, Love Alone,” “Yellow Bird,” “Walk Around,” and “When the Saints Go Marching In.” Seeger also shows a significant part of the film *Music from Oil*

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<sup>123</sup> Dunaway, *How Can I Keep from Singing?*, p 312.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

*Drums* as part of the episode, encouraging any interested parties to contact him or seek out his steel band instructional manual. Despite Seeger's own assertion that *Music from Oil Drums* and the other ethnographic films of the 1950s are the ideal medium for folk music dissemination, the *Rainbow Quest* steel band episode was more successful in that it reached a wider audience. Furthermore, *Rainbow Quest* represents the culmination of Seeger's work with steel pan and film, displaying his efforts to promote steel pan in United States; complete with an American steel band led by a newly emigrated Trinidadian. Moreover, unlike the documentary style of filmmaking used in *Music from Oil Drums*, the *Rainbow Quest* episode serves as a showcase for the possibilities of steel band and this television work serves as a transition to a discussion of the audio recordings that Seeger and Folkways undertook.

### **Seeger and Steel Band Recordings**

Aside from Seeger's ethnographic film and television projects, his legacy as an American steel band pioneer rests, further, on his notable contributions to steel pan audio recordings. Following his emigration to New York in June of 1959, Kim Loy Wong established a steel drum band at University Settlement, New York, and at the Wiltwyck School near Seeger's home in Beacon, New York. Following Wong's move to the United States, Seeger orchestrated the recording and production of three steel band LP records for Folkways: *Kim Loy Wong and his Wiltwyck Steel Band* (1959), *The Steel Drums of Kim Loy Wong with the University Settlement Steel Band: An Instructional Record Supervised by Peter Seeger* (1961), and *The Bomboushay Steel Band* (1962). The trio of

recordings offered contemporary listeners a wide spectrum of steel band audio selections, including educational arrangements of popular tunes, arrangements of classical works, and, of course, a multitude of Manhattan and Trinidadian calypsos.



**LP Cover (Wong pictured bottom) 1959<sup>125</sup>**

The first steel pan album recorded by Seeger and Folkways, *Kim Loy Wong and his Wiltwyck Steel Band* (above), was an early example for burgeoning American steel pan scenes; however, it also displays many of the problems in sound quality commonly found in early steel pan recordings both Trinidadian or domestic.<sup>126</sup> Regardless of the album's shortcomings, it is a showcase for the Seeger's grand scheme to subversively liberate the youth of America with the "raucous democracy" of steel band. The Wiltwyck ensemble consisted of local boys, twelve years of age, all of whom attended the

<sup>125</sup> Kim Loy Wong, *Kim Loy Wong and His Wiltwyck Steel Band*, FW03834 (New York: Folkways Records, 1959).

<sup>126</sup> This includes over-driven treble, practically non-existent bass notes, and swirling harmonic overtones that often wash-out the desired melodic clarity of the tune.



Wiltwyck School. Wong introduced the steel drums and began teaching the boys in June of 1959. By October the new steel band offered a public concert in the school gymnasium which Seeger and sound engineer Peter Bartok recorded and produced into the album.

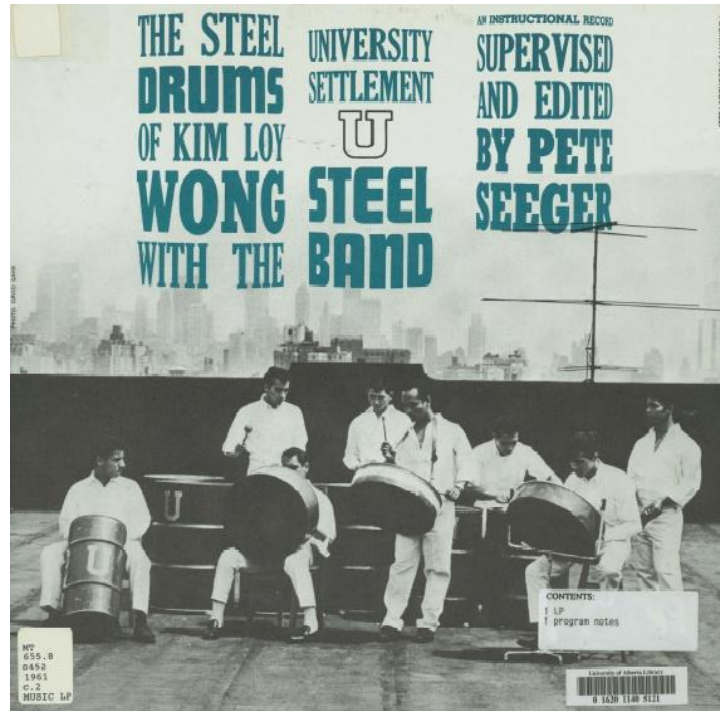


**Kim Loy Wong (far right) and Wiltwyck students (1959)<sup>127</sup>**

The liner notes indicate that the audience reception was very enthusiastic and Seeger, with equal enthusiasm, offers a description of the unique sound of the steel band which goes so far as to crown steel pan the future of American folk music. The album's liner notes further include an excerpt of an article on how to make and play steel drums that Seeger published in the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1958. The article draws heavily from the language of an edited version of the instructional pamphlet Seeger wrote in 1956 for Admiral Gallery and later edited and expanded into book-length in 1961 (published 1964).

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<sup>127</sup> Kim Loy Wong, *Kim Loy Wong and his Wiltwyck Steel Band* (New York: Folkways Records and Services Company, 1959).



**Album Cover for Kim Loy Wong, produced by Pete Seeger, 1959<sup>128</sup>**

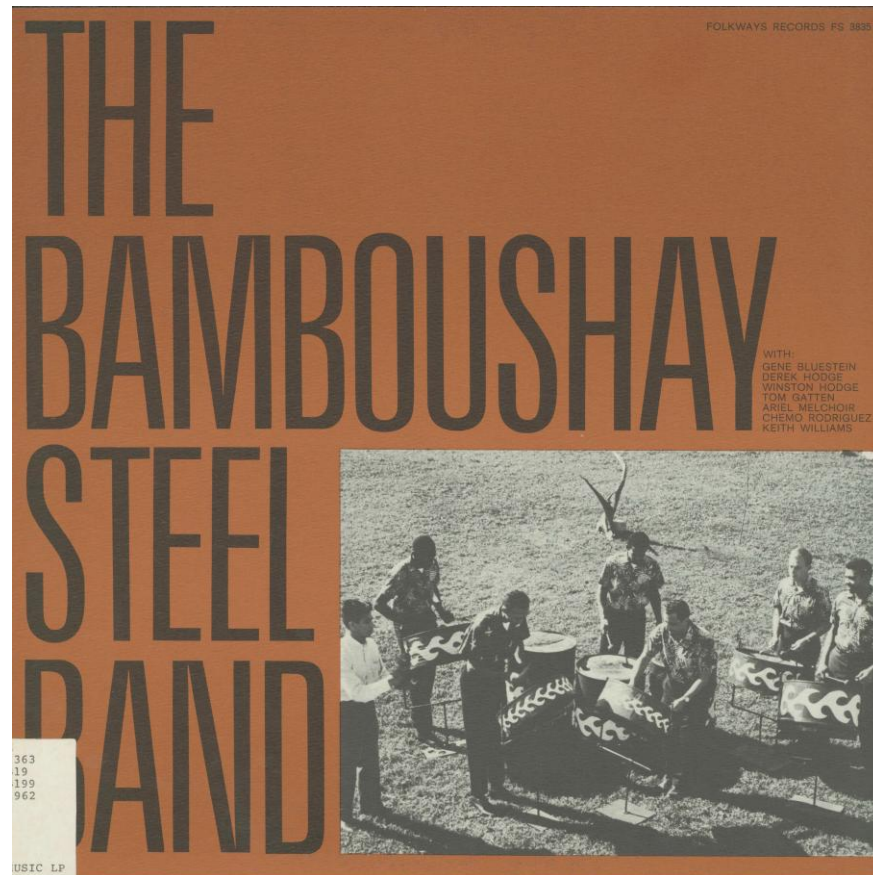
The second steel band LP released by Folkways titled *The Steel Drums of Kim Loy Wong with the University Settlement Steel Band: An Instructional Record Supervised by Peter Seeger* (1961), represents Seeger's most ambitious steel pan recording project. This recording was initially conceived as an accompaniment and audio supplement to the instructional manual *Steel Drums, How to Make and Play Them: An Instructional Manual by Peter Seeger* (1964), published by Oak Press and discussed later in this study.<sup>129</sup> True to the title, the album features full ensemble recordings of steel band tunes; however, the album also includes single-track extrapolations of individual parts taken from educational steel band arrangements created by Seeger and featured in the instructional manual.

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<sup>128</sup> *The Steel Drums of Kim Loy Wong with the University Settlement Steel Band: Recorded and Supervised by Peter Seeger* (New York: Folkways Records and Services Corporation, 1959).

<sup>129</sup> Oak Press was the publishing arm of People's Songs (later Sing Out!), the leftist organization for which Seeger sporadically worked during the 1940s and to which the folklorist contributed several articles and monographs.

The third steel band album, released by Folkways in 1962, featured the Bomboushay Steel Band. The ensemble was comprised of students from Michigan State University and was one of several early American steel bands fostered by Seeger while on his college tours. Members of the group included director Gene Bluestein and American students as well as several visiting Caribbean international students.



### **Bomboushay Steel Band, 1962<sup>130</sup>**

The liner notes for this record are credited to ensemble director Gene Bluestein (Above, front row center), who began teaching at Michigan State University before relocating to California State University-Fresno where he spent most of his professional career as a professor of English. However, the liner notes are undoubtedly edited and co-written by

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<sup>130</sup> *The Bomboushay Steel Band* (New York: Folkways Records and Services Corporation, 1962).

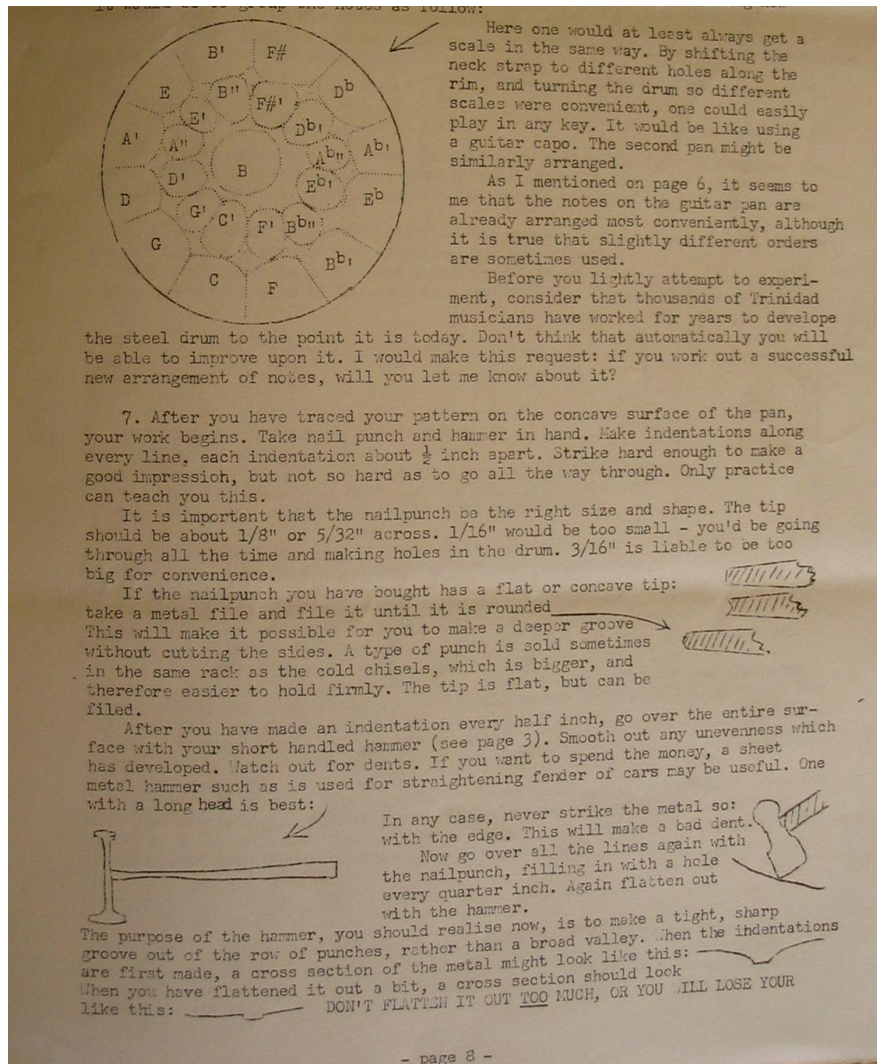
Seeger himself, as evidenced by his stylistic prose and familiar explanation of steel drums.<sup>131</sup>

### **Seeger as Steel Band Pedagogue**

Although Seeger was a seasoned world traveler who endured serious poverty in order to support his social and artistic convictions, it should also be noted that he was Harvard educated and an accomplished writer. Moreover, this study has already referenced the “how-to” manual for building steel drums that Seeger wrote in 1956 and the following is a discussion of the steel drum manual and its impact on Seeger’s steel band activities. The version of the manual published in 1964 was an expansion of Seeger’s original manuscript written in late 1956. In it, Seeger comprehensively documented the entire process of making steel drums, including instructions and examples of traditional folk tunes appropriate to arrange and play with steel drum ensembles.

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<sup>131</sup> Recycling liner note material was a common practice in early Trinidadian and American steel band records as well as calypso records. American record companies would often release three or more albums of different artists on separate subsidiary labels all sharing the same liner notes. In this regard, the fact that all three of Seeger’s steel band albums shared liner note material was not extraordinary considering the industry practice.



**Mimeograph copy of Seeger's original steel drum manual (1956)<sup>132</sup>**

The manual was developed from Seeger's research in Trinidad and subsequent collaboration with Kim Loy Wong. Consequently, the pedagogically oriented steel band arrangements featured in the manual are heavily influenced, or actually written, by Wong (who, along with being one of the founding members of the steel band movement in Trinidad, worked closely with several legendary Trinidadian steel pan pioneers including Bertie Marshall). *Steel Drums, How to Make and Play Them: An Instructional Manual*

<sup>132</sup> *Papers of Admiral Daniel V. Gallery*, Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

(the published manual's full title) contains several transcriptions of University Settlement steel band arrangements Wong made for Folkways recording projects. The corresponding liner notes of the Folkways recordings include snippets of score notation of the steel band's actual arrangements. The transcriptions found in Seeger's 1964 published version of the manual, however, contain full-band arrangements as well as individual parts extracted from the full-band arrangements for practice and performance.

The pedagogical aspect of this recording and manual is surprisingly rich, in-depth, and fascinating. Throughout the manual, Seeger displays a mastery of the steel band genre, and his keen ear and understanding of the musical genre explains the ease and accuracy with which Seeger transcribed the tunes he heard in the panyards of Trinidad. Moreover, it is these very transcriptions that Seeger arranged for the professionally made recording done by Kim Loy Wong. Most Trinidadian steel band arrangers, Wong included, have an aural understanding of music, and are not literate in music notation. Seeger had to transcribe all of the arrangements directly from his field recordings in order to copy the parts down into sheet music for the manual. This type of transcription is a remarkably tedious and time-consuming enterprise, and Seeger's success is all the more impressive considering he had the challenge of transcribing the multiple voices and composite rhythmic layering of the steel band ensemble from poor quality field recordings. Nonetheless, Seeger's work in transcribing Wong's arrangements is important in understanding the arranging style of Trinidadian steel bands of the period. Other notable arrangers such as Ellie Mannette, Tony Williams, and Neville Jules used a similar style of arranging music for the steel band; mainly, a melody with two sets of accompanying strumming patterns and a bass groove. Trinidadian steel band arrangers

may not have been literate in musical notation, but they were skilled musicians who created complex steel band arrangements by ear. In a way similar to many early rock'n'roll artists, early steel band arrangers adopted the formulaic harmonic conventions of jazz and American popular music in their works for steel band. Steel band recordings from the early 1950s indicate wise use of AABA or Tin Pan Alley song form, and most calypso and steel band records of this period display the use of blues scales and American jazz harmonies. In one particularly interesting scene from *Music from Oil Drums*, Seeger captures the rehearsal process of the Hi-landers steel band in which the above harmonic and formulaic elements are practiced by the steel panists.

Early steel band music, much like the blues or jazz, often adheres to a set of musical conventions and Seeger extracts and standardizes a set of accompaniment rhythms intended as a template for orchestrating and arranging new tunes. As we see in the example below, Seeger outlines the process and supplies the tools by which one could simply transfer the stock rhythms into the appropriate key. The intended result is that, with minimal effort, an interested steel band novice can produce steel band arrangements in the appropriate musical style and rhythmic feel regardless of skill level and genre understanding. The “standard” rhythms below are very much consistent with traditional rhythms commonly utilized in the Trinidadian steel band genre; however, the pedagogical tradition of Trinidadian steel band arranging is on oral one. Considering this non-Western method of steel band pedagogy in Trinidad these rhythmic elements were not something systematically isolated and transcribed during the 1950s and 60s. The result of this phenomenon was that most non-west Indian steel drum ensembles displayed an Americanized-rhythmic feel in their music, leading many seasoned Trinidadian steel

band players to frequently complain about the “New York feel” or lack of proper groove elicited by these early American steel band ensembles.<sup>133</sup>

The main accompaniment parts in a steel band are usually played by the second pans and the cello pans, using this rhythm:

Or this rhythm:

The bass pans may play this:

Or this:

The conga, maracas, and cowbell each have their own traditional pattern:

### Standard Rhythmic Patterns for Percussion as transcribed by Seeger<sup>134</sup>

Focusing on the rhythmic foundation first, Seeger pairs the bass pan and “engine room” (percussion section) instruments, together illustrating their rhythmic integrity by charting the layering and overlap of the individual parts.

Seeger further provides six basic rhythmic patterns for bass-pan rhythmic accompaniment, suggesting that the reader experiment with these “basic” patterns in his or her own arranging. Moreover, he implies that the following six patterns (found below) are the “traditional” six patterns upon which all calypso and steel band music is based in Trinidad.

<sup>133</sup> This quote and its meaning were noted during an interview with steel pan legend Cliff Alexis, Port of Spain, Trinidad, 2008.

<sup>134</sup> Pete Seeger, *The Steel Drums of Kim Loy Wong; An Instructional Manual to Accompany* (New York: Oak Press, 1964).





**Six “Standard” bass pan rhythmic patterns as transcribed by Seeger<sup>135</sup>**

On the surface this claim appears over-simplified; however, a survey of the contemporary calypso and steel band canon does in fact support this result.<sup>136</sup> His sensibility to the musical genre further supports my analysis of Seeger and period steel band music. In fact, most early American steel band recordings, such as the Tchaikovsky example below, tend to adhere to these rhythmic interlocking patterns. This was the house style and was adopted by most steel pan arrangers is perhaps analogous to the drumset grooves and piano composing patterns common in jazz. Moreover, over time steel pan arrangements in Trinidad actually became more structurally and rhythmically formulaic and less creatively expansive in later decades of the 1970s and 1980s. This is most apparent in the Panorama-style of steel band arrangements. Panorama is an annual island-wide steel band competition in Trinidad and Tobago where steel bands perform eight minute highly

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> For comparison of recordings, see Funk, Ray and Stephen Stuenkel. 2007. “Calypso: A World Music” An Exhibition of Photographs and Illustrations of the International History of Calypso. Online <<http://www.calypsoworld.org/noflash/introduction.htm>>

complex arrangements. However, for ease of learning and regional tastes, most American-based steel bands, including the United States Navy Steel Band, have historically tended to shy away from Panorama-style tunes and consciously targeted to perform the early Seeger style of steel band arrangements described above. As such, Seeger's method for arranging steel band tunes can be used as an apparatus to transcribe and understand the recordings of the United States Navy Steel band and other early arrangements and recordings of American steel bands.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a steel band arrangement of Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto #1. The score is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of two systems of music. The first system includes a repeat sign. The instruments are: Ping-Pong (melody), 2nd Pan (rhythmic accompaniment), Cello (bass line), Bass (bass line), and Conga/Maracas (percussion). The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and rhythmic patterns. Annotations include 'TR' (trumpet) and '(Throughout)' for the percussion parts.

**Tchaikovsky *Piano Concerto #1*,  
 Arranged by Wong as transcribed by Seeger<sup>137</sup>**

<sup>137</sup> Seeger, *Steel Drums of Kim Loy Wong*, 1964.

Steel Band arrangements, along with the instruction of how to build steel drums, comprise a significant portion of Seeger's steel drum manual. However, true to form, Seeger also attempts to further his social mission by pushing for cultural sensitivity throughout the pages of his instructional manual. Throughout the text, Seeger fills the prose with subtle, and at other times pointed, comments of cultural history and social philosophy. For instance, he offers the following comments to introduce the above Tchaikovsky arrangement:

Trained musicians who think that some music such as this should better be left to orchestras having violin sections, brasses, and reeds should reflect on what is known as the process of acculturation.<sup>138</sup>

As stated earlier in this study, Tchaikovsky and Elvis are as traditional as calypso when it comes to steel band repertoire and Seeger, in this case, pounces on the opportunity to discuss the integration of an instrument and its repertoire. Though a young instrument, the steel band could play the great compositions of western classical music in a way that was musically and artistically viable, not just novel or eclectic. By 1964 the calypso craze, so rampant in the late 1950s, had long since fizzled, and Seeger sought to promote the adaptive possibilities of steel band to any style of music; including jazz and western classical music. Moreover, in the above passage Seeger trumpets the complexity of steel band music, a reality confronted first-hand by Admiral Gallery and the United States Navy Steel Band, and challenged head-on the prevailing attitudes and preconceptions Americans assigned to folk and/or non-western vernacular music. Simply put, Americans of the 1950s and 1960s could only perceive the stylistic possibilities of steel band as playing calypso-style music and road marches. In reality, Trinidadians had been playing arrangements of Bach and other master composers for decades in a style known as

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

“bomb” tunes, and Seeger, having heard first-hand these arrangements of the classics during his time in Trinidad, attempts to showcase the full abilities of the steel band in this arrangement.<sup>139</sup> Trinidadians traditionally used “bomb” tunes as a means of earning respect from their colonial government and to demonstrate the potential of the steel drum as a true instrument of high art. In this respect, Seeger employs the Tchaikovsky example above in a similar fashion.

There is a kind of raucous democracy about a good street celebration. People who, throughout the rest of the year, stay more or less politely out each other’s way, behind closed doors, will find themselves in the streets rubbing shoulders and bottoms. Rich and poor, black and white, Catholic, Protestant, Jew, and atheist find themselves irresistibly drawn by the rhythm out of their houses into the street and enjoying themselves there together as fellow human beings on God’s great green earth. In these days of wars and rumors of wars, I cannot think of any nobler achievement for a musical instrument than this. Would it not be a good thing if something similar to this Carnival or Mardi Gras spirit could be introduced into many a solemn or discouraged American community? Once upon a time, the U.S. was accustomed to such things as circus parades and torchlight political rallies. Nowadays, all too often a parade is a cut and dry affair, a duty more than a pleasure, highly organized and humorless, with all the floats created by professional display firm. Perhaps, as the steel band idea spreads, American parades could once again take on the informality and enthusiasm that they had of old.<sup>140</sup>

Another pertinent example of Seeger’s cultural mission is the “Carnival! Carnival!” section of the manual which offers a brief description of Carnival in Trinidad and its importance to Trinidadian culture. Interestingly, the section closes with the above quotation in which Seeger locates what he considers a void in American culture that the “spirit” of steel band could fill. 1961 was a time of great personal turmoil for Seeger, a devout pacifist, and his general malaise towards the escalation of military activity in South East Asia is apparent in the reference to “wars and rumors of wars.” Yet placing

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<sup>139</sup> For more information on “bomb” tunes, see Shannon Dudley, “Dropping the Bomb” Steel Band Performance and Meaning in 1960s Trinidad” *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Winter 2002) : 135-164

<sup>140</sup> Seeger, *Steel Drum Manual*, pg 7.

steel bands in the place of military bands on parade is an interesting juxtaposition. Ultimately, Seeger hoped the steel band and steel band music, similar to other representative non-western musical cultures, calypso and mambo for example, could integrate with and remain part of the American musical landscape. By suggesting a fit with parades, Seeger attempts to offer steel band as a means towards American cultural progress.

Another way in which Seeger attempts to integrate social issues in this “how-to” steel band manual is by inserting timely newspaper clippings from Trinidadian and the American newspaper sources throughout the monograph. In most cases these appear as small inserts, but in one striking instance Seeger includes a full-page reproduction of a *London Times* article titled “Beating out the Rhythms in Trinidad” originally published in September of 1960. Seeger includes the following annotation at the base of this newspaper article:

Probably no other musical instrument in the world has gotten so much free publicity as has the steel drum in recent years. This article and other clippings reproduced in this booklet represent a small sampling.<sup>141</sup>

His claim is referring to the general public’s excitement and embrace of the United States Navy Steel Band, Harry Belafonte, the calypso craze, and the music of the Caribbean. The claim is certainly apt as evidenced by the travel advertisements discussed earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 2. Moreover, steel pan ensembles appeared on several important nationally syndicated television programs including *The Ed Sullivan Show* and the powerful imagery of the steel pan and steel bands was, along with other implements of exotica, able to capture the hearts and minds of Americans in mainstream advertising and popular music.

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<sup>141</sup> Seeger, *Steel Drum Manual*, pg 29.

In the grand scheme of things Seeger is an American icon and internationally famous for many reasons; unfortunately, this book on how to make and play steel drums is not one of them. Currently, the text is out of print and only a minimal number of copies survive in private and public libraries throughout the United States. Yet the book was an influential “how to” guide for steel band arranging to those in the business of doing such things (secondary education, college and university, and community-based educators) and early steel band agents such as Admiral Daniel Gallery (discussed in Chapter 4) utilized Seeger’s instructions. Moreover, the value of this manual to early steel band leaders in higher education is invaluable and the vitality and spark of the university steel band movement in the 1970s was fueled, or at least guided, by Seeger and his manual. In this sense, we should not overlook this important influence when evaluating Seeger’s contributions to the development of steel pan in America. The practical value of Seeger’s manual, and its ability to illustrate the style and method by which steel band arrangers constructed their arrangements in the late 1950s and early 1960s, ranks equally to any of his projects of ethnomusicological value.

## Pete Seeger and the United States Navy Steel Band



**United States Navy Steel Band during Seeger/Gallery Era,  
San Juan, Puerto Rico (1958)<sup>142</sup>**

Broad as his interests in the steel drum ensemble were, perhaps Seeger's most important—and unlikely—contribution to the development of steel pan in America was as consultant to Admiral Daniel Gallery, founder of the United States Navy Steel Band.<sup>143</sup> From 1957 to 1961 Gallery and Seeger exchanged a series of letters that describe in great detail methods for steel drum construction, opinions on proper repertoire for the United States Navy Steel Band, and the contemporary state of folk and popular music in the United States. In these letters, Seeger and his political ideology are locked in

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<sup>142</sup> *Papers of Admiral Daniel V. Gallery*, Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

<sup>143</sup> Portions of the following case study are adapted from Andrew Martin, "Words of Steel: Pete Seeger and the US Navy Steel Band," *Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore* Vol. 34, No. 1 (Spring-Summer 2008) : 20-27.

a fascinating tension with Gallery and the military connotations of this partnership. The correspondence took place while Seeger was living in Beacon and Gallery was stationed in Puerto Rico, but making regular visits to the continental United States. The following discussion aims to explore and frame this correspondence, which offers a partial glimpse into Seeger's life as a folklorist during the late 1950s. Gallery and Seeger both recognized the inherent potential of steel drums, the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago, as a musical cultural ambassador for the United States. Their correspondence uniquely illustrates how both men pursued their goals.

Seeger had no intention of seeking an alliance or partnership with the United States military at the onset of his steel drum career in 1955. However, according to his steel drum manual, Seeger wanted to bring the steel drum to everyone, including "Rich and poor, black and white, Catholic, Protestant, Jew, and atheist," and the military certainly feel under this inclusionary umbrella.<sup>144</sup> This project was no different and Seeger fostered the partnership with the same accepting and non-discriminatory embrace with which he approached any and all of his musical, cultural, and social projects. However, this project in particular had the complicated circumstance of Seeger's persecution by HUAC paired with his partnership with a government agency. Seeger biographer Ray Brown once asked the folk singer if, during his blacklist and HUAC trials, there was ever any fear of going to prison for his organizing and political activities. Seeger responded, "I may have been very foolish, but I truly believed in the hearts of man and my cause."<sup>145</sup> It is apparent that Seeger approached Gallery and steel drums in a similar fashion. He genuinely loved the music of Trinidad, but also understood that steel

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<sup>144</sup> Seeger, *Steel Drum Manual*, pg 7.

<sup>145</sup> Brown, *Power of Song*, DVD, 2007.



drum ensembles offered American children, regardless of socioeconomic class, a positive outlet, and that by their very nature steel drum bands fostered egalitarianism, creativity, and self-expression. Ultimately, the following case study provides an interesting first-hand account of how Seeger was able to function within the blacklist and achieve, if only partially, his goal of furthering a cultural awareness of Trinidadian music while reaching the masses and educating them on value of active music making.



**Admiral Daniel V. Gallery**

Admiral Daniel V. Gallery, Commandant of the Tenth Naval District, was a highly decorated naval officer, yet he is perhaps best known today as the founder of the first continuously running, American-based steel band comprised of non-Trinidadian players. In his memoir, Gallery often lamented this legacy:

I never heard of the steel drum until I was in Trinidad at Carnival time in 1957, when I heard hundreds of them in the fabulous Carnival parade. The music just got inside me and shook me up. I bought a whole set of steel drums. . . . During my forty-three years of active duty in the Navy, I had a hand in a lot of things for which one might think I would be remembered, such as inventing new ordnance devices, flying jet airplanes, and capturing

a German submarine. . . . But if you ask any Captain or Admiral on active duty now, “do you know Dan Gallery?” the chances are he will say, “Sure. He’s the guy who started that steel band in San Juan.”<sup>146</sup>

Gallery stationed his steel band at the naval base in Puerto Rico starting in 1957. The Pandamoniacs, as they were known, immediately took the island by storm, instilling enough confidence for Gallery to embark on a tour of the United States. The steel band’s early success was propelled by enthusiasts of the calypso craze championed by Harry Belafonte and the exotica craze promoted by Martin Denny. The first musicians of the United States Navy Steel Band were navy musicians stationed in San Juan who Gallery ordered to learn how to play the steel drums.<sup>147</sup> Gallery regularly flew in famed Trinidadian steel bandsmen Ellie Mannette from 1957 to the early 1960s for instruction, steel band tuning, and maintenance.<sup>148</sup> Following Gallery’s retirement from the Navy in 1960, the United States Navy Steel Band remained stationed in San Juan until 1972, when the band was moved to the Algiers Naval Base in New Orleans, Louisiana. As I will discuss further in Chapter 4, the United States Navy Steel Band—only disbanded in 1999—cut several records and performed more than twenty thousand concerts worldwide.

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<sup>146</sup> Daniel Gallery, *Eight Bells and All’s Well* (New York: Norton, 1965), p 273–5.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> Although this article highlights his work in the late 1950s and 1960s, Mannette worked closely with the United States Navy Steel Band continuously from 1957 until the bands decommissioning and disbandment in 1999; a relationship that spanned some forty-two years.



**President Dwight Eisenhower and Daniel Gallery (right) 1957<sup>149</sup>**

### **Admiral Gallery and Seeger: Correspondences**

The partnership between Gallery and Seeger began in 1957 with a series of letters. Over the course of four years the two men would correspond frequently, exchanging tips and pointers for making and playing steel drums. The letters begin as a tutorial for Gallery to learn the basics of the steel band construction; however, they quickly progress to the sharing of ideas and strategies for promoting the steel band on a global scale.

The historical timing of Seeger and Gallery's clandestine partnership could not have been more peculiar. As we have seen, Seeger had a long history of political work

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<sup>149</sup> *Papers of Admiral Daniel V. Gallery* are held in the Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

with leftist politics and his work unions, *People's Songs*, the presidential campaign of Henry Wallace, and civil rights organizations put him under the constant surveillance of the CIA. If Seeger's political views are well known, Gallery's—diametrically opposed to Seeger's—need some introduction. Besides his post as a senior flag-rank officer in the United States Navy, Gallery was friends with President Dwight D. Eisenhower (Above), and his letters to friends suggest that he supported Senator Joseph McCarthy's anti-Communist crusade.<sup>150</sup> In one letter, Gallery commented on a recent trip to the Dominican Republic that:

In the Dominican “Republic” they've got dictatorship, law, order, and happiness—next door in Cuba they've liberte, Egalite, Fraternite,[sic] and chaos! I have no objections whatsoever to dictatorship as a form of government for other people, as long as the dictators don't want to destroy the USA. That's the only bone I have to pick with the Russians. If they would just confine their efforts to their own people and let us the hell alone, I would be an enthusiastic adherent of communism for the Russians.<sup>151</sup>

Gallery's opposition to communism and “liberté” sentiments were shared by many of his military colleagues, and the Admiral was open about his hatred for communism and communists which in reality extended beyond the Russians simply “leaving America the hell alone.” Yet, perhaps Gallery's most public political activity was his role in the “Revolt of the Admirals” in 1949. In a series of letters to the *Saturday Evening Post*, Gallery harshly criticized Louis Johnson, Secretary of Defense under Democratic President Harry S Truman, for his drawdown plans to significantly reduce the Navy and merge the army and Marine Corps into one entity following WWII. Among other

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<sup>150</sup> These sentiments are most evident in a letter from Gallery to Rudy Onsrud (1957) in which Gallery discuss the “evil of sputnik” and letter to Admiral Smith (1957) in which Gallery blames the ills of the Cuban revolution on socialists, communists, and their supporters and sympathizers.

<sup>151</sup> Letter from Gallery to Martin Sommers of the *Saturday Evening Post*, June 26, 1959. *Papers of Admiral Daniel V. Gallery* are held in the Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

inflammatory remarks, Gallery accused Johnson of conspiring with the communist Russians in order to destroy American democracy.<sup>152</sup>

Gallery's role in the "Revolt of the Admirals" nearly cost him his career and he narrowly avoided court marshal. As result of these actions, Gallery was sent to command the Tenth Naval District instead of a more prestigious post elsewhere in Washington, DC. His career stalled, Gallery began to focus his energies on more personal projects within his command. Inspired by a recent visit to Trinidad in 1956, Gallery was eager to start a steel drum ensemble and sought out help in doing so in 1957. In an effort to broaden his call for aid, Gallery wrote an article for the *Chicago Tribune* that spring telling the story of steel drums and announcing the organization of a United States Navy-sponsored ensemble. Seeger, who was on tour in Xenia, Ohio, made first contact and responded to the article, sending Gallery the following letter:

Dear Admiral Gallery:

I have read with interest the article in the *Chicago Tribune* telling of your organizing a steel band. How I wish I could have been in Chicago August 24th to hear it! I am writing because I thought you might be interested in seeing a copy of the enclosed. During the last year I've given away several hundred copies to people who have heard me demonstrate the Ping Pong [lead steel drum]. In several colleges steel bands have now started . . . I quite agree with you that this music will "sweep across the United States like a brush fire."

Yours Very Sincerely,  
Peter Seeger<sup>153</sup>

From this initial contact in 1957, the correspondence between Seeger and Gallery spanned four years; of particular interest, however, are the earliest letters from 1957. The men's opposing political positions complicate the seemingly mundane exchanges:

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<sup>152</sup> "Armed Forces: Revolt of the Admirals," *Time Magazine*, October 17, 1949.

<sup>153</sup> *Papers of Admiral Daniel V. Gallery* are held in the Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

Gallery was a Navy admiral and commandant, while Seeger was a blacklisted supposed Communist. Their collaboration was, without a doubt, an improbable one.

By 1957 Seeger was already in the process of appealing his HUAC conviction and the prompt and enthusiastic reply letter from Gallery may have made the folk singer a bit suspicious. Moreover, Seeger was perhaps a bit wary of Gallery and his exploits, considering that by 1957 the distribution of the initial two hundred copies of the steel drum manual had yielded little. One could only imagine Seeger's delight when he received the following letter of June 20 from Gallery, which began:

Dear Seeger:

I was very interested in your letter which arrived this morning. I was already quite familiar with the enclosure as one of the several hundred copies you mentioned had fallen into my hands, and I had made quite a study of it.

I am having a whale of a time with this band. My sailors have taken to it like natives. They want to raffle off their regular instruments and play nothing but steel drums now. I swear, I think they're better than any band in Trinidad right now—after only two months experience.<sup>154</sup>

Although Gallery's enthusiasm is genuine, his claim that the new steel band was better than any Trinidadian ensemble after only two months of practice is overblown and the statement is unfortunately dripping with American cultural arrogance. Interestingly, the letter continued with a long story of how Gallery had tried to build a steel drum. The story culminates with Gallery creating a primitive two-note steel drum that cost him several blisters in his right hand (from swinging a hammer) and a bloody smashed thumb (from being pounded). But more importantly, Gallery's sincerity and willingness to experiment with the unfamiliar drums greatly impressed Seeger and instilled an instant respect for the admiral. This is evidenced by Seeger's reply, dated July 8:

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

Dear Admiral:

All I can say is that my admiration for the U.S. Navy could not be higher after reading your letter. I feel I owe you deep apologies for your mashed thumb and weekend effort. If I had only had the sense to put into those mimeographed directions the information that there were different types of oil barrels and to steer clear of ones that are too thick or made out of too highly tempered steel!

Seeger ended this letter with the salute, “With my hat off to you and the Navy, Sir.

Respectfully, Peter Seeger.” It is clear that, for the moment, Gallery’s mashed thumb has softened Seeger’s ongoing disappointment with the United States government. In this case, Seeger’s love and enthusiasm for folk music—specifically steel drums and the folk music of Trinidad—transcended the political, aligning with a history of generosity and sharing that aptly characterize the folklorist. Gallery was equally impressed with Seeger’s enthusiasm, pragmatism, and candor, replying in a letter dated July 13:

Dear Pete:

You owe me no apologies for the mashed thumb. I think it’s on the first page of your screed that you say “you’ll wind up with a mashed thumb” if you try to make a steel drum. It turned out so precisely like you said it would, that I have complete confidence in all the rest of your directions from here on.<sup>155</sup>

Gallery addresses Seeger by his first name and also closed with “Regards,” rather than his usual “Sincerely.” From this point, the baggage of each man’s position in life was cast aside, and the conversations took on the relaxed quality of two friends chatting about music.

Although Gallery and Seeger had different motives—Gallery was interested in a new recruiting tool for the United States Navy, whereas Seeger hoped to aid in the proliferation of a folk instrument accessible to and playable by all, regardless of socioeconomic situation—both men recognized the benefit of working together to launch

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

the United States Navy Steel Band. And both Gallery and Seeger's initial expectations for steel bands in the United States were lofty. Gallery's high military rank brought him considerable clout. The Admiral had recently hosted a party at his base in Puerto Rico, for example, and engaged Harry Belafonte for the event. Based on this calypso performance, Gallery was convinced that steel drum bands could attain the widespread popularity of the contemporary calypso craze. Gallery's infectious enthusiasm pervades his June 20 letter to Seeger, which closes with the following:

I am very much interested in this steel band idea. I really believe this band of mine might start something big. We may be on [Arthur] Godfrey's show next month. I would appreciate very much anything you can tell me about the present state of arts both making and playing steel drums in the United States.

The possible appearance of the United States Navy Steel Band on Arthur Godfrey's television variety show was a major opportunity for steel drums in the United States. The press and visibility for such an appearance would be significant, and Seeger eagerly acknowledged this, immediately responding to Gallery:

If your steel band can get on Arthur Godfrey's show that is exactly what is needed to give the whole thing a great kick off. There will be thousands of people in America begging to know where they can buy them and begging to know how to make them. I agree with you 100% that the instrument is liable to spread around the world. It is unbeatable on parade.<sup>156</sup>

The appearance on *Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts* never came to fruition, but Gallery arranged for the United States Navy Steel Band to make many other arguably more prestigious appearances, including the *Ed Sullivan Show* in 1958 and 1959 and CBS's *Adventure Tomorrow* series in 1960. The band also made a short feature film, *Admiral Dan's Pandemonics*, and had a brief background appearance in the 1961 film *The Saint of Devil's Island*, starring Eartha Kitt. Through these and many other national

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.



appearances, the United States Navy Steel Band did enjoy an intense, though brief, moment of popularity in mainstream American pop culture of the late 1950s and early 1960s, but the band's success never fulfilled the expectations of either man.

The repertoire of the early steel bands was also an issue important to Seeger and Gallery. Since the United States Navy Steel Band was to function as, among other things, a military ensemble, calypso arrangements of "Stars and Strips" and other military band standards would be needed in order to supplement the calypso favorites of the late 1950s. Steel bands in Trinidad had a tradition of adapting and performing the popular tunes of the day; and in the late 1950s this meant rock'n' roll music. This was a predicament for Gallery who admittedly hated rock'n' roll music, suggesting in a 1957 letter to a fellow admiral that steel drum bands "might knock Rock n' Roll and Elvis Presley into the ash can (where they belong)." Gallery's desire to expand steel drums' popularity in American certainly struck a chord with Seeger, who had considered the subject in depth, and this meant playing the most relatable repertoire for the target audience. Seeger wrote in his 1956 steel drum manual, annotated for Gallery's own use:

Once you are familiar with how steel bands are used in the West Indies, you should start considering how you want to adapt them to other music familiar to your own friends and neighbors in your home town. It seems to me there is no reason why many popular or folk melodies of the U.S.A. could not be played by a good steel band. Try any square dance tune such as "Old Joe Clark" or "Arkansas Traveler," and try also rhythms such as an Irish Jig. The only problem I have found here is that rhythmically they sound rather over simple, after you are used to the complex counter rhythmic effects of Caribbean music.

To solve this problem will be the problem of young people who start playing steel pans in every country. . . . What I am sure of is that right now the steel band can fill a niche unoccupied in American life since the decline of the fife and drum corps. Here is something for a gang of young people to latch on to, and let the whole world know that they are around.

Steel pans are cheap, hard to break, and can be played in the rain or snow. Everyone can participate on his or her own level.<sup>157</sup>

Although Gallery did not specifically address the subject of repertoire in later letters, the Admiral must have concurred with Seeger's conclusion that any popular folk melody could be adapted for steel drums, for the United States Navy Steel Band archives include arrangements of "Yankee Doodle," "Old Joe Clark," "Marianne," and "Guantanamara" which for the Seeger/Gallery era. Yet it is notable that Seeger addressed the subject of repertoire within the context of the public good: that is, reaching young people, inclusion and participation by all, and the elevation of the poor and working class. Seeger was keenly aware of the political nature of steel drums in Trinidad and their function as a vehicle for protest and cultural awareness for the oppressed classes, and he never missed an opportunity to draw attention to such issues—even in correspondence with a Navy Admiral.

### **Chapter Conclusions**

In July 1960 the Admiral was in declining health and the United States Navy issued new orders effectively forcing him to accept a medical retirement. Gallery vacated his post as commandant of the Tenth Naval District, turning over control of his beloved steel band to chief musician Franz Grissom. Though Gallery's enthusiasm for steel drums waned slightly in the following years, and ill health and other circumstances limited his contact with the band, each successive leader of the United States Navy Steel Band kept Gallery informed with letters about the performance schedule and activities of the group.

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

For Seeger, the passing years yielded a similar fate: following the publication of his steel drum manual in 1964, he too moved on to other projects. Yet the activities of both men laid the groundwork for steel band in America today. With literally hundreds of college, primary school, and community-based steel drum ensembles spread throughout the country, the legacy of Gallery and Seeger's labors are witnessed in American steel bands on a daily basis. Considering the political climate of the 1950s, the remarkable unlikelihood of this relationship is a testament to the genuine character of each man. The diplomatic grace and humility embraced by Gallery and Seeger during the correspondence of 1957 provide a fascinating example of a shared admiration for folk music and culture.

For Seeger, this interesting episode only adds to his work as an American folklorist and is a capstone to his role in the development of steel pan in America. Although Gallery and the United States Navy Steel Band have fallen into the void of pop-culture history, they remain more than simply a period piece, greatly influencing the steel band movement of the past 50 years. Conversely, steel pan in America never reached the masses in quite the lofty way Seeger (or Gallery) envisioned, though this should not negate the fact that Seeger did succeed in cultivating several isolated steel pan scenes in the United States and laid the foundation for future generations of steel panists.

Though Seeger was but one agent in the development of steel pan in America, his involvement and influence were wide-reaching and integral to the success currently enjoyed by the steel band in American universities and primary schools. Seeger is a fine example of how an outsider, in this case a non-Trinidadian, embraced the music and culture of Trinidad and Tobago in an attempt to remake the steel band tradition in the

United States. His work in steel band and calypso add another layer to Seeger's iconic career; however, as we will see in the following chapters, Chapter 7 in particular, the early development of steel pan in America is dominated by singular individuals who worked to spread the instrument and music across the United States. In this sense, Seeger is linked to Admiral Gallery, Andy Narell, Alan O'Connor, and many other early American steel band pioneers.

## Chapter 4

### The [Pan]demonium of the Pandemoniacs: Searching for the United States Navy Steel Band



#### **United States Navy Steel Band performing in Honolulu, Hawaii 1959<sup>158</sup>**

As we have seen, during 1956 the meteoric rise of the American calypso craze temporarily propelled calypso music to the height of the mainstream American cultural consciousness. Meanwhile, America was also becoming increasingly entrenched in the Cold War, and the United States military was eager to secure the Atlantic and Caribbean

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<sup>158</sup> This photo is part of the *Papers of Admiral Daniel V. Gallery*, Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

seafront. One facet of this plan to control the Atlantic was to create outposts across the region, and the United States Navy had, since the end of WWII, built and/or occupied several bases throughout the Caribbean. Many of these lands were acquired from Great Britain during the Roosevelt administration through a program known as “land for destroyers” in which the United States military traded older beat down destroyer ships for large swaths of strategic land in the Caribbean and Canada. Often, to the chagrin of island inhabitants, American sailors in Trinidad, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and other Caribbean islands adapted to island life by shopping at local establishments and participating in local festivals and celebrations. For Rear Admiral Daniel Gallery, whom we briefly discussed in Chapter 3, this meant starting (with help from Pete Seeger) a Trinidad-style steel band comprised of naval musicians at his base in Puerto Rico in 1957.

The United States Navy Steel Band (hereafter USNSB) was an immediate success on the naval base in Puerto Rico, and its popularity carried over to the mainland. The group toured the United States extensively and gave performances at the White House and on national variety shows, including *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1958 and 1959. Though the group was initially known as the USNSB, the title soon changed and by 1958 the group was known affectionately as the Pandemoniacs, Admiral Dan’s Pandemoniacs (1959), Commander of the Caribbean Sea Frontier (1970), and then USNSB (1972) once again. The USNSB, which moved to New Orleans in 1972 and were stationed there until their disbandment in 1999, brought the cultural capital of the Caribbean—steel pan music and the Limbo—to the fore of the American cultural mainstream. Its impact on the growth and development of steel pan in America was enormous. Remarkably, despite some 20,000 performances world-wide, the USNSB has flown under the radar of

scholars. Moreover, beside occasional coverage by regional branches of the press, little was known about the ensemble. The goal of this chapter is a periodized history of the USNSB with a contextualization of the group's influence within the overarching narrative of steel pan in America. The global impact of the USNSB is historically and culturally rich, and a discussion of issues such as cultural appropriation, remade traditions, and American Cold War politics, tensions, and fears are crucial to this narrative. The story of the USNSB is vast; therefore, for the sake of brevity this chapter will focus only on the first sixteen years of the USNSB's existence, spanning roughly 1956 to 1972. I will explore, in turn, Admiral Gallery, Franz Grissom, early success, the South American tour of 1960, album recordings, the USNSB on film, instrument development, and the group's move to New Orleans, offering some final thoughts on the USNSB at the close. Though the more recent years of the ensemble (1973-1999) are tremendously interesting and important to the development of steel pan in America, the USNSB's first period dovetails neatly with the calypso craze and is thus more germane to this study of the early development of steel band in the United States.



**Rear Admiral Daniel V. Gallery (Center)<sup>159</sup>**

Rear Admiral Daniel V. Gallery was a classic American war hero with impeccable character, sharp wit, and plenty of can-do spirit. A true renaissance man, Gallery was also a writer, well-versed in the arts, an avid reader, and an accomplished athlete (he competed on the United States Olympic team as a wrestler during the 1920 Games held in Antwerp, Belgium). The Admiral was also dedicated to community service, and was single-handedly responsible for starting and fostering the first youth baseball leagues in Puerto Rico. Despite all of these achievements, and Gallery's service as Commander of an area encompassing the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean known as the Tenth Naval District, he grudgingly admits that he is perhaps best known for his dabbles with Trinidad's National instrument. A portion the following quote appears in Chapter 3 of this study; however, the full passage is even more indicative of Gallery's frustrations.

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid.



I never heard of the steel drum until I was in Trinidad at Carnival time in 1957, and when I heard hundreds of them in the fabulous Carnival parade. The music just got inside me and shook me up. I bought a whole set of steel drums, and when I got to San Juan I sent for the leader of my official navy band, Chief Musician Charles A. Roeper, and told him I wanted to teach his boys how to play them. . . . During my forty-three years of active duty in the Navy, I had a hand in a lot of things for which one might think I would be remembered, such as inventing new ordnance devices, flying jet airplane, and capturing a German Submarine. I have also written three books and a lot of articles and short stories for the Saturday Evening Post, Reader's Digest, and other national magazines. But if you ask any captain or admiral on active duty now, "do you know Dan Gallery?" the chances are he will say, "Sure. He's the guy who started that steel band in San Juan."<sup>160</sup>

Gallery served his post as Commandant of the Tenth Naval District from December 1956 until July 1960 when, battling the early stages of cancer, he was deemed medically unfit to serve and was forced to retire from the United States Navy. Despite his ill health, Gallery was a man of unrelenting energy, and in his short time in Puerto Rico the Admiral was able to forever shape the course of the steel band in America. His energy and enthusiasm for life, music, and the Caribbean Carnival are hallmarks of the USNSB's success.

Admiral Gallery, like many Americans, was entranced by the melody and lyricism of Harry Belafonte's 1956 *Calypso* album; however, Gallery was an ambitious well-connected man, and this interest in calypso which inspired him to start a Trinidad-style-steel band comprised of naval musicians at his base at Roosevelt Road, San Juan, Puerto Rico in 1957. Unlike most Americans in the 1950s, Gallery had actually attended Carnival in Trinidad (in both 1955 and 1957) and he was spellbound by the spirit, music, and sound of the steel band. Moreover, so profound was the Trinidadian Carnival that it served as the driving force for Gallery's steel band obsession.

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<sup>160</sup> Daniel Gallery, *Eight Bells, and All's Well* (New York: Norton, 1965), 273-275.



**Pans for the United States Navy Steel Band, Port of Spain, Trinidad (1957)**

Upon returning to Puerto Rico from Trinidad in February of 1957, Gallery immediately ordered a set of steel drums from steel pan maker Ellie Mannette in Port of Spain, and had the instruments shipped to San Juan. The first musicians of the USNSB were actually traditional navy musicians (players of trombones, flute, etc.) stationed in San Juan.



**Chief Musician Charles Roeper (center) in Puerto Rico (1957)<sup>161</sup>**

Gallery informed his chief musician Charles Roeper of the change in mission, and ordered the base musicians to put aside their normal instruments and learn to play steel drums.<sup>162</sup> From this point onward, any navy musicians assigned to the Tenth Naval District would surrender their primary instruments and play steel drums.

Neither Roeper nor any other naval musicians had previous experience with steel drums, and training the early members of the USNSB on how to play steel drums was a problem. Interestingly, there are conflicting reports on the nature of the early steel drum training of the USNSB. For example, in an interview with Murna Nurse, Franz Grissom, chief musician of the USNSB from 1957 to 1964, claims that the band was flown down

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<sup>161</sup> This document is held in the *Papers of Admiral Daniel V. Gallery*, Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

<sup>162</sup> Gallery, *Eight Bells*, 273-275.

to Trinidad in 1956 in order to learn how to play the drums and to bring a set of steel pans back to the base in Puerto Rico.<sup>163</sup> The accuracy of this claim is disputed by Ellie Mannelle, who suggests that he came to San Juan in 1957 to build the steel pans prior to the entire USNSB traveling to Trinidad. Mannelle offered his version of the story in an interview with Chris Tanner, Associate Professor of Music, Miami University of Ohio in 2006:

One day [1957] while working in my panyard, a big white, Navy van pulled outside. Seeing the Navy personnel dressed in their uniforms, I began running, certain they'd come for me to lock me up for stealing their drums [spent crude oil drums, not steel pans yet]. I reached the fence and was about to climb over when one of them shouted, "Mannelle! Wait! Hey, Stop!" I paused at the bottom fence then climbed up. At the top, I turned around and asked, "What you want?" The naval officer replied, "I'm here to see Ellie Mannelle." I asked, "What you want him for?" "Are you Ellie?" Refusing to identify myself, I asked again "What you want him for?" He replied "They want him down at the Navy Base". Scared to death now, I was certain they would hold me down there for stealing their drums. I thought about my predicament for a moment before climbing down the fence. I walked toward the front of the yard and the parked van with its big, bold lettering, "U.S. Navy," and the men dressed in their U.S. Navy Uniforms. I asked one of them, "What you want me for the base?" The officer replied, "Well, the Admiral wants to see you. He wants to speak to you about building a Navy steel band." I replied, "Well, OK." I thought I may as well take the chance and get in. I was thinking that this may be a good way to get some drums without stealing them. So, I climbed into the van and went with them down to the naval base [Chaguaramas].

The Admiral, Dan Gallery, was in Puerto Rico. The men at the Chaguaramas base telephoned him and I spoke with him. He introduced himself, "Mannelle, I am Dan Gallery, the commander of the Western Hemisphere Fleet. I understand that you've been stealing my drums. So, I want you know to build me some steel drums..." "How do I do that?" "I will fly you out to Puerto Rico and you will build them here." Of course, I agreed. What else could I do? I told him I didn't; know how I'd get there because I had no passport. He said he'd take care of that. I would fly on a Navy Plane, one of those Catalinas... He further offered that I could stay as long as I wanted, which I did because I wasn't doing anything else of

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<sup>163</sup> Murna Nusrse, *Unheard Voices: The Rise of Calypso in the Caribbean and North America* (New York: iUniverse, Inc, 2007), p 168-172.

count. A few days later, the van returned and transported me to the Navy Base from where I was placed on a Catalina and flown to Puerto Rico. I remained in Puerto Rico for three to four months. I lived on the barracks with the naval people and got the Navy band started in 1957. What I returned, I wore a Navy uniform and lived like a member of the Navy, the only difference was I built drums while sailors did their required Navy tasks. I remained there for almost a year, which earned me quite a bit of money. The U.S. dollar was much better than the Trinidad dollar. So when I returned home I could live a better life.<sup>164</sup>

According to the official “report of activity for 1957” submitted to the Navy, the USNSB was indeed flown to Trinidad in 1957 to study and learn pan from the steel band masters, but this was only after the steel band had received a set of steel pans from Mannelle at the base in San Juan. Moreover, for instruction, steel band tuning, and maintenance, Mannelle—who by 1957 was already famous in Trinidad for his steel band activity—was regularly flown to the San Juan naval base from Trinidad. Mannelle (Below) would often live and work on the base during these visits, spanning one to four weeks, in which he would build and tune steel drums twelve to eighteen hours per day.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Interview between Ellie Mannelle and Chris Tanner, October 28, 1998, Miami University of Ohio.

<sup>165</sup> Dennis Jansson, member of the USNSB from 1978-1981, remembers fondly how Mannelle would arrive on a Greyhound bus with his suitcase full of hammers. The steel pan master-builder would build all day and talk all night with USNSB members. Jansson recalls that the fire marshal was a regular visitor to the base in New Orleans when Mannelle was tuning as he would build fires to harden steel pans in open spaces around the base such as parking lots, walking spaces, or in any vacant area. His Trinidadian sensibilities towards property and public sharing were often frustrating for the naval brass.



**Ellie Mannelle tuning pans for the USNSB (1964)<sup>166</sup>**

Hiring a Trinidadian to train American steel panists during the 1950s and 60s was necessary as there was a scarcity of qualified instructors, and the relatively recent evolution of the steel band genre in Trinidad had yet to consistently export steel panists to the United States. Interestingly, the practice of importing foreign tuners to service and tune American steel pan ensembles begun by the USNSB continues for other steel bands in the United States to this day, a process aided by the many touring Trinidadian steel bands that extended tours in order to earn extra income in the United States.<sup>167</sup>

Throughout its forty-two year history, the USNSB used only three steel pan tuners/builders; Ellie Mannelle, Phil Solomon, and Cliff Alexis.

Following the acquisition of the Mannelle-made steel pans, Gallery was faced with the serious problem of acquiring and/or writing arrangements for this fledgling steel band. Gallery and the USNSB were in a sense alone, considering that they were the first

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<sup>166</sup> This photo is stamped on the backside “Official Navy Press Photo” and was donated to the Author by former USNSB member Bruce Smith.

<sup>167</sup> These include but are not limited to the 1951 TASPO steel band, the 1967-1970 Trinidad Tripoli Steel Band, members of WITCO Desperados tours of the 1960s.

permanently American-based steel band and had no similar groups to model their work after. Furthermore, the USNSB differed in one fundamental way from their Trinidadian counterparts; they read music. Music notation literacy is scarce in Trinidad, and to this day most Trinidadian panists learn by ear and teach by rote, making the process of learning new tunes laborious and inefficient when presented to American schooled musicians, but perfectly acceptable and traditional for Trinidadians. Gallery's men had all graduated from the Armed Forces School of Music, could fluently read music, and quickly attained fluency on steel drums that astounded many Trinidadians.<sup>168</sup>

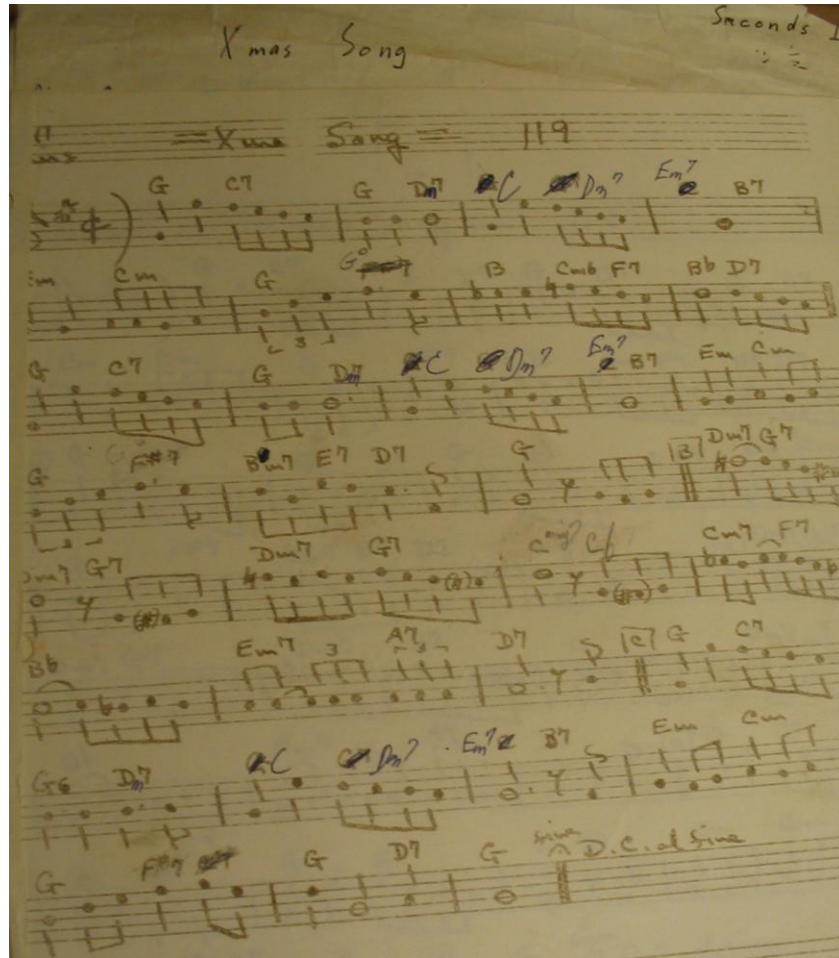
However, because of the relative ease by which the USNSB assimilated Trinidadian music, many Trinidadians became jealous and suspicious of the band's intentions. Others felt Americans were stealing their cultural capital.<sup>169</sup> Some of the animosity may have stemmed from the uneasy politics that persisted since 1941, when the United States built and occupied a naval base on Trinidad in an area called Chaguaramas, located on the northwestern tip of the island near the capital city of Port of Spain. The Yankee interlopers occupied the base from 1941 until 1968 officially, and left entirely by 1978.

After several months of practice during the summer of 1957, the sailors began feeling confident on their new instruments; however, at this point the USNSB had very little music to read, spurring the recently promoted chief Musician Franz Grissom to transcribe and arrange approximately 200 popular calypsos, folk tunes, and armed forces medleys from records, radio, and field recordings the groups had made during reconnaissance trips to Trinidad Carnival.

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<sup>168</sup> Email conversation with former USNSB member Calvin Stewart August 3, 2010.

<sup>169</sup> Guardian Staff Reporter, "Admiral Dan has a Steelband" *Trinidad Guardian*, December 15, 1957, pg 9.



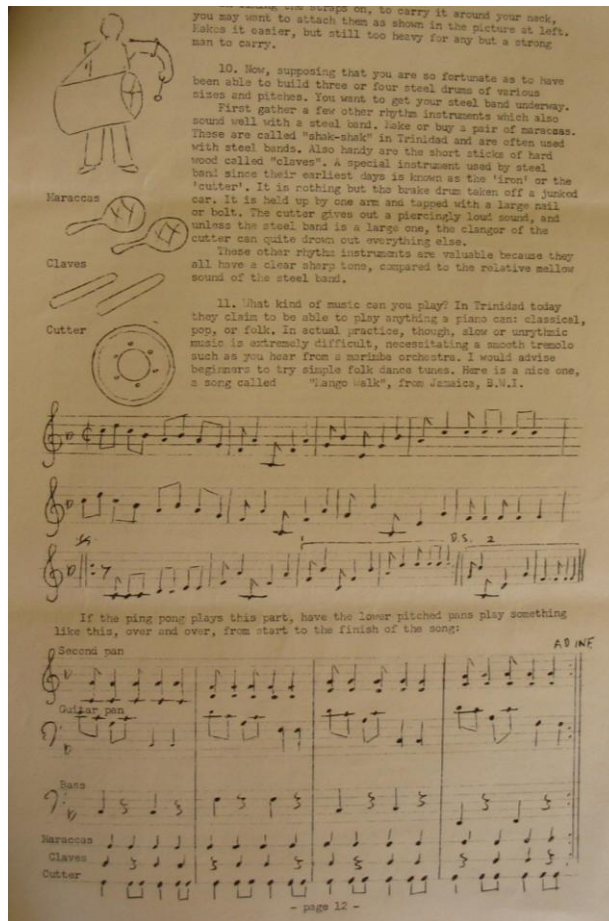
**#119, the X-Mas Song, arranged by Franz Grissom (1958)<sup>170</sup>**

The popularity of Grissom’s arrangements became the basis for the band’s early catalog; though their initial success was further aided by an unlikely source, Pete Seeger. As discussed in Chapter 3, after reading a *Chicago Tribune* story promoting the USNSB’s upcoming performance in August of 1957, Seeger wrote a letter to Gallery offering his help. In particular, Seeger’s help came in the form of a “how to” instructional manual for steel drums. Seeger’s manual included steel band musical arrangements and tips for arranging new tunes. Using the template found in Seeger’s manual (Below and

<sup>170</sup> This document is held in the *Papers of Admiral Daniel V. Gallery*, Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.



discussed in Chapter 3), the USNSB created several of their early arrangements based on Seeger's observations and methods.



**Excerpt from Pete Seeger's steel drum manual given to Gallery (1956)<sup>171</sup>**

While Seeger was interested in remaking the steel band traditions of Trinidad in America, Gallery had different ideas, and the USNSB would take a very different trajectory. This new path would forge a new steel band tradition that would influence the development of steel pan in America for the next forty-two years.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.



**Harry Belafonte, San Juan Naval Base (1957)**

Prior to the rise of Las Vegas as a trendy gambling destination, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and other Caribbean islands were popular destinations for the rich and famous to vacation and gamble. At his base in San Juan, Gallery often hosted important United States and foreign government officials as well as a plethora of entertainment stars, including Harry Belafonte (Above), opera star Eileen Farrell, Jane Morgan, Eartha Kitt, and Pablo Casals (Below), and the USNSB acted as Gallery's cocktail band for such occasions.



**Pablo Casals, Admiral Gallery, Franz Grissom, Puerto Rico (1960)<sup>172</sup>**

### **Franz Grissom**

One story that is legendary among former members and widely circulated in print, is the circumstance by which Gallery informed the musicians based in Puerto Rico that they were to put aside their regular instruments and play steel pan (mentioned previously). According to Gallery's letters, the story begins while Admiral was on assignment conducting official Navy duties at the Chaguaramas Naval Base in Trinidad during February of 1957. This was Gallery's second visit to Trinidad, and it just so

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<sup>172</sup> This document was provided by Gilda Strom, daughter of Franz Grissom and keeper of the Franz Grissom Archive.

happened to coincide with Carnival that particular year. According to the official naval press kit bulletin:

In 1957, Rear Admiral Dan Gallery, Commander Caribbean Sea Frontier, San Juan Puerto Rico, went down to Trinidad never having heard of such a thing as steel drum. At Carnival, he listened in amazement to hundreds of steel bands, and he says, they music just got inside me, and shook me up. He ordered a set of twenty drums from Ellie Mannette, the best drum maker in the world. When he got back to base in San Juan, he sent for his music Chief Charles A. Roeper. Roeper was tied-up with official business when the admiral sent for him. He and his band were playing morning colors at the Naval Station. After colors, Roeper reported to the admiral, the admiral explained he had just ordered a set of steel drums and wanted Roeper to teach his boys to play them. Roeper didn't know what a steel drum was, and when the admiral explained, the chief look at him as if he'd gone nuts, but being a good navy chief, Roeper just said "Aye Aye, Sir" and went to work.<sup>173</sup>

The above story is corroborated by the official documents and Navy records indicate that Gallery indeed paid Ellie Mannette \$120 in 1957 for a set of steel pans (three tenor pans, two sets of the double second pans, three sets of cello/guitar pans, one set of bass pans) and brought him to the base in Puerto Rico to build instruments.<sup>174</sup> Charles Roeper, then a middle-aged man and the master chief of the Tenth Naval District Band, was in that instant thrust into the role of a steel band pioneer. However, Roeper's tenure with the USNSB was short lived, and soon after Gallery's impulsive installation of the steel band in 1957 he became ill with what may have been malaria.<sup>175</sup> Later that summer Roeper was relieved of his duties, sent back to the continental United States for treatment, and was ultimately given a medical discharge. In his place, Franz Grissom was promoted to master chief from his former post at a United States Naval base stationed in France and

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<sup>173</sup> *Admiral Dan's Pandemoniacs*, film transcript produced and published by the Douglas Aircraft Company, Long Beach, California, 1960.

<sup>174</sup> This information is taken from a mimeograph document held in the *Papers of Admiral Daniel V. Gallery*, Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

<sup>175</sup> Personal conversation with calypso scholar Ray Funk, August 14, 2009.

assumed the leadership of the USNSB. With this appointment, the USNSB entered a new era and with Grissom at the helm, the years of 1958 to 1964 would retrospectively be known as the group's golden age.



**Grissom in Columbia (1960)<sup>176</sup>**

Franz Grissom arrived in Puerto Rico in August of 1957 having no prior experience with steel drums or Caribbean music. He was a percussionist by training and had graduated from the Armed Forces School of Music in Little Creek, Virginia. Despite his lack of steel band experience, Grissom was a skilled arranger of American popular music and jazz, and closely followed the Afro-Cuban movement started by Tito Puente and Dizzy Gillespie that infiltrated mainstream jazz music during the 1950s. Grissom was a musician's musician and, despite his early steel pan inexperience, he knew how to direct

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<sup>176</sup> Staff Writer, "Se presentará en Columbia orquesta tambores de acero de la Marina de E.U.," *El Tiempo*, Bogotá, Columbia, October 8, 1960.

ensembles. With Roeper on the decline in the early summer months of 1957, the USNSB was in a state of disrepair upon Grissom's arrival, and he set about rehearsing the group back into top form. Gallery sent the entire steel band down to Trinidad for Carnival in both 1958 and 1959 in order to study further the latest styles and techniques of playing. During these reconnaissance trips Grissom spent countless hours in the Invaders Steel Band panyard asking questions of Ellie Mannette, practicing with members of the Invaders Steel Band, and tape-recording road march tunes, Carnival tunes, bomb tunes (Western classical tunes arranged for steel band), and calypsos for later transcription. Grissom credited this exposure in Trinidad as an important influence on his steel pan education.<sup>177</sup>

As stated earlier in this chapter, one of the directives of the USNSB was to function as the social band for Admiral Gallery, and this meant compiling a substantial collection of arrangements. Grissom was personally responsible for assembling, arranging, and composing in excess of 200 tunes that comprised the "book," or the bulk of the USNSB's repertoire. In order to create these arrangements, Grissom spent countless hours transcribing tunes tape-recorded during the USNSB's visits to Trinidad. He also worked through guitar and piano chord books in order to find combinations of chords and harmonic voicing that would both suit the limitations of the steel band and satisfy the rules of proper voice leading. Moreover, after finding the right ensemble balance, Grissom would compare his final version to Trinidadian steel pan tunes in an effort to check stylistic accuracy and fluency. It is this pragmatic combination of traditional folk music with western classical musical elements that defined the USNSB's

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<sup>177</sup> Interview with Gilda Strom, Daughter of Franz Grissom, March 12, 2008.

distinctive steel band sound and which shaped the group's socio-musical identity for more than forty years.

Besides his formidable musical abilities, Grissom was also keenly aware of the special visual capabilities of the steel band, and he focused on creating a "slick show." In order to create such a show, Grissom compiled a diverse collection of tunes for the USNSB to draw upon during performances that included audience participation numbers and limbo tunes. The "gig book," as it was known, was a trove of musical genres, including jazz, classical tunes such as Schubert's Ave Maria, Latin-tinged light classics, bossa nova, meringue, limbo, American, Caribbean, Latin, South American popular and folk tunes, and calypsos.

\* \* LIST OF PIECES NORMALLY PLAYED BY \* \*  
 \* \* THE TENTH NAVAL DISTRICT STEEL BAND \* \*

AFRO - CUBAN AND MAMBOS

DRUME NEGRITA  
 MERCI BON DIEU  
 MONTIVIDEO  
 MONTUNA #1  
 TEMPTATION  
 WACHI WARA  
 WATCH YOUR STEP

BALLADS

AMONG MY SOUVENIRS  
 BLUE MOON  
 IN MY SOLITUDE  
 UNCHAINED MELODY

BOLEROS AND RHUMBAS

ARRIVERDERCHI ROMA  
 COME BACK TO SORRENTO  
 GOLDEN EARRINGS  
 I'M ALWAYS CHASING RAINBOWS  
 LA PALOMA  
 MES CHERS  
 SEPTEMBER SONG  
 SIBONEY  
 SO?  
 THE BREEZE AND I  
 THE MOON WAS YELLOW  
 YOU BELONG TO MY HEART -- YOURS

CHA -- CHAS

ACHOO CHA - CHA  
 CHA CHA CHA  
 IF I CAN'T TAKE IT WITH ME WHEN I GO  
 MARIA ELENA  
 ROSELLE

CLASSICS

AVE MARIA 3:24  
 BERCEUSE (from Jocelyn)  
 JESU JOY OF MAN'S DESIRING  
 POET AND PEASANT OVERTURE  
 REVERIE  
 ROMEO AND JULIET THEME  
 SCHUBERT'S SERENADE

CALYPSOS

ANNA  
 BESAR  
 BROWN SKIN GIRL 2:28  
 DEY GOT CALYPSO  
 DOLLIE  
 EDEN WAS JUST LIKE THIS  
 FASINATOR'S MINCR  
 FIRE DOWN BELOW  
 GUNSLINGER  
 GREENSLEEVES  
 I DO ADORE HER  
 I'M COMING BACK TO MY LORD  
 IS HIS LOVE LIKE HIS RUM?  
 IT'S YOU I LOVE  
 JACKASS SONG  
 JEAN AND DINAH 3:18  
 JINGO BELLS  
 LET'S ALL GO TO THE MARKET PLACE  
 LIZA  
 MAMA LOOKA EUBU  
 MARIANNE  
 MARY'S BOY CHILD  
 MATILDA  
 MOONIA  
 PANDEMONIACS CALYPSO  
 PAY AS YOU EARN  
 SATURDAY NIGHT  
 THERESA  
 TOM CAT

DIXIELAND AND JAZZ

HIGH SOCIETY  
 JUST A CLOSER WALK WITH YOU  
 MUSKRAT RAMBLE  
 WHEN THE SAINTS GO MARCHING IN

LIMBO MUSIC AND POLKAS

LIMBO LIMBO LIKE ME 2:58  
 POLKA MEDLEY  
 SERVICE MEDLEY

3-14-60

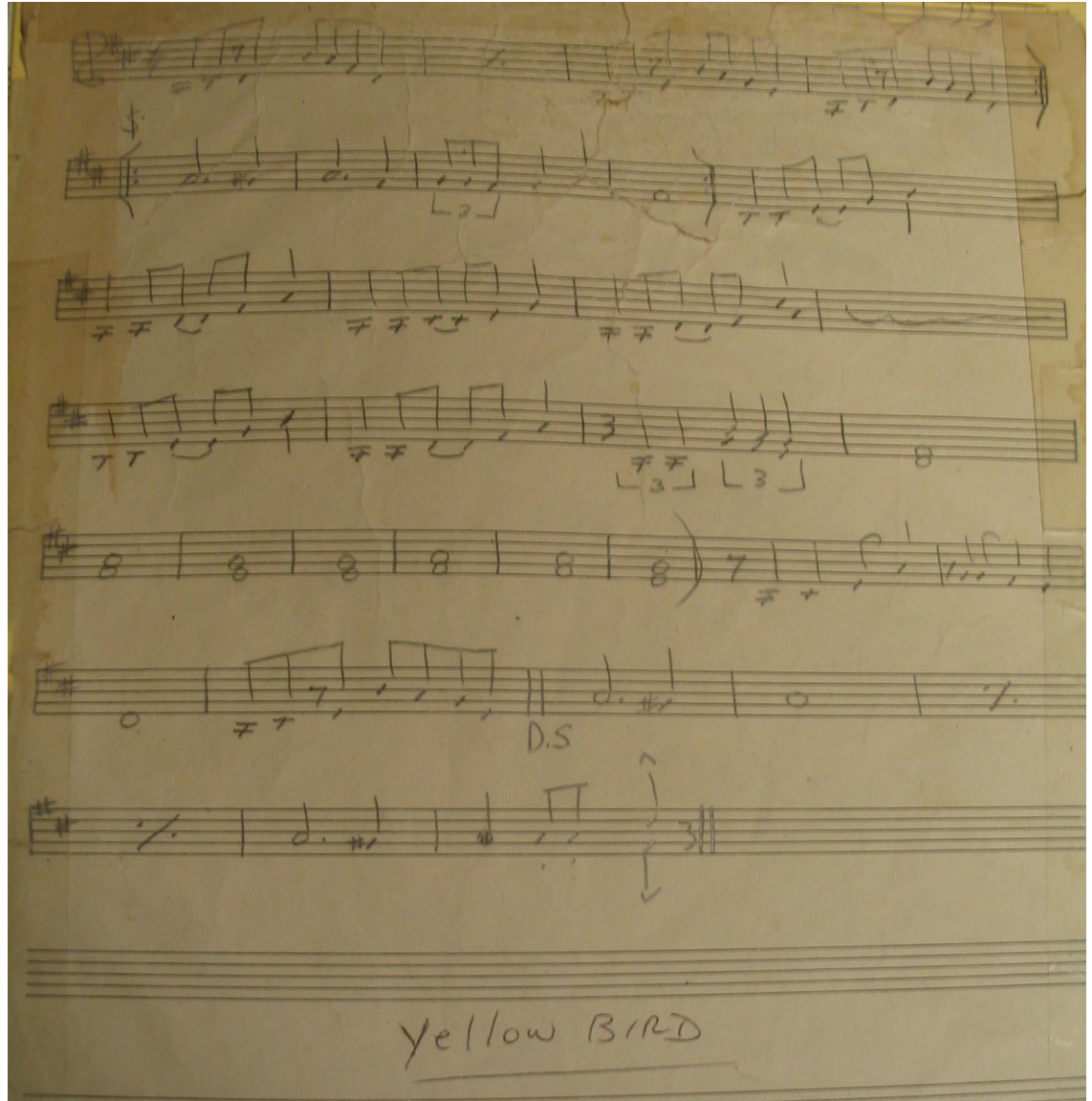
**Repertoire List, South American Tour 1960<sup>178</sup>**

The above list is a fragment of an existing set list from 1960 used on the South American tour. Almost all of the tunes listed were either original compositions or arrangements

<sup>178</sup> This document is held in the Franz Grissom family archive.



made by Grissom. Throughout the course of the USNSB's existence, the group consistently added to their repertoire year by year, constantly adapting to the popular music of the era. However, many of Grissom's original tunes and arrangements became the ensemble's core repertoire and were still being played in 1999 during the steel band's final year of service.



**“Yellow Bird” arranged by Grissom (1960)<sup>179</sup>**

<sup>179</sup> This document is held in the Music Library, Armed Forces School of Music, Little Creek Naval Amphibious Base, Norfolk, Virginia.

In late 1964, Grissom was promoted out of the USNSB and headed west to the Treasure Island Band stationed in San Francisco, California. A year later, he received an official letter of commendation for his work with the USNSB from Admiral Caldwell (Gallery's replacement as Commandant of the Tenth Naval District). The Admiral summed up Grissom's contributions:

Although you assumed leadership of the band in 1957 after it had already been organized, the high standards of musicianship and the many innovations in arranging and techniques which you instituted are directly responsible for the excellent reputation which the band enjoys today. . . .The Tenth Naval District Steel Band under your direction has achieved international recognition and has contributed materially to public understanding and support of the Navy on a local as well as a national level. You are hereby commended for you superior performance of duty. Congratulations and a traditional navy "Well Done!"<sup>180</sup>

His six years of service would have a lasting impact on the USNSB, and many members from throughout the group's existence credit Grissom with building a solid foundation. However, the end of his tenure with the USNSB was not the end of steel band for Grissom; he started a group with his family in San Francisco and performed throughout California for the next five years until his transfer to Italy. Grissom once again took up the steel pan in 1995 when the American steel drum manufacturer Panyard, Inc. approached him with an offer to publish some of his early USNSB-era steel band arrangements. Grissom leapt at the chance and was reassured that his work with the band would last into the future. By this time Grissom had relocated to Arizona; however, his work with Panyard inspired the former panist to once again form a small steel band in which he played until his death in 2005.

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<sup>180</sup> This document is held in the Franz Grissom Family archive.



**Steel Band Competition, Antigua, (1957)<sup>181</sup>**

### **Early Success**

Riding the USNSB's early success in San Juan, Admiral Gallery began formulating plans for a grand world tour. However, Gallery first wanted to test the quality of the USNSB in the Caribbean. He brought the group to Antigua in the fall of 1957 to play two weeks of engagements throughout the island and participate in a steel band competition against local island steel bands from Antigua, St Thomas, and elsewhere. The USNSB placed a respectable third in the competition, which pleased the Admiral and gave him enough confidence to send the group out for higher profile Caribbean

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<sup>181</sup> This document is held in the *Papers of Admiral Daniel V. Gallery*, Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

engagements which included performing at diplomatic functions. Following these early successful performances, Gallery was convinced the group was ready for a larger stage, and in the winter of 1957 and Carnival season of 1958 he sent the USNSB on tour to perform in several other Caribbean islands, including Trinidad, St. Thomas, Barbados, and Cuba. His position as a flag-rank officer gave him significant clout and control over naval resources, so Gallery provided the ensemble with a personal Catalan aircraft (Below) to transport the ensemble throughout the Caribbean and continental United States.<sup>182</sup>



**USNSB loading the Douglas *Catalan*, (1960)<sup>183</sup>**

The USNSB's constant performing in the Caribbean Islands during 1957 and early 1958 underscored Gallery's desire to hone the product before bringing the group to the United

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<sup>182</sup> The Catalan aircraft was a favorite of Gallery's and was manufactured by the Douglas Aircraft Company. The company would later produce two films that featured the USNSB called *Admiral Dan's Pandemoniacs* and *The Arm and the Spear*. Both films were likely made as a lobby payoff for Gallery's later consideration on future military contracts.

<sup>183</sup> This document is held in the *Papers of Admiral Daniel V. Gallery*, Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

States and Europe. Moreover, these early Caribbean performances were confidence builders for the USNSB's early high profile performances such as the 1958 Brussels Worlds Fair, the White House in 1958 (and 1964), and the 1960 South American tour.



### **Brussel's World Fair (1958)<sup>184</sup>**

The USNSB's performance at the 1958 Brussels World Fair was the group's European debut and an ambitious undertaking for Gallery and company. The USNSB played for the entire two week duration of the Fair at the American Pavilion in the shadows of the Atomium. The performances were grueling work for the USNSB members as the men were required to play the same three tunes (an arrangement of Schubert's "Ave Maria," a calypso called "Jean and Dinah," and a limbo tune called "Armed Services Medley") in

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<sup>184</sup> This document is held in the Franz Grissom Archive.

ten minute intervals for ten hours per day, fourteen days in a row. Despite the schedule, the men kept in good spirits and the USNSB was a huge success. Gallery received congratulatory messages from many European governments and news sources, and narrowly missed attaining an audience with Pope Pius VII in the Vatican where he intended to have the USNSB play for the pontiff.<sup>185</sup>

The Brussels performance was one of the USNSB's early international touring highlights; yet, for Gallery, the prestige of the White House performances surpassed the Brussels affair. Gallery was personal friends with President Eisenhower and the White House performance realized many of Gallery's ambitions for the group. For the Admiral, the White House performance announced to America the arrival of steel band.



**USNSB and President Eisenhower at the White House (1958)**

The USNSB had arrived on the world stage, yes, but this entrance had only landed them on the fringes of the mainstream American consciousness, where the novelty of the

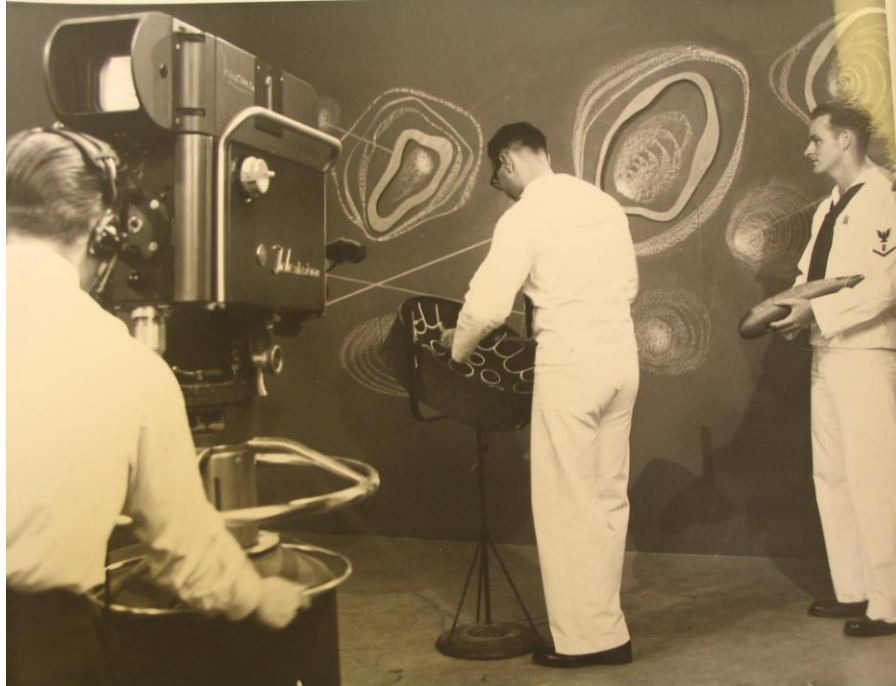
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<sup>185</sup> A devote Catholic, Gallery was very intent on arranging an audience with Pope Pius VII. Gallery's brother John was also a Navy Chaplain and lobbied on the USNSB's behalf.

ensemble, the racially motivated curiosity of the public, and energy created by the United States Navy promotional machine ensured significant newspaper coverage of the USNSB's tours, both domestically and internationally. Sensing that steel band was destined to become America's next popular music, Gallery was eager to position the USNSB as *the* premier act in order to capitalize on the market once, as he believed, the fickle public rejected rock'n' roll in favor of a steel band music revolution. Gallery admittedly hated rock'n' roll music and once suggested in a letter to a fellow admiral that steel drum bands "might knock rock 'n roll and Elvis Presley into the ash can (where they belong)." Yet, he also knew that one of the only ways for the USNSB to reach the masses of the American populous was to tap the potential of television so skillfully used by Dick Clark and other rock'n' roll promoters.<sup>186</sup> A man of unbridled ambition, Gallery refused to settle for the small audience of local television affiliates in San Juan, instead setting his sights on the national stage. Gallery was a well-connected man and began calling in favors from his contacts in New York.

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<sup>186</sup>Letter from Daniel Gallery to Admiral White held in the *Papers of Admiral Daniel V. Gallery*, Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.



**Back stage preparing for *The Ed Sullivan* show performance (1958)**

The depth of Gallery's connections in government and the entertainment industry are impressive, and within a few short weeks he secured the USNSB appearances on nearly every major national variety shows, including the *Ed Sullivan Show* in 1958 (and again in 1959) as part of the "US Navy Talent Spectacular."





***Today Show* rehearsal with co-host [chimpanzee] J. Fred Muggs (1958)<sup>187</sup>**

The USNSB also appeared on the *Arthur Godfrey Show* in 1959, the *Adventure Tomorrow* series for CBS in 1960, the *Steve Allen Show* in 1960, the *Mike Douglas Show* in 1962, and numerous other regional and national television programs. The group appeared on NBC's *The Today Show* in 1958 and 1959, where they enjoyed a particularly warm reception from the erratic but lovable co-host and primate J. Fred Muggs. The group's television success was touted by the Navy, proudly praised in such official military publications as the 1966 "Your Navy in Puerto Rico" handbook, which was designed to acclimate and familiarize recently transferred officers to the San Juan Naval base.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> This photo is held in the *Papers of Admiral Daniel V. Gallery*, Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

<sup>188</sup> The actual quote reads "The U.S. Navy Steel Band was formed in 1957 in San Juan and since has skyrocketed to world fame through appearances in the United States, Europe and South America, including performances in two world's fairs and on national television in the states. The band is unique to the Navy in that the instruments used consist of 55-gallon oil drums which have been altered to produce series of musical tones. With a repertoire of popular, classical and calypso music, the Navy Steel Band has been honored with two command performances at the White House in Washington, D.C., has appeared on

## South American Tour 1960

1960 was a busy year for the USNSB; the group played over 265 performances, spent 88 days on the road, and logged more than 76,000 miles of travel. During this year, the USNSB was to again embark on a significant tour outside of the United States, this time spanning South America. The South American tour lasted three weeks (from October 9 to November 1, 1960) and reached Chile, Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay, Argentina, Paraguay, Brazil, and British Guyana.

The impetus for the tour was twofold. The USNSB's primary orders were to aid President Eisenhower's People-to-People initiative. Eisenhower began the program in 1956 as a pet project aimed at strengthening diplomatic relations and ambassadorship among nations. The organization, which was initially part of the United States Information Agency, sought to strengthen international understanding and friendship among member nations via cultural and humanitarian efforts that involved the direct exchange of culture, ideas, and experiences.<sup>189</sup> Eisenhower and Gallery were close friends and it comes as no surprise that the USNSB was tapped to represent the United States for the mission.

The second impetus was somewhat less humanitarian in nature. The USNSB used the tour as an opportunity to appease the inquiries of ambassadors and commanding naval officers of several Latin American countries who constantly wrote Gallery requesting

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popular television shows, including Ed Sullivan and Mike Douglas Shows and has produced four LP recordings." *Your Navy in Puerto Rico*, Public Affairs Office, United States Navy (Lubbock: Boone Publications, 1966), 6.

<sup>189</sup> For more information on People to People, see <[http://www.ptpi.org/about\\_us/History.aspx](http://www.ptpi.org/about_us/History.aspx)>

performances of his famed steel band. From his leadership position as commanding officer of the Tenth Naval District, Gallery had fervently boasted to his colleagues the musical prowess and uniqueness of the USNSB. Many of the United States and foreign naval personnel subordinate to Gallery were taken by the Admiral's steel band enthusiasm and were eager to host what Gallery referred to as his "hot steel band commodity."

The South American tour was similar to many of the early domestic tours completed by the USNSB in that it lasted twenty-one days. Moreover, the frequency of daily concerts and total number of performances for the tour would become standard practice for the group, setting a precedent for the USNSB's scheduled activities on future domestic tours. Overall, the attendance for the tour was estimated by the United States Navy at some 44,000; the group gave forty performances, which encompassed a wide variety of media, including television, radio, public concerts, and private club engagements. Due in large part to the humanitarian mission of the People-to-People initiative, the venues for most of the public concert performances were outdoor arenas and attendance was, as for every USNSB concert throughout their entire history, free. The attendance numbers at these outdoor events varied widely from a low of several hundred to a high of an estimated 12,000 at an outdoor concert in central Bogotá, Columbia. The smallest concerts took place in Brazil, where an overzealous local United States Navy liaison, Captain Ireland, temporarily relieved Franz Grissom of his command of the group and altered the USNSB's tour itinerary. Captain Ireland commandeered the

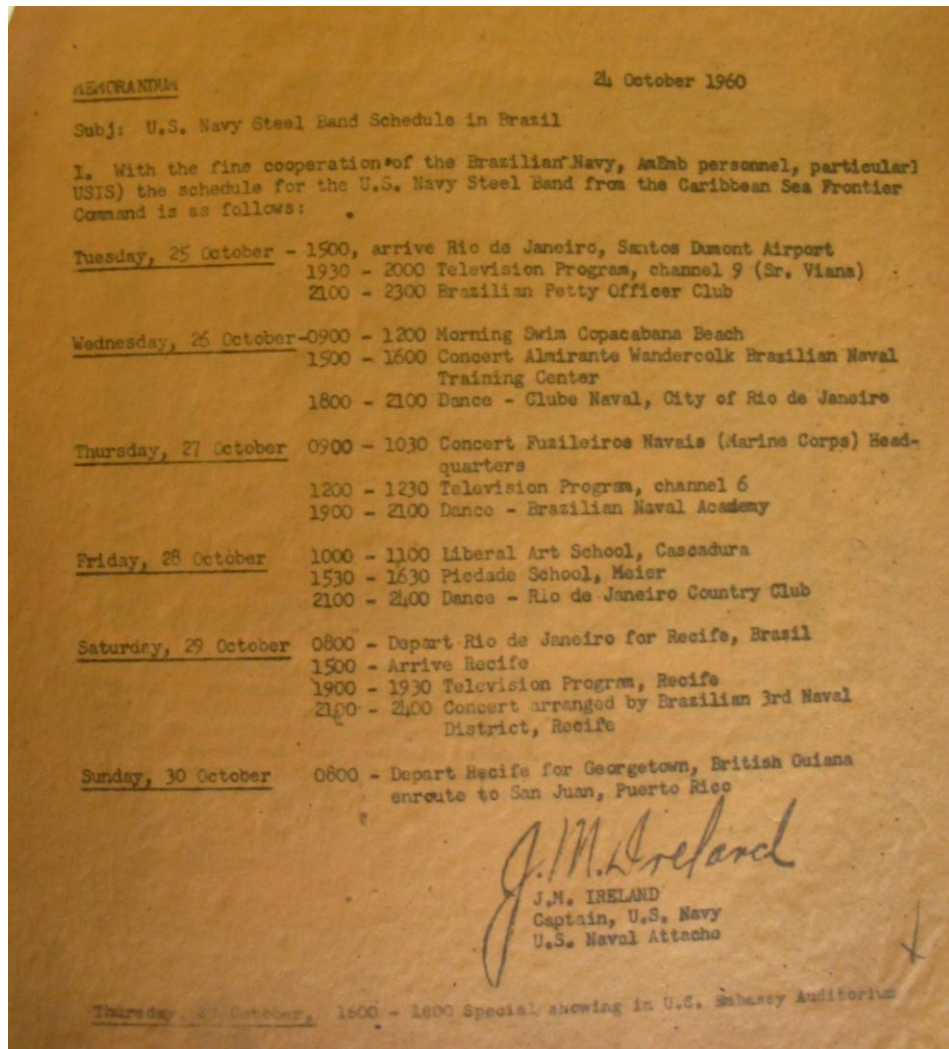
USNSB for three days of private performances at the officers club of a United States naval base in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>190</sup>

The band also performed on local and national television on every stop of the tour. The individual television programs were arranged by the United States government and the ratings share for these performances suggests that the USNSB reached approximately eight million viewers all told.<sup>191</sup> Considering that the USNSB also performed on radio shows in several of the countries, and was covered extensively in newsprint by foreign journalists, the South American tour was a major success.

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<sup>190</sup> Ireland's bold maneuver proved costly in the end as Gallery personally saw to the Captain's reprimand and Ireland narrowly escaped court martial.

<sup>191</sup> This information was taken from T.J. Ellerthorpe's November 2, 1960 document "Steel Band Tour of South America; Trip Report" written to Admiral Gallery and is part of the *Papers of Admiral Daniel V. Gallery*, Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.



### Captain's Report, South American Tour (1960)<sup>192</sup>

The above mimeograph is the post-tour Captain's report to Admiral Gallery detailing the daily activities of the USNSB during their Brazilian stop of the tour. Captain Ireland's report suggests a very controlled daily schedule for the group while on tour; however, several former USNSB members stressed that nothing was ever typical when on tour with the group.<sup>193</sup> The South American tour was no exception, and daily accounts of the group's activity display a wide spectrum of variation. For example, looking at three

<sup>192</sup> This document is held in the *Papers of Admiral Daniel V. Gallery*, Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

<sup>193</sup> This statement is informed by interviews with former members Dennis Jansson, Bruce Smith, Cal Stewart, and Manny Cepeda.

days (October 21-23) of the South American tour gives us a fascinating glimpse into the duties of the band. On October 21 the band arrived in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from Santiago, Chile, at 4:30 in the afternoon after traveling the entire day. The band unpacked and settled at the Argentinean military's school of mechanics to rest, shower, and shave. However, the group was disappointed to find only a broken shower, one wash bowl, and a single towel for the fourteen-man entourage. Later that evening, they performed a concert for 2,000 people at a local outdoor amphitheatre that was received with wild enthusiasm. The following evening, the group went to tape a "television spectacular," to be aired later in the fall (1960) on Argentine television.

Upon arrival to the studio, the USNSB was informed that they would have thirty minutes of a sixty minute show to fill. Furthermore, the television studio had hired dancers, jugglers, and acrobats to accompany the USNSB's steel band show in an effort to join the two cultures and fulfill, in their eyes, the People-to-People mission. Needless to say, the complexity of the show was immense and required significant rehearsal time and a multitude of takes. The tape was finally finished at five o'clock the next morning, three hours before the steel band hopped on a plane to travel to Brazil. Despite the long session, the tape was excellent and when the television program aired it was viewed by an estimated 1.5 million people, making it one of the largest single audiences of the USNSB's entire career. To the men of USNSB, it was simply all in a day's work on the road.



**United States Navy Steel Band, Bogota, Colombia (1960)<sup>194</sup>**

Following WWII and the Korean War, the United States was engaged in many efforts of serious diplomacy, and not all Latin American countries were particularly supportive of America's ascendance as a superpower. Consequently, several precautions were taken in preparation for the South American tour in order to protect the USNSB from political demonstrations or anti-American violence. As such, each country hosting the USNSB arranged for special envoys of military personnel to act as security for the group during concerts and to serve as escorts during travel and public engagements. In fact, there was no demonstrating, violence, or public dissension in any country during any portion of the tour. In his report to Admiral Gallery, USNSB member T.J. Ellerthorpe commented that:

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<sup>194</sup> *El Comercio*, Quito, Ecuador, Thursday October 1, 1960.

After seeing the reaction of the crowds and the enthusiasm with which the band was received in every country, there can be no doubt but that the President's People-to-People program was furthered to a very great extent. Not one incident marred the tour though the local USIS warned us that there could very well have been demonstrations against the U.S. at any one of the stops. The crowds were so interested in *what* the band was doing that it may have been they forgot to demonstrate.<sup>195</sup>

The success of the USNSB's early tours of the United States in 1958 proved that the novelty of the steel pan was particularly influential for Americans with some prior experience with the instrument or the calypso craze. The positive reception the USNSB received from Latin Americans during the 1960 tour suggests that the steel band was seen as a pan-Latin American sound. The enthusiasm of the reception was so profound that according to Ellerthorpe's report and newspaper coverage from Latin American newspapers, the image of white naval men playing the "tamburo del arco" was captivating enough to deter protesters who had planned to disrupt the concerts.

In order to foster the intended spirit of goodwill, the USNSB attempted to offer its South American audiences concerts that melded standard American and Caribbean musical repertoire with individualized musical numbers unique to each country visited. The practice of performing local tunes during concerts was a major success, and Franz Grissom was commended for his arrangements of local popular music tunes. Grissom's efforts were particularly impressive considering that many of the arrangements were created on short notice for performances on Latin American radio and television stations. Another tool that aided in the USNSB's goodwill mission was the use of Spanish speaking member Clemente Bobonis as master of ceremonies for concerts in Spanish speaking areas. This attention to detail, cultural sensitivity, and high musical standards

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<sup>195</sup> T.J. Ellerthorpe's November 2, 1960 document "Steel Band Tour of South America; Trip Report" written to Admiral Gallery and is part of the *Papers of Admiral Daniel V. Gallery*, Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.



were a testimony to just how seriously the USNSB took these diplomatic measures on the South American tour; however, these elements also became hallmarks of the USNSB for the next forty years.



### Studio Albums

In addition to the grueling schedule of constant tours and private military engagements, the visibility of the USNSB was further advanced by the release of seven studio albums, six of which appeared prior to 1972. Gallery and company saw these albums as devices for promoting the Navy and had no intention of monetary gain from

the recordings. To this end, all proceeds from album sales were designated to a Navy charity foundation.<sup>196</sup> The USNSB's studio albums were crafted to bring attention, visibility, possibly even fame, to the USNSB. Gallery was so enthusiastic about the ensemble that he felt sure the albums would share in the meteoric fame of Belafonte's *Calypso* album, and could perhaps be the first step in securing the attention of Hollywood. Gallery also envisioned American backyard calypso enthusiasts using these steel band recordings as background music for parties much the same way he was fond of using the USNSB as his personal cocktail/social band.

Before the USNSB could record their first albums, however, they would need to improve on the recording quality of steel band records made in Trinidad. Throughout the 1950s, both Trinidadian and American recording engineers experienced several problems with recording steel drum ensembles. Gallery wrote several letters, like the one below to metal engineer Rudy Onsrud in 1957, to friends and colleagues across the country addressing the issues and attempting to solve the problem.

[Rudy] don't ask me for a tape recording of this thing [USNSB]. They haven't yet learned how to record it properly. I have a set of HiFi [sic] records of the best steel bands in Trinidad and they are no good. They are just a feeble indication of the real thing. I let a local radio station record the premier of my band here and rebroadcast it—it was murder. I'm sure this stuff can [sic] be recorded and broadcast but until some real talent gets on the job and learns how to do it my boys are strictly live performers.<sup>197</sup>

A steel drum is an omni-directional producer of sound and recording the steel band was a monumental task which posed many technological roadblocks. Perhaps the biggest technical issue was capturing the bass sound of the steel band while mixing down the

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<sup>196</sup> The first such charity was called the "Navy League" though this changed over the years following Gallery's retirement and the USNSB's relocation to Trinidad.

<sup>197</sup> This document is held in the *Papers of Admiral Daniel V. Gallery*, Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

overwhelming treble and metallic shimmer of lead-voice steel drums. The *High Fidelity* recording technology of the 1950s struggled to capture the bass sound of a steel band and most early recordings sounded excruciatingly bright and clunky. Gallery and company persisted in their quest for quality steel band recordings with the aid of friends from the Decca record company. With producers from Decca already on hand, the Navy hired a team of experienced recording engineers from Florida and flew the experts to San Juan in order to create a specially designed studio at the naval base. In May of 1957, Gallery and Bob Lehfedt of Flagler Radio Company, Miami, Florida created a state-of-the-art recording studio in the rehearsal quarters of the USNSB on the San Juan base in order to record the band. Lehfedt used a series of new stereophonic microphones to capture the ensemble in a more realistic fashion than had previously been attempted. He was also able to temper the harshness of the treble steel drums while increasing the volume and body of the bass steel drums. The sound quality of the result was arguably better than anything previous in Trinidad or the United States. Gallery raved, claiming “you can’t tell the difference between the live band and the recording.” The fame of the San Juan recording studio would eventually spread throughout the Caribbean, and from 1957 to 1972 the San Juan recording studio became a destination for steel bands, many sponsored by hotels and resorts, from throughout the Caribbean islands (including Trinidad) to record albums.<sup>198</sup>

The USNSB began to record demos at their new studio in San Juan, and after some adjustments their debut album appeared by the calendar end of 1957. Gallery may have been guilty of overstatement in his lofty claims of the recording quality; yet, in

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<sup>198</sup> Many steel bands such as the Invaders of Trinidad, The Virgin Island Steel Band, and the Brute Force Steel Band of Antigua recorded albums in San Juan at the USNSB’s facility.

comparison to other contemporary steel band recordings the USNSB's first recording "Pan-Demonia" is a major upgrade in sound quality and clarity.



**The USNSB's debut album *Pan-Demonia* (1957)<sup>199</sup>**

*Pan-Demonia* was released in late 1957 and featured a collection of stock Manhattan-style calypso tunes, most of which were arranged by Roeper (pictured above, front left of the cover). The cover photo was taken outside the base in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and depicts the group on the shores of the Caribbean Sea. The disc was first shopped to several large record distributors, including RCA, before finally being picked up and distributed by Decca. Among the USNSB's seven studio albums, *Pan-Demonia* was the only one to be released by Decca, which was known throughout the 1950s and 1960s for gambling on exotic music and musicians in order to discover new talent and capture new

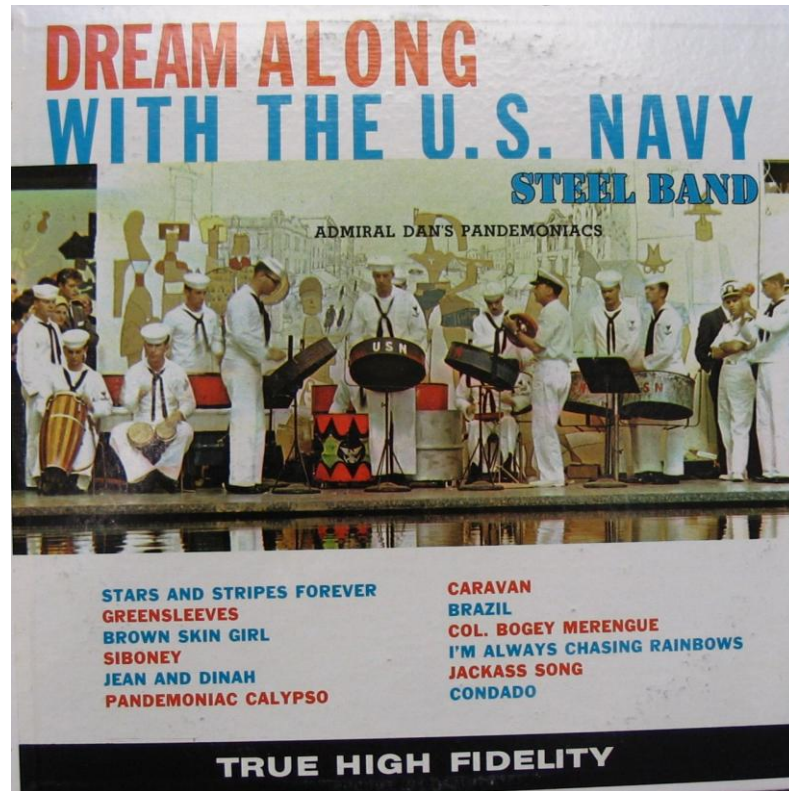
<sup>199</sup> Tenth Naval District Steel Band, "Pan-Demonia: Popular and Caribbean Melodies by the Tenth Naval District Steel Band," *Decca*, DL 5717, 1957.

untapped immigrant and youth markets. The USNSB was a perfect candidate for investment and both parties had high expectations for the partnership.<sup>200</sup>

Each album released by the USNSB echoes the tastes of its time period; each was also carefully crafted to convey an official image and sound of the United States Navy as it, too, changed complexion over time. The individual albums were programmatic and the track structure was based on the set lists of the USNSB's live shows. However, the albums are not live recordings and certain pieces of repertoire such as audience participation tunes were purged from the recording. A fine example of this is the 1960 release "Dream along with the U.S. Navy Steel Band" the second album recorded by the ensemble.

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<sup>200</sup> Decca would later sign the Steel Bandits to their label in 1967 and Andy Narell indicated that the A and R men for Decca were constantly searching for what he called "the next Baja Marimba Band." Or, according to Andy "an unsigned artists playing completely unique music could produce a hype-driven popularity."

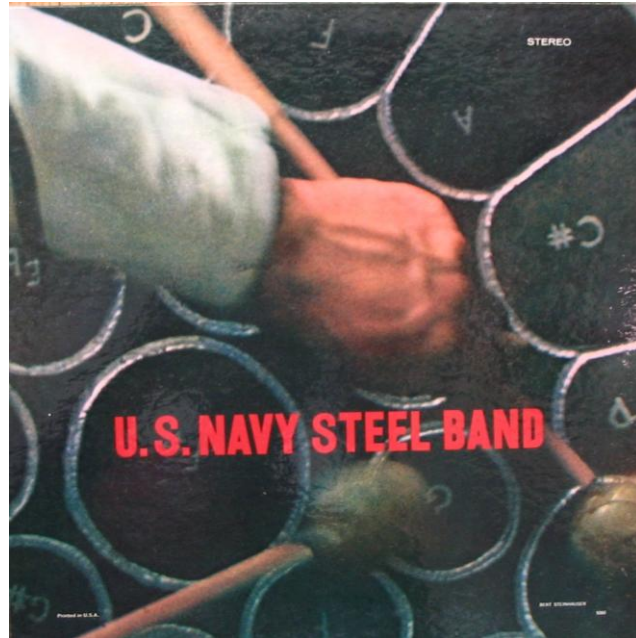


*Dream Along with the U.S. Navy Steel Band (1960)*<sup>201</sup>

The album displays a plethora of hegemonic Caribbean signifiers, complete with a vibrantly colorful spread of the happy islanders (in this case happy sailors) entertaining by the pool. The unmistakably patriotic red, white, and blue hues of the album lettering contrast brilliantly with the dress-white uniforms of the musicians to create a patriotic yet Caribbean-esque feel to the overall visual impression. Interestingly, this album and another USNSB album, “Blowin in the Wind,” have alternate covers.

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<sup>201</sup> USNSB, “Dream Along with the U.S. Navy Steel Band, *Continental Records*, CPL 1003, 1960.



***Dream Along with the U.S. Navy Steel Band alternate cover (1961)***

The above alternate cover design is significantly less visually stimulating and is stylistically more analogous to the earlier “Pan-Demonia” album cover art. Both versions were simultaneously available upon the album’s release, and the explanation for the dual cover revolves around the album’s actual cover art. The cover art to the patriotic version of the “Dream Along with the U.S. Navy Steel Band” album features Roeper and several other musicians from the 1958 world’s fair in Brussels. Interestingly, this photo actually contains less than half of the actual performers from the album recording and many players, including Roeper, had left the navy before the time of the recording. In fact, all of the arrangements on the album are either original tunes or arrangements made by Franz Grissom, who is left off the credits of the album as a composer and performer. In a letter to Gallery in 1960, Grissom voiced his displeasure:

The Band was not too pleased with the album cover, as it has a picture of Roeper and Company at the Brussels Fair. Only a couple of the guys that actually made the record are in the picture. Also they failed to list the names of the people performing on the record like I asked them to do. Not

to mention that in no manner am I given credit, although most of the arrangements on the record are mine, and two of the songs are my original music. Since three original tunes are copyrighted, the omission of the credits is especially galling. I have written to Mr. Gabor about these things am awaiting his reply.

Nonetheless, despite his understandable displeasure there was not much Grissom could do about the first pressing of the album. The alternate cover jacket, which includes an up-to-date photo of the actual roster of musicians who performed on the recording, was a placation towards Grissom and the other USNSB members left off the first album cover. Gilda Strom, daughter of Franz Grissom, indicated that Gallery, ever an entrepreneur, suggested to Grissom that rather than pull the first version of the album cover the USNSB should use two versions of the cover in order to propel sales and dissemination of the album. As stated above, all profits from any album sale from the USNSB were designated for the Navy's Charity Fund. Gallery was a board member of the organization a saw this initial mistake of the inaccurate cover as an opportunity to raise charity funds.<sup>202</sup>

As stated above, the tracks on "Dream Along with the U.S. Navy Steel Band" are mostly arrangements or original compositions written by Grissom and encompass a variety of musical genres including traditional American military tunes ("Stars and Stripes Forever"), calypso ("Marianne" and "Brown Skin Girl"), folk ("Greensleeves"), jazz/Latin ("Caravan") and original tunes ("Pandemoniac Calypso"). Keeping relevant with contemporary culture was important to the USNSB, hence the inclusion of the popular calypso tunes "Marianne" and "Brown Skin Girl" on the above album. The USNSB's aim at contemporary cultural relevance is also evident in later albums, such as an arrangement of Bob Dylan's "Blowin in the Wind" on the 1972 album of the same name.

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<sup>202</sup> Gilda Strom, interviewed by the Author, March 12, 2008.



## **United States Navy Steel Band on Film**

As stated above, in the early years of the ensemble the USNSB was a fixture on local and national television shows, and it appears as though the camera, as well as the microphone, found the ensemble equally transfixing. From 1957 to 1964, the USNSB was involved in four films: two of these were feature films and two more heard the group performing soundtrack music. The USNSB, particularly under Grissom's direction, was interested in providing their audience with the Carnival experience, complete with sights and sounds of steel band music. Creating a well-polished "show" similar to something one would see in Las Vegas was of the utmost importance; moreover, this approach to concert programming made the USNSB's television work appealing for the home audience. Throughout the early years of the group's existence, stereotypical Caribbean folk elements such as limbo dances were a staple of the USNSB's live performances while on tour.

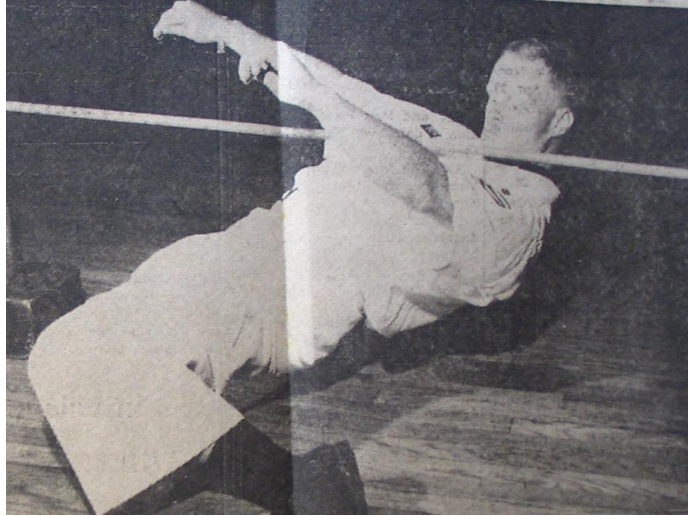


**Limbo Dance, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands (1957)<sup>203</sup>**

The visual image of a dancer slowly edging underneath an inconceivably low limbo pole, which was often lit on fire, was a popular segment of the USNSB's performances on television and film, even on such high profile engagements as the *Ed Sullivan Show* performance. Like the image of sailors playing steel drums, the visually stimulating Limbo dance captured the imagination of both live and screen audiences.

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<sup>203</sup> This document is held in the *Papers of Admiral Daniel V. Gallery*, Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.



**Hugh Bailey,**

**USNSB member and armed forces limbo champion of 1957 and 1958<sup>204</sup>**

In this way, the USNSB attempted to present the hegemonic image of the happy islander along with the polished and clean-cut look and precision of the United States Navy.

In two of the films mentioned above, “Arm and the Spear” and “Saint of Devil’s Island,” the USNSB served as background music. The films were shot in 1960 on location in and around the beaches of Puerto Rico as well the United States naval base located at Roosevelt Road, San Juan. The first film, “Arm and the Spear,” was commissioned by the Douglas Aircraft Company—a well-known defense contractor of the time—in a joint venture with the Navy. Both the Navy and Douglas had interests in the promotion of the USNSB and the latter used the film as an experiment in product placement. The Douglas Aircraft Company had a long history as a military contractor, and the company manufactured several military aircraft used extensively by the United States Navy, including the DC3 and the Douglas Catalan. Both aircraft were regularly used by the USNSB for transport and Douglas was very interested in connecting the

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<sup>204</sup> This document is held in the *Papers of Admiral Daniel V. Gallery*, Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

public's image of the United States Navy with their products. In particular, Douglas was attempting to show the viability of their older models of prop-driven aircraft working alongside more modern tools of war such as aircraft carriers and the Grumman F14 "Tomcat" fighter jets.<sup>205</sup> The film "The Arm and the Spear" was a propagandistic documentary espousing the virtues and need military preparedness during perceived times of crisis. The film features the Strategic Army Corps and the Military Air Transport Service in a variety of emergency response situations with plenty of live action and Douglas Aircraft scenes throughout. The soundtrack aimed at tapping the calypso and steel band for an island feel, wrought with the exotic, yet soothing, sounds of the USNSB. The band themselves do not make an appearance on the film, yet they are heard throughout on the soundtrack. Grissom arranged all of the film music and directed the sound recording for the film.

The second film to which the USNSB contributed soundtrack music was "The Saint of Devil's Island." The film (also known as "Seventy Times Seven") was a feature length film released in 1961 to no fanfare, and has since fallen into obscurity. The film was directed by Douglas Cox and starred Richard Cutting and the famed Eartha Kitt as the main love interest. The film's plot was adapted from the George Bernard Shaw novel of the same name and situates the action in a beautiful, yet mysterious, tropical island paradise called Devil's Island. In this case, Devil's Island is a real place, located off the coast of modern day French Guiana in South America.

Like Elvis Presley in the 1966 film "Paradise: Hawaiian Style," the protagonist in "The Saint of Devil's Island" Richard Cutting, is a G.I. who washes ashore on a

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<sup>205</sup> Personal Interview with Jennifer Bryan, Head of Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, May 9, 2007.

mysterious island. Despite his initial apprehension, he falls in love with a local vixen (Eartha Kitt), and the two frequently dance and frolic to the island sounds of steel pans: the USNSB to be more precise. Throughout the film the trope of exoticism is thick and the “otherness” of the “natives” is overwhelming at times, though fairly consistent with contemporary films of the day. Overall, the film is congruent in many ways with calypso films of the late 1950s, such as “Calypso Heat Wave” and “Bop Girl Goes Calypso” discussed in Chapter 2.

The USNSB would also be the star in two feature films, “Admiral Dan’s Pandemoniacs” and “Eighteen on Steel,” both shot in 1960.<sup>206</sup> Both are documentaries, though they are very different in content, and take quite different approaches to the documentary genre. The goals of each film are entirely different, too, where the degree of involvement of the USNSB is concerned.

Like “Arm and the Spear,” “Admiral Dan’s Pandemoniacs” was commissioned by the Douglas Aircraft Company, and was shot during the same filming in 1960. Presumably an attempt to win the influence of Admiral Gallery, the Douglas Aircraft Company agreed to fund the filming without any concrete plans to distribute the film in the continental United States.<sup>207</sup> Moreover, Gallery’s was the signature needed for any military contract in the Tenth Naval District, and the company took great pains to lobby the Admiral in any way possible. Unlike the “Arm and the Spear,” a majority of the

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<sup>206</sup> Exact dates of the films shooting are unknown; however, based on the members of the band identified in the film, the roster is consistent with a group that existed from 1959 and 1960. The film was officially released to the public in 1962 by the Film Unit of the Trinidad government.

<sup>207</sup> The Douglas Aircraft Company intended to distribute “Arm and the Spear” to public schools and library across the country. Along with the navy, the company hoped to use the film for military propaganda and recruitment of American children. Yet, this was perhaps a secondary agenda for the Douglas who, at the time, was competing with the Boeing Aircraft Company during the late 1950s for jetliner supremacy. The company would create several films like “Admiral Dan’s Pandemoniacs” designed to promote their DC-8 jetliner. For more information, please see the documentary “Chasing the Sun: The History of Aviation seen through the eyes of its innovators” < <http://www.pbs.org/kcet/chasingthesun/> > accessed May 8, 2010.

scenes in “Admiral Dan’s Pandemonics” are staged in and around the naval base, with some shots of the Caribbean sea and historic Fort San Felipe de Morro to flavor the backdrop.

As early as 1957, Gallery had dreamed of a feature length film for his steel band and he tested the waters in letters to connections with the *Washington Post*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and talent scouts in New York City. The Admiral even wrote his own screen play featuring the members of his own USNSB with a slew of Hollywood ringers cast in the lead roles. According to Gallery, the film was a “sure thing” that “shot itself.” In a 1957 letter to New York-based talent agent for NBC James Street, Gallery attempted the hard sell.

There’s one other angle on which you and I may do some business. If we go over big in Chicago [at the Great Lakes Armed Forces Festival (1957)] and get a fad started, and if we get a top selling disc, it seems to me that this steel band is a natural subject for a feature movie. What I have in mind is a musical picture about the navy, that wouldn’t really need much of any serious story. It could almost be a documentary on this band which would lend itself to all sorts of colorful stuff, such as the Carnival at Trinidad, the band on board the USS Forrester, the band in any sort of exotic setting you want to put them in. Right there you have got the making of a picture with tremendous eye and ear appeal. With just a routine run of the mill story I think such a story could be a big money maker if it didn’t win any Oscars. I’m sure it would be easy to cook up some kind of a light story line—which I would be happy to do for a suitable fee. This would be a picture for which Navy cooperation would be easy to get. The band itself would have to be in the picture (padded with a few actors to take the main parts), because there is no other steel band in the United States right now to my knowledge.<sup>208</sup>

Although his big screen dream never materialized, the Douglas Aircraft Company did allow Gallery the pleasure of creating the short documentary film. The Admiral wrote the

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<sup>208</sup> Letter to from Gallery to James Street of the Harold Mattson talent agency, July 1, 1957. This document is held in the *Papers of Admiral Daniel V. Gallery*, Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

scripts and co-produced both the “Arm and the Spear” and “Admiral Dan’s Pandemoniacs.”

“Admiral Dan’s Pandemoniacs” opens with a shot of a single steel pan floating near the shore, crashing into rocks and making clang sounds. The tenor of the film’s script is one of cultural education and the narrator gently introduces the viewer to the exotic wonder of steel pan in a way similar to wildlife films of the era. However, the film then moves to what the narrator describes as the even more “unbelievable wonder” of white American sailors playing the instruments. As the film progresses, the story takes a positive stance on the steel band and the music of Trinidad, and attempts to establish the band’s diplomatic capabilities which the Navy would demonstrate on its tour of South America in 1960. The “partnership,” as the Navy would call it, is a happy one and the United States Navy conducts itself with the highest standards of tolerance and respect; even in controversial areas such as Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Despite its altruistic pose, there are many instances in the film of casual racism and Western European musical elitism. One passage states:

The first steel drums appeared in Trinidad in 1945 and until 1957 the only steel bands in the worlds were native Caribbean bands. Their music was spontaneous, uninhibited, un-scored, and unbelievable. It was the song of primitive people born with rhythm and harmony in their souls, who had a great new musical instrument on their hands, but who were not real musicians, and were limited by the fact that they could only play by ear.

Depicting Trinidadian players as “primitive people” and characterizing them as “not real musicians” resonated with American audiences who were, at this time, concurrently struggling with the rise of rock’n’ roll music and the newfound national popularity of black artists such as Nat King Cole and Harry Belafonte. The above dialogue is presented in conjunction with a scene of the USNSB playing the famous calypso “Brown Skin Girl”

outside the officer's quarters of the naval base in San Juan. It is interesting to note that much of the musical meaning so expertly woven into the lyrical fabric of the song by "uninhibited and primitive" Trinidadian's is lost on the Navy and American audience, as the calypso "Brown Skin Girl" (discussed in Chapter 2) is a lyrical attack on the United States military which openly discusses prostitution (in this case mother and daughter).<sup>209</sup> Regardless, "Brown Skin Girl" was an arrangement made by Grissom, and the chief musician was credited with arranging and composing all of the music on the film.

"Admiral Dan's Pandemoniacs" closes with a montage of the USNSB playing an arrangement of John Philip Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever" in several locations, including outside the San Juan base, on an aircraft carrier, and on numerous Puerto Rican beaches. Despite the superficial discussion of Trinidadian cultural and steel band music, the film was ultimately aimed at displaying the versatility of the United States Navy and Douglas Aircraft.

[Narrator] This navy of ours is a versatile outfit, they put amphibious forces of Marines ashore, quickly, whenever a situation threatens to get out of hand and upset world peace. They can fire Polaris rockets through cracks in the ice up at the North Pole. They fly jet airplanes off carries, which are mobile landing fields which can be shipped at a moment's notice to anywhere on the high seas where they can do the most good. And, in addition to all these things, they can make music, music that makes the world a better and happier place to live in.

According to the film, the United States Navy was more than simply a war machine, and military readiness was always balanced with peacekeeping activities, including music, culture, and apparently steel pan. This mission would further be on display on the

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<sup>209</sup> The second verse for the calypso "Brown Skin Girl" reads "Now de Americans made an invasion / We thought it was a help to the island / Until they left from here on vacation / They left de native boy home to mind their children" and the chorus "Brown skin girl stay home and mind baby / Brown skin girl stay home and mind baby / I'm goin away, in a sailing boat / And if I don't come back / Stay home and mind baby." The lyrics refer to US Military personnel fathering children with Afro-Trinidadian women and then abandoning the child and mother in order to return back the United States.



USNSB's 1960 South America tour. However, in this film the balance between military strength and international cooperation was certainly directed towards quelling the fears of regular Americans during the escalation of the Cold War and the attempt at military supremacy was at the fore of the film's intentions.

Another film that featured the USNSB was "Eighteen on Steel," a documentary film shot in 1960 in which the group co-starred with two other Trinidadian steel bands. The USNSB shared the film with the Invaders Steel Band of Woodbrook, Port of Spain, and the Sundowners Steel Band also of Port of Spain. The film was produced and released two years later by the Cultural Ministry of Trinidad and Tobago. It contains no narration and instead takes the form of an edited concert performance with plenty of crowd shots. The film was based on a concert given at an all-day festival of steel bands held at the United States Naval base in Chaguaramas, Trinidad, in 1960. "Eighteen on Steel" was created by the Public Relations Division of the Trinidadian government in conjunction with the United States Navy in an effort to promote the culture of Trinidad. Moreover, the film also attempted to calm tensions between the Trinidad government and the United States military which by 1960 had escalated into a contentious situation.<sup>210</sup> Dr. Eric Williams was the first elected president of the newly sovereign country of Trinidad and Tobago in 1962, and a strong opponent of what he felt was the continued American occupation of the Trinidad. Williams and others from the PNM (People's National Movement) political party refuted the lease claim the United States had signed with Britain (the former colonial ruler of the island) in 1940. Moreover, Williams and the PNM tirelessly worked to force the Americans out of Trinidad.

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<sup>210</sup> For more information on the American political diplomacy in Trinidad, see Harvey Neptune, *Caliban and The Yankees: Trinidad and the United States Occupation* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

In order to balance the competing interests, the two governments sought common ground in the form of steel pan and created “Eighteen on Steel” as a goodwill gesture designed to smooth-over relations. Furthermore, Ellie Mannette’s recognition as a pioneer in the Trinidadian steel band movement, and the sister developments in America, received prime billing in the opening credits. Mannette served as peacemaker of sorts:

To the pioneers whose devotion to the pan gave musical expression to the unique blendings of diverse races, colors, cultures, that form the phenomenon that is Trinidad’s cosmopolitan society... To those who borrowed from Africa and India to give genesis to this exciting new art... To those who struggle for recognition and acceptance in the face of social ostracism, and brought the steel band triumphantly through to its present position of almost universal popularity... To those who have jumped—or swayed—or shuffled or tapped their feet to the sensuous rhythms emanating from Oil Drums—or those who have listened – enchanted by the magic of the steel band... To all these and especially Ellie Mannette, the man who contributed more than any other to the creation of the sounds you will hear during the next “Eighteen on Steel” minutes, --the man referred to by other pan-men as “El Maestro”... This film is dedicated.<sup>211</sup>

Mannette was the founder of the Invaders Steel Band of Trinidad and was the primary tuner, builder for the USNSB unifying the two seemingly disparate ends of the spectrum. The homage to Mannette was more than simply a dedication; in fact, Mannette’s endorsement went a considerable way toward convincing the Tenth Naval District to participate in the festival, and to facilitate the Chaguaramas base the event host. Furthermore, this film was to become a part of Mannette’s legacy as he would leave Trinidad in 1967 and not return for some thirty years (an act that sparked much criticism and debate about the actions of one of Trinidad’s national steel pan heroes).

The repertoire for “Eighteen on Steel” film was typical of early steel pan tunes, and the Trinidad steel bands played exclusively calypsos and western classical tunes by

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<sup>211</sup> Opening Credits, “Eighteen on Steel,” Trinidad Film Unit, Port of Spain, Trinidad, 1962.

European composers. Trinidadian steel bands have always been out to prove the worth of steel band as a legitimate musical instrument and historically this was done by performing the classics.<sup>212</sup> The process of playing these western classical tunes while marching the streets of Port of Spain during Carnival time is known as “dropping the bomb;” however, in the case of “Eighteen on Steel” the audience is seated in a manner similar to any western classic orchestra concert. In colonial Trinidad, soon to be former colony, the cultural impact of Britain was still dominant and the traditional European concert setting and this would have dictated Trinidadian steel band’s repertoire choices.

The USNSB performed two tunes on the film, and like their other film music, both tunes were written and arranged by Grissom. The tunes were in a calypso style and fit the stock version of the Manhattan calypso craze. The USNSB was a sign of the times and combined the American perception of Caribbean music with the current trends in American popular music such as Bob Dylan. In this sense, “Eighteen on Steel” brought forth the best of what Trinidad and America had to offer in steel pan to the world.

### **Technology and Instrument Development**

As mentioned above, the USNSB created their own recording studio in order to solve some of the technological problems with recording the steel band. Yet, these problems were not the only technical issues the steel band presented to the USNSB. Gallery, and the USNSB were in constant pursuit of a technique for perfecting the

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<sup>212</sup> For more information on this practice see Shannon Dudley, “Dropping the Bomb” Steel Band Performance and Meaning in 1960s Trinidad” *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Winter 2002) : 135-164, and Steven Stuempfle, *The Steelband Movement: The Forging of A National Art in Trinidad and Tobago* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).

process of building and tuning the highest possible quality steel pans that would also expedite the labor-intensive process. As discussed above, Gallery's knowledge base was impressive, and the letter quoted below, to engineer Rudy Onsrud, displays the Admiral's grasp of metallurgy and mathematics. While discussing the use of other metals in steel pan construction Gallery states:

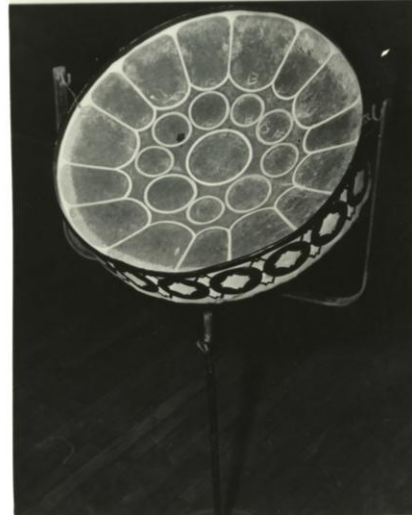
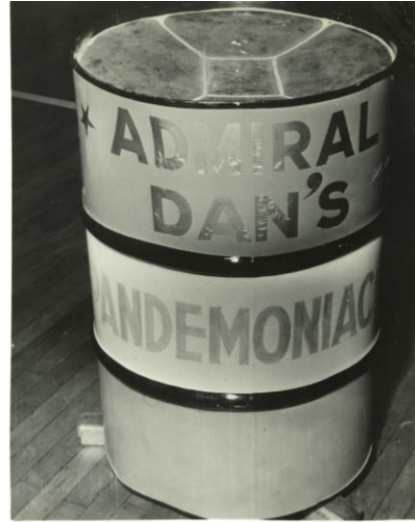
On second thought I believe my first hunch was correct. The area of the note on any given drum is inversely proportional to the frequency of the note. I think if you shifted from steel to copper, aluminum, or brass, or changed the diameter of the drum you would get a different constant, but I think the relation  $\text{Area} \times \text{Frequency} = \text{Constant}$ , would still hold good—as long as the tension across the surface of each note was the same.

Gallery was constantly experimenting with different metals for steel pan construction and he was perplexed by the mystery of fine tuning steel pans. Trinidadians often call this mystery the "pan jumbie" or spirit that guides the energy of the instrument. A rational and disciplined navy man, Gallery sought with little avail to explain this process mathematically and systematically and marveled at the skill of Mannette and other steel drum builders and tuners.

Trinidadians have historically had access to only the lowest quality of steel drums for use in making steel pans. Drums were either stolen from the United States Navy base in Chagauramas or from gas stations, or were looted from neighborhood garbage depositories. To this end, Trinidadian steel pans were rarely of the quality available to the United States Navy and few if any could actually hold liquid at the time of their transformation from vessel of oil to vessel of music. The USNSB, on the other hand, had access to the finest oil drums of any grade and thickness. For Mannette and Gallery this meant experimentation with various composites and qualities of steel drums in order to find the optimal material and thickness. Through this experimentation the Navy learned

what Mannette and many other Trinidadians already knew, which was that thin steel drum heads make the best sounding steel pans and, despite their experimentation with other metals, steel was the premier metal.

Gallery learned a valuable lesson on various grades of steel drum rigidity the hard way. The Admiral, inspired by Pete Seeger's manual, attempted to make his own steel pan in 1957. He asked a subordinate for a stock steel drum barrel to work with and this sailor, thinking that the Admiral would want the best drum possible, provided the Admiral with an ultra-high tempered steel drum that could be dropped by an aircraft from an altitude of 5,000 feet and not rupture. Needless to say, after two days of pounding Gallery had a bloody thumb, blisters, and a primitive two-note steel pan. The Admiral, upon discovering the difference in steel drum test levels, was furious, though he did laugh-off the story in letters to Seeger and others.



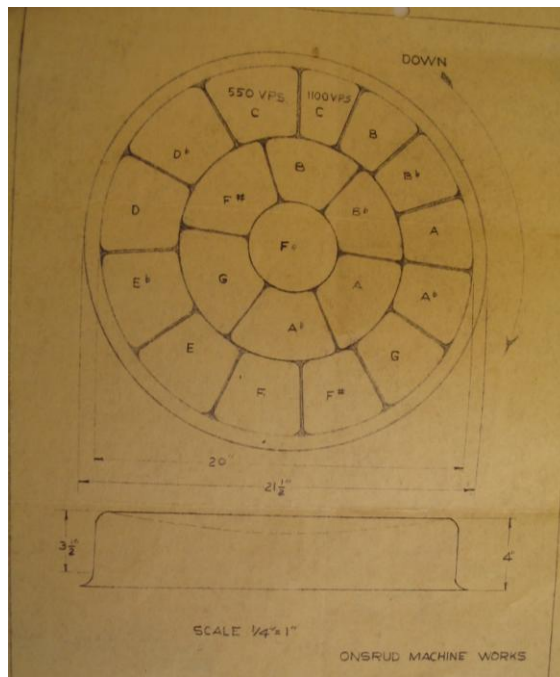
**USNSB steel pans made by Ellie Mannette (1960)<sup>213</sup>**

Although Gallery had Mannette at the ready to service the USNSB, he was so convinced that steel pan mania would consume the United States that he expended considerable energy trying to devise a way to mass produce steel pans. In this endeavor, Gallery didn't trust nor think reliable Trinidadians, and constantly questioned Roeper, Grissom, and the other USNSB members as to "how" steel pans were actually made. As a result of Mannette's quest to share the secrets of steel pan with anyone interested, the

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

antithesis of most Trinidadians, the USNSB members, including Grissom, all learned some level of tuning and some were capable of making basic tuning adjustments to the pans. However, neither Grissom nor the USNSB members had the time for a proper steel pan construction apprenticeship, a process that often lasts more than five years, and subsequently could not explain many of the phenomena surrounding the construction of steel pans from a musical standpoint much beyond the note patterns and harmonic overtones. Gallery turned to childhood friend Rudy Onsrud, an engineer and president of a machine manufacturing company in Chicago, Illinois. Gallery already had access to the highest quality steel pans available, but for his dream of large-scale steel drum production, the massive cost in man hours required to build and tune a steel pan would have to be severely lowered.



**Onsrud Architectural Drawing of a Ping Pong Steel Pan (1957)<sup>214</sup>**

<sup>214</sup>This document is held in the *Papers of Admiral Daniel V. Gallery*, Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

Gallery and Onsrud exchanged a series of letters in 1957 in which the two men discussed the process of creating steel pans and strategized on how to improve the overall quality of instrument while making the process more efficient. Gallery sent Onsrud several steel pans made by Mannette for analysis, hoping that he would crack their code. Onsrud's final conclusion did not bode well for Gallery:

I will say that some of my preconceived notions on [steel pan] tuning have already been changed and I doubt if we have a so-called production item. By this I mean they undoubtedly could be blanked out in quantity but the finishing may require a combination of machining experience and musical education and I have reservations about the profitability of such an endeavor.

Interestingly, although Mannette and other steel drum makers now use machines to press and sink the heads of some of their new steel pans, a giant machine that stamps out finished steel pans—similar to car parts—never materialized and Onsrud's reservations about the profitability are problems still faced by steel pan makers today. Moreover, some sixty years after Gallery's early attempts, the mass production of the steel drums is still an elusive goal for America manufacturers. After receiving Onsrud's letter, Gallery dropped his ambitions for mass producing steel pans and shifted his focus on creating the steel band films and recordings discussed earlier in this chapter.





**Franz Grissom tuning with a strobe (1960)<sup>215</sup>**

Gallery may not have been successful in his ambition to mass produce the steel pan, but the USNSB was innovative in many aspects of steel pan tuning and construction. Besides boasting the highest quality steel pans in the world, they were the first steel band to regularly use a strobe (Above) for tuning the steel pan. Furthermore, Mannette's refinement of the overtone tuning process was largely perfected on USNSB steel pans over the course of his long tenure working for the group. The USNSB devised a method of storing and transporting the steel pans that limited vibration and prolonged the natural de-tuning of any regularly-played steel pan. The group also was the first American steel

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<sup>215</sup> This document is held in the Franz Grissom Family Archive.

band to chrome their steel drums, a process that adds a durability and better tone quality to the instrument. Although this did not occur until the early 1970s, one can attribute the relentless pursuit of quality steel pans to Gallery, Grissom, and the early founders of the ensemble. Ultimately, the USNSB would develop a reputation for their clean sound and polished performances. This reputation was undoubtedly fostered by their focus on quality steel pans and technical innovations.

### **Move to New Orleans and Conclusions**

Television shows, recordings, films, and cocktail parties represent only a fraction of the USNSB's performance schedule, as the ensemble was also a fixture at state fairs, military and private sector air shows, maritime and ocean-side festival locations on the East and West coast, parades, Mardi Gras in New Orleans, and the list goes on. Moreover, the USNSB was also a fixture of other high-profile events such as the Macy's Thanksgiving Day, Rose Bowl parade, and other public events that draw crowds not traditionally associated with armed forces recruitment. Regardless of Gallery's thirst for fame and grandiose visions for the USNSB, the group was primarily a recruitment tool, and their performance schedule reflects this reality (hence the state fairs). The USNSB brought what it perceived as the cultural capital of the Caribbean—steel pan music and the Limbo—to the fore of the American populous. In the early years, the USNSB reached out to white youth smitten with the hipness of calypso; however, in the group's later years from the mid 1960s to 1999, the Navy attempted to subtly employ the steel band's powerful image association for Navy recruitment by targeting West Indian immigrants

and minorities. The USNSB's adaptation of the post-war American hegemonic vision capitalized on the American concept of calypso clubs, which, as further described in Chapter 2, created an imaginary Caribbean atmosphere complete with fishnets, palm fronds, and other trappings, supplanting this with actual steel band performers instead of recordings, while placing them in the context of a larger national cultural practice.<sup>216</sup>

Gallery's obsession or cultural phenomenon? Depending on your perspective either scenario can certainly serve as an apt descriptor for the creation of the USNSB. However, as stated above, neither Gallery nor the USNSB members directly benefited financially from the ensemble's performances or recordings. All public concerts were free of charge, and any proceeds from record sales went to various naval charities. Regardless, when in July 1960 the Navy issued new orders to Gallery, and the Admiral was forced to vacate his post as Commandant of the Tenth Naval District the future course of the USNSB was already charted and its legacy well under way. The change in command also meant that Gallery had to turn over control of his beloved steel band to the new Commandant Admiral Allen Smith and Chief Musician Franz Grissom. Following his retirement, Gallery left Puerto Rico and moved to Virginia, where his energy and enthusiasm for steel drums waned only slightly. Further into the 1960s, ill-health would further limit his contact with the ensemble when they were on tour or in the vicinity. Despite losing their founding father, the USNSB continued for the next thirty-five years, performing thousands of concerts and numerous television performances, and releasing two new albums.

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<sup>216</sup> Ray Funk and Stephen Stuempfle, "Calypso: A World Music" An Exhibition of Photographs and Illustrations of the International History of Calypso, 1930-1970" Historical Museum of South Florida (Accessed January 1, 2007), <<http://www.calypso-world.org/noflash/introduction.htm>>

Following Gallery's departure as acting superior of the group in 1960, the USNSB moved into a new phase that saw the group become a fixture of the Navy's recruitment and goodwill outreach. However, due to the high cost of avgas (transportation) to and from the mainland United States, the mounting political complexity of the cold war, and lack of high-level administrative support only generated from someone politically well-connected *and* obsessed with steel pan (Gallery), the Puerto Rico naval base became a hindrance for the USNSB, and the ensemble officially moved headquarters to the Algiers Naval base in New Orleans in 1972. New Orleans was perhaps an equally culturally appropriate home for the ensemble, and the annual Mardi Gras held in the Crescent City was a natural fit for the USNSB. The group began to focus their performances almost exclusively on the continental United States. Moreover, from 1972 until the group's disbandment in 1999 the USNSB rarely made international tours and the overseas tours they did make never again resembled the scale and ambitiousness of those organized by Gallery in the ensembles formative years.

In the end, the USNSB aided in exposing the American public to the steel drum ensemble, while ushering them through the calypso and exotica crazes of the 1950s and 60s. But the USNSB's specific legacy for the growth and development of steel band in America is also felt in the performance of Franz Grissom's arrangements, the many professional or educational institution-based steel pan ensembles throughout the United States started by former USNSB members, and the countless individuals—such as Al O'Connor and Gary Gibson—who were inspired by the USNSB to create a life with steel pan.<sup>217</sup> The global impact of the USNSB, too vast to expound upon in this short study, is

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<sup>217</sup> Many of Franz Grissom's steel band arrangements are available for purchase by the Hillbridge Music Company, Bridgeville, PA. <<http://www.hillbridge.com/index.php>>

perhaps best understood as a type of heritage. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett suggests that theorizing heritage is a three-part concept in which heritage is a mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past, heritage is a “value added” industry, and heritage produces the local for export.<sup>218</sup> In this sense, from 1957 to 1972 the USNSB created its own heritage as an ambassador of American culture, or at least the contemporary exotica obsession, uniquely displaying to the world the confluence of people and culture so central to American society while reinterpreting and recreating a heritage separate and new from its Trinidadian forefathers.

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<sup>218</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Theorizing Heritage,” *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Autumn 1995) : 367-380.

## Chapter 5

### Early Steel Band Developments in the American University

In the June 27, 1999 Chicago-land edition of the *Chicago Tribune*, noted arts critic Howard Reich was charged with reviewing a recent concerto performance by steel pan virtuoso Liam Teague and the Chicago Sinfonia de Camera. The performance was one of the first steel pan concerto performances with a notable American orchestra, and the review was mixed as Reich took issue with some aspects of the performance. The ability of Reich's prose to encapsulate the novelty of the instrument and identify the audience's preconceptions surrounding the steel pan make this review an important testimony to the development of steel pan in America. This is nowhere more evident than in the headline for the review which read "Steel Pan Alley: To become a virtuoso on the steel drum, Liam Teague had to leave his native Trinidad to study in—where else?—Dekalb."<sup>219</sup> As I will discuss in later chapters of this study, the typical imagery conjured through steel pan music is of tropical islands and cruise ships; certainly not the flat corn fields of Dekalb, Illinois. In this sense, Reich's review locates one of the central ironies of steel drum education in which regional geographic sites such as Illinois are hotbeds of pedagogical activity whereas Trinidad is lagging behind. Moreover, considering that one of Trinidad's most prominent virtuosic steel pan heroes (Liam Teague) is a product of American steel band training, the notion held by many Trinidadians that steel pan belongs to one place, people, and culture is under fire. It is logical to assume that one must travel

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<sup>219</sup> Howard Reich, "Steel pan alley to become a virtuoso on the steel drum, Liam Teague had to leave his native Trinidad to study in—where else?—Dekalb," *Chicago Tribune*, July 27, 1999. Pg 10.

to Trinidad, the birthplace of the steel band, in order to learn the instrument and culture of its people. However, Reich's review muses that, although it's logical to think Trinidad in this situation, perhaps one would be better advised to traverse the corn fields of northwest Illinois in search of steel pan knowledge and training.

How did Northern Illinois University become an international hotbed for steel pan education? Dekalb and Port of Spain are approximately 2700 miles, and several large bodies of water, apart, yet they share an affinity for the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago. The present state of steel pan education in primary schools, secondary schools, and university steel pan programs forms a thriving and robust scene: the strongest and most active climate in the steel pan's sixty year history in America. In the past two decades, steel drum ensembles have become increasingly popular additions to school curricula throughout the United States. The open arms of American universities, though initially on a very small scale, proved a receptive outlet for steel band activity following the implosion of the calypso craze and waning public interest in exotica during the late 1950s. Like the vibrant folk music revival of the 1960s, contemporary steel pan ensembles were received warmly at college and university campuses across the country during this time. Moreover, there are numerous accounts of touring Trinidadian steel bands (the Esso Trinidad Tripoli Steel Band, the Trinidad National Steel Band of 1964, and the Renegades Steel Band for example) visiting American universities and performing concerts for the student body or at multicultural festivals.<sup>220</sup>

Despite an initial flurry of activity in several isolated locations, a number of barriers hampered the large-scale adoption of steel pan ensembles into academia. These

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<sup>220</sup> This statement is based on the large body of existing accounts documenting visiting concerts at American universities. These visits often took place as student life activities and are documented in student newspapers and campus yearbooks.

include, but are not limited to, the availability of instruments, overwhelming size of the Trinidadian-style steel band ensembles, and lack of qualified instructors in America.

Trinidad achieved independence from Britain in 1962; however, until favorable changes in the United States immigration laws went into effect in 1965, political relations and dialogue between the United States and the newly post-colonial Trinidad temporarily slowed, and in some cases disallowed, university study-abroad programs. One result of these strained political relations was the restriction of international students traveling to American universities, a third factor that served to create unfavorable conditions for the fledgling art form of steel pan as it attempted to gain traction in academia.<sup>221</sup>

In the early years of steel band in academia, small pockets of activity were scattered throughout the United States and existed in something of an underground. The movement was tight and nepotistic, with established ensembles spreading primarily by sending out protégé students regionally to begin new programs within a close proximity, akin to the branches of a tree. We can fix a fairly precise starting point for this process: the first permanently established steel band program in the United States. This was the Northern Illinois University steel band, founded in 1973.<sup>222</sup> Following the success of the Northern Illinois steel band program, steel pan in America gained momentum and began

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<sup>221</sup> It should perhaps be noted that many of the early steel band programs started by international students at American universities were not a result of student exchange programs between Trinidadian and American universities. In fact, often, students from the greater Caribbean Islands such as British Guyana, Barbados, Aruba, Antigua, and St. Thomas formed small steel bands and performed one-off concerts for student campus or culture events while studying at American universities. In this sense, the above statement should still be considered accurate considering that many Caribbean nations became independent during the early and mid 1960s causing turmoil and instability for many students traveling to study abroad.

<sup>222</sup> It is with great passion and exacting intention that I point out to skeptics the semantic difference between “the first American university steel band” and “the first permanently established American university steel band program”. I am fully aware that many American universities experimented with the steel bands as early as 1957; a point expounded upon in Chapter 3 of this study for example. But my research suggests that the Northern Illinois University steel band program was the first of its kind. The NIU program is without question the longest continuously run steel band program.



to make a substantial impact in academic institutions across the nation over the coming years.

This chapter explores the genesis of this movement and highlights the key agents and specific universities that fostered early permanent and non-permanent steel pan programs. This analysis will make use of several case studies, a nation-wide survey, and fieldwork conducted with the University of Minnesota steel band in order to examine and understand the real-life process of creating and sustaining a steel band in an American university. Broadly, my aim in analyzing the function of these steel bands within their respective universities is to work toward a methodology and framework for explaining the motivations and goals of harboring a steel pan ensemble in academia. Moreover, several other important issues surface throughout this chapter including the authenticity of steel band performance and the recreation of steel pan traditions in regional locations across America. To this end, this chapter explores the question “what should an American steel band sound like?” as this issue manifests itself within the many steel bands from throughout the United States surveyed for this study.

**If I had a hammer, I'd hammer steel pan all over this land:  
Early non-permanent steel bands at American Universities**

In a 1957 letter to Admiral Gallery, founder of the United States Navy Steel Band, Pete Seeger wrote:

I think I can say with confidence that your band is the first real steel band made up of non-West Indians. Last year my family and my neighbors and myself had a small band and we still play together occasionally but our repertoire is limited to two or three songs and we are only about six members all in all. On the UCLA campus in California the students

followed my directions and put on a short performance for the other students but they disbanded when summer came this year.<sup>223</sup>

This appears to be the first documented proof of a Seeger-led steel band at an American university comprised chiefly of students and the letter dates the UCLA ensemble to approximately spring of 1957. Universities, by nature, are places of intersection and experimentation both musically and culturally. Historically, minstrels traveled extensively across Europe since the middle ages and it was universities that often harbored these traveling musicians.<sup>224</sup> One need only consider the troubadours of the thirteenth and fourteenth century, meistersingers and minnesingers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, American folk music of the twentieth century, and so on. Therefore, the desire for early steel bands to perform at universities is not only logical but part of a grander Western European tradition of exploring culture and global perspective at places of learning.

One early example of this exchange, though short lived, was fostered by Pete Seeger. Although the exact point at which Seeger first encountered steel drums is not known, though as we have seen in Chapter 3, it probably started in earnest during the winter of 1955, when Seeger started regularly performing on a steel drum as part of his folk instrumental repertoire. As Chapter 3 showed, Seeger was also interested in teaching practical methods for building and playing steel drums to the youth of America in an ill-fated attempt to replace the solidarity and community building fostered by community

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<sup>223</sup> Personal letter from Pete Seeger to Daniel Gallery. This letter is held in the *Papers of Admiral Daniel V. Gallery*, Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

<sup>224</sup> For more information on medieval minstrels, see Jeremy Yudkin, *Music of Medieval Europe* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1989), and Fiona Kisby, "Music and Musicians in Early Tudor Westminster." *Early Music* 23, no. 2 (May, 1995) : 223-228+231-240.

bands and those associated with organizations such as the American Legion and VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) following WWII.

During the lost years of his media blacklist from 1950 to 1967, public performance on television or radio became increasingly difficult for Seeger, and he found colleges, primary, and secondary schools a receptive venue for his folk music concerts. It appears as though these venues either ignored or agreed with his political agenda, and Seeger would spend a substantial portion of 1955-1969 on tour at universities throughout America. While on campus, Seeger often gave lectures, held instrument workshops, and stayed for extended residencies at host institutions. This was a trying time for Seeger, as these college tours criss-crossed the nation and were comprised of as many as five concerts per day, often for weeks, sometimes months, on end. For the nearly-bankrupt Seeger, this was one of the only ways to earn income for his family. As stated in Chapter 3, Seeger began performing steel pan at his folk music concerts as early as 1955 and for the development of steel pan in America, Seeger's transient lifestyle also served to expose Trinidadian music and steel pan to a vast number of Americans. Steel pan was well received in many of the universities that hosted him, and Seeger helped start steel bands at Cornell, UCLA, USC, and Michigan State University though none of the above bands survived more than a few years of life, and their popularity on campus was likely isolated.

The Bomboushay Steel Band, founded at Michigan State University—one of several early university-based steel bands in which Seeger played a key role in founding—produced a record, later released by Folkways in 1962. In this case, the namesake “Bomboushay” is a term taken from a Carnival dance “Bomboushay” which,

along with calypso and limbo, was one of the original six Carnival dances. Members of the group included director Gene Bluestein (who was a Professor of English and Literature from 1959 to 1962), and students Derek Hodge, Winston Hodge, Tom Gatten, Ariel Melchoir, Keith Williams, Chemo Rodriguez.



**Bomboushay Steel Band, 1962<sup>225</sup>**

The liner notes for this record are credited to Gene Bluestein, though they are edited and/or co-written by Seeger himself. Bluestein met Seeger in 1957 and was a disciple, in a sense, of Seeger and American folk music. We see in the liner notes two key ideas: a perfunctory explanation and history of the band and a brief explanation of steel drums (a common practice in early steel band and calypso records).

The Bomboushay steel band is composed of students at Michigan State University who came from the Virgin Islands, Bermuda, and Michigan. (To complete the geographic distribution, I should add that I am from Brooklyn though I teach at MSU.) Most of the drums were made under the supervision of Derek Hodge, who also plays lead or first solo pan. The

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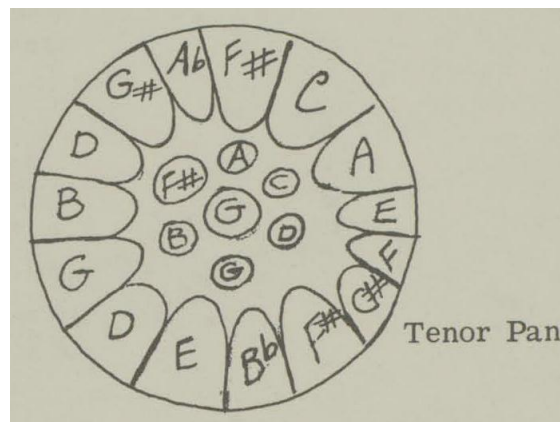
<sup>225</sup> *The Bomboushay Steel Band*, FS 3835 (New York: Folkways Record, 1962).

group is one of many that now exist in this country, developing a kind of music which originated in Trinidad during the last war.<sup>226</sup>

In the above passage, Bluestein may have been attempting to gain some creditability for his work in steel band by highlighting his Brooklyn heritage. At the time of this album's release, Brooklyn was the steel band center of the United States and drawing an association with the region may suggest the target market for the album.

The second key idea is the lengthy, highly informative, portion of the liner notes describing the process by which steel drums are built, steel bands arrangements are made, how ensembles function, and other general issues specific to steel band; this trope, too, is common in the liner notes of early steel band albums. However, in this case Seeger's hand is clearly present in the prose and some of the material is recycled from his how-to manual "The Steel Drums of Kim Loy Wong" discussed in Chapter 3.<sup>227</sup>

When each note has been separated from its neighbor by a light stippling with a cold chisel and a blunted nail punch, the crucial and most painstaking operation begins. As each area of the pattern is hammered up and down with a small hammer, it takes on pitch. In fact, the steel drum is the only instrument I know of which is tuned by being hit hard with a hammer. In order to prevent dissonant sympathetic vibrations from neighboring tones the notes of the scale are laid out on alternating sides of the drum. A typical layout looks like this:



<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Seeger, *Steel Drums: How to Make and Play them*, 1964.

This arrangement of the notes makes it easier to play with great speed and also facilitates chording. The above arrangement makes it possible to play in the keys of G and D major. Most of our songs are played in G although in the song, “Cocoanut” we modulate. . . .<sup>228</sup>

The detail of the liner notes is interesting, to say the least. Who is the target audience? It certainly isn't Caribbean-Americans living in New York as many of these patrons already knew how to play the instrument and its history. Nor was it the curious, travel savvy, newly middle-class American post-war audiences buying the exotica albums of Martin Denny by the hundreds of thousands. Rather, Seeger and Bluestein utilize the liners notes as something akin to a textbook extension, with the hopes that the album could be used to facilitate the beginning of a steel band elsewhere. This fit neatly with the educational offerings of Folkways Records. It bears stressing that most of the early steel bands started by Seeger and others had an underlying mission of cultural education, and were only marginally interested in financial gain. To this end, their desire to release an album on the tail-end of the calypso craze was more interested in promotion of the student and music than in fame and stardom. Seeger undertook comparable projects at several universities across the country including Cornell University and UCLA. Despite the generally short life of these steel bands, they played a key role in the establishment of a place for the future installation of steel pan in American academic institutions.

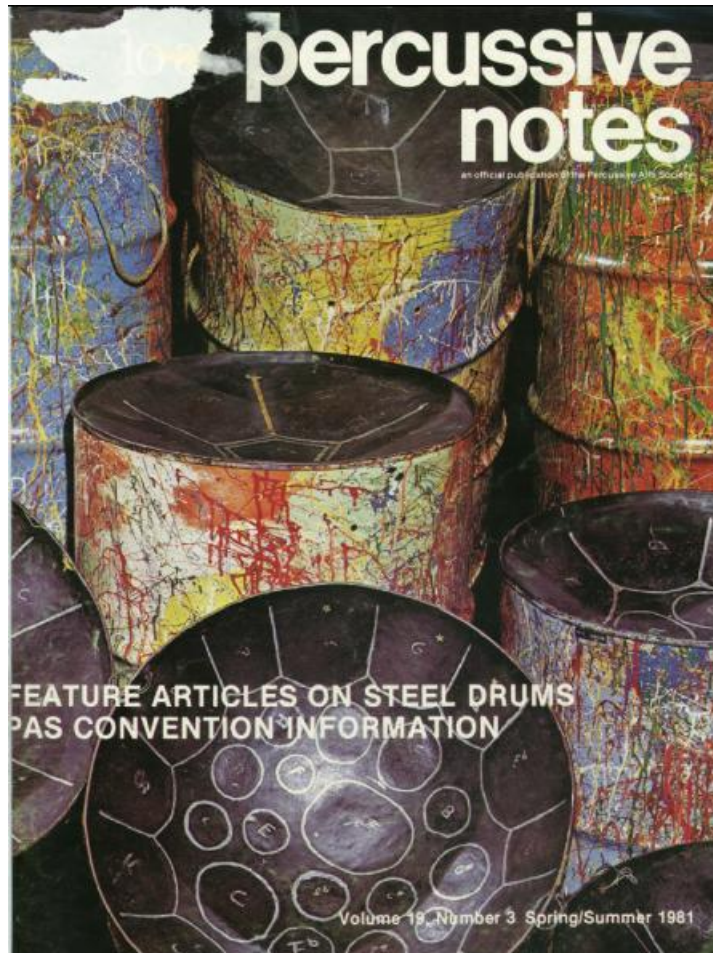
### **P.A.S. and the Official Issue of Pan**

*Notes: The Journal of the Percussive Arts Society (P.A.S.) is the premier academic publication in the study of percussion music, and with a current readership of*

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

some ten thousand subscribers, its reach is vast. In this sense, one could say that steel pan officially stepped into the mainstream academic consciousness with the 1981 spring-summer issue of *Percussive Notes*, which was dedicated to steel band.



Professor Allan O'Connor of Northern Illinois University edited the feature, and the issue included articles by O'Connor and former student Jeff Bush who at the time of publication assistant professor of percussion at the University of Regina, Saskatchewan. O'Connor's four articles—"Pan, Heartbeat of a Nation," "So you want to start a steel band," "A Conversation with Cliff Alexis," and "A Brief Survey of Steel Bands in North American Schools" were designed to give a solid historical and musical introduction of

steel band to the uninitiated university percussion director potentially interested in forming an ensemble or learning more about the steel band.

O'Connor's "Brief Survey" lists six university programs and seven high school programs then active. Of the thirteen programs listed, only four were outside of the Midwest, and six of the thirteen hailed from the state of Illinois. Furthermore, O'Connor's "Brief Survey" is restricted to steel bands from academic institutions; his study omits the Carnival steel bands in New York, and working steel bands in areas such as Walt Disney World, Orlando, Florida, and Andrew de la Bastide's steel bands in Southern California. However, the figure does offer a general measure of the university steel band scene in 1981. For the sake of this study, a reproduction of O'Connor's brief description and photos of the thirteen steel bands can be found in Appendix A.<sup>229</sup>



**Universtiy of Akron Steel Band (1981)<sup>230</sup>**

Although O'Connor's "Brief Survey" lists thirteen total steel bands, only six are discussed at length and include photos. The list of ensembles includes the

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<sup>229</sup> All forthcoming text and photos are found in G. Allen O'Connor "A Survey of Steel Bands In North American Schools," *Notes: The Journal of the Percussive Arts Society*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Spring-Summer, 1981) : 58-59.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.



University of Akron steel band (Above), Eastern Illinois University steel band, the American Conservatory of Music steel band, the Icemen steel band of the University of Regina, Saskatchewan, the University of Illinois steel band, and the Northern Illinois University steel band. The above list offers an interesting look at the diversity of steel bands concentrated in the regional Midwest.

In Seeger's early attempts to start steel bands at American universities, Michigan States University for example, the ensembles were comprised mostly of international students, and the photos of the various steel bands in O'Connor's "Brief Survey" suggest that these Midwestern ensembles were comprised of mostly white performers. The homogenous demographic of the steel bands surveyed by O'Connor is not all that surprising and this demographic likely representative of each universities overall makeup. Yet, by including information on membership and audience demographics Appendix A shows that these steel bands were interested in reaching out to the international student audiences of the universities during performances. Moreover, it is interesting to note that, according to O'Connor, even in its infancy, the steel bands of academia strove for a diverse audience. Moreover, the description of origins, rehearsal times, rehearsal frequency, and administrative functions and governance of the various ensembles discussed in O'Connor's study offer an interesting insight into how each university dealt with the steel band on the administrative level.

The grandfather of all university steel band programs, the Northern Illinois University (NIU) steel band, is located at the end of O'Connor's list; however, the NIU steel band had arguable the greatest impact on the development of steel pan in academia

and should be placed in the first position. All of the Illinois steel bands stem from O'Connor in some way, either as start-up ensembles by former students or as actual steel bands that O'Connor formed, and/or influenced in some way. For instance, O'Connor attended the University of Illinois, earning a graduate degree in percussion performance, before moving on to Northern Illinois University. The Icemen steel band was founded by Jeff Bush, a former student of O'Connor, and Larry Snider founded the steel drum program at the University of Akron after he attended the University of Illinois with O'Connor. Thus the method of oral transmission historically used to teach steel band in Trinidad is certainly at work here, made easier by friendship between teacher and student, colleague to colleague.

Steel pan educator and composer Chris Tanner further argues that the geographic location of steel bands is of paramount importance to the spread of the instrument:

The US [United States] is simply a very large country. Even with the rise of connective technology such as cell phones and the internet, it is still difficult to keep track or even know what is going on around the US in terms of pan (or anything!). Efforts to connect us, or to develop a broad “community” of pan in the US have mostly failed. A prime reason is simply geography. The US is too big, and currently pan is spread too thin – it has not yet reached a “critical mass” where connectivity and community will simply happen by default.<sup>231</sup>

A system of discipleship is often at work where specialty instruments such as steel pan are concerned, but the formation of ensembles on the broader scale throughout the country cannot rely on nepotism alone, and each ensemble has its own unique set of developmental circumstances. Moreover, the financial commitment required to start a steel band is considerable and is not the type of sum readily available within the budgets of most music departments. Since, as Tanner argues, steel bands are not forming by

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<sup>231</sup> Personal phone interview with Chris Tanner, 2009.

default in most areas, the close proximity of some university steel band programs to each other provides ample opportunity for campus visits from neighboring steel bands. This, in turn, provided visibility for the steel bands to university administrators which then fostered an environment of familiarity towards the instrument that eased the burden of college percussion professors lobbying for funds to start a steel band.

It is important to remember that since the publication of O'Connor's "Brief Survey" in 1981, many important steel bands successfully formed in other areas the United States outside the Midwest; several of which formed on both the east and west coast areas. Examples of these include steel bands at Wesleyan University, Florida State University, the Hartt Conservatory of Music, West Virginia University, and the Humboldt State University Calypso Band which is a particularly successful example. Streaming from the University of Illinois connection, Eugene Novotny has enjoyed great success as professor of percussion at Humboldt State University in Arcata, California. Novotny graduate from the University of Illinois in the mid 1980s and subsequently founded the Humboldt State University Calypso Band in 1986.



### **Humboldt State University Calypso Band<sup>232</sup>**

Novotny is well connected with many of Trinidad's leading steel band arrangers and his steel bands have worked with and/or commissioned work from such leader arrangers as Len "Boogsie" Sharpe and Ray Holmen. The Humboldt State University Calypso Band (Above) performs regularly in and around Northern California and has in the past embarked on tours of the entire state.

Other notable steel bands started in academic institutions include the University of North Texas Steel Band founded by Gary Gibson in 1982 and on the east coast a steel band established by Mark Ford called Panama Steel that was loosely affiliated with Eastern Carolina University in the late 1980s.<sup>233</sup> Ultimately, the named steel bands above represent only a sample of steel bands active in academia during the past thirty years; a comprehensive list of all active steel bands in academia is impossible to assemble. However, the ensembles of Novotny, Gibson, and Ford provide a glimpse into progress

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<sup>232</sup> [http://1.bp.blogspot.com/\\_A85qkvx2cLI/Sw0ZOp6Hu8I/AAAAAAAAABoc/rHt-QB1x\\_OY/s1600/calypso084.jpg](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_A85qkvx2cLI/Sw0ZOp6Hu8I/AAAAAAAAABoc/rHt-QB1x_OY/s1600/calypso084.jpg), <accessed May 12, 2010>

<sup>233</sup> <http://www.eskimo.com/~seanote/biography.html> <access May 12, 2010>

of the movement and are notable for their influence.<sup>234</sup> There is no set formula dictating the formation of these individual steel bands and the geographic relationship indicative of proximity found in O'Connor's "Brief Survey" appears to often be a less important factor than the ties of teacher and protégé such as Novotny moving to Northern California from Illinois. What is clear, in any case, is that the foundation forged by the early ensembles not only emboldened other colleges and universities to start steel bands, but proved to administrations of academic institutions the feasibility of creating and maintaining educational ensembles that may seem quite unorthodox in comparison to the traditional musical ensembles dedicated to the Western European canon.

### **Cold Steel for the North Star State: The University of Minnesota Steel Band**

Though the subject of the follow case study is somewhat removed from the first wave of steel bands in academia, many of the same issues and circumstances that triggered the formation of the above steel pan ensembles has, some twenty-five years later, affected the University of Minnesota steel band. This phase of the discussion has a personal dimension. My own introduction to steel band and the formation of the steel band program at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities shape, in many ways, a classic example of how a steel band is created and functions at an American university.

As a new graduate student at the University of Minnesota, I had never played a single note on a steel pan until I was notified in the winter of 2002, my first year at the institution, that I would be directing the steel pan ensemble as part of my teaching

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<sup>234</sup> The most comprehensive list of American steel bands can be found on the Pan Jumbie website: <<http://www.pan-jumbie.com/index.php?page=united-states> >

assistantship within the School of Music. The University of Minnesota steel band was founded in the fall of 2002 and was originally offered as one of four percussion ensembles: steel band, African drumming, Javanese gamelan, and classical percussion ensemble. The inaugural ensemble of the University of Minnesota steel band consisted of nine players and played mostly calypso charts purchased from Panyard, Inc. and a few manuscript arrangements of Latin-jazz standards arranged by Boogie Sharpe, Andy Narell, and Gato Barbieri. Since 2002, the membership of the ensemble has fluctuated from a low of seven to a high of twenty-nine, and the demographic of the ensemble is split equally between music majors, percussion majors, and non-majors from the general student body. The ensemble plays two formal concerts per academic year and many smaller engagements throughout the campus and surrounding Twin Cities community. Leadership of the ensemble rotates every one to two academic years with the arrival and departure of graduate percussion students who assume the directorship as part of a teaching assistantship within the School of Music.

My fateful intersection with pan is not unique, and similar stories of new graduate students directing steel bands as part of teaching assistantships was repeated to me countless times in my research of academic steel pan ensembles throughout the United States. Thrust into the role of steel band leader, I quickly sought out resources to aid me in my direction of the ensemble and was surprised by the lack of quality resources available to someone in my predicament. When assessing the task in front of me, it immediately became apparent that successfully directing a steel band was more than simply notes and rhythms. Moreover, according to Chris Tanner and many other steel pan pedagogues, there are preconceptions as to the how, why, what a steel band should sound

like and/or what repertoire should be performed, and part of my job as ensemble director was to navigate these preconceptions. The following vignette is my personal account of some of the hardships faced within the American steel band experience beyond the acquisition of the steel drums, and may contribute to the broader discussion of the development of steel pan in America.

In January of 2002, the stress of my new teaching assistantship as director of the University of Minnesota steel band, something with which I had very little experience, was palpable. I was searching for help. As I confided my fears to a colleague, we reminisced about playing in our university steel drum ensemble the previous semester. My colleague, an ethnomusicologist, mentioned that once in rehearsal she asked our former director what a “calypso” was, since this style appeared to account for most of the ensemble repertoire. At the first rehearsal of the semester the director had played a film discussing the Panorama steel drum competition in Trinidad and a brief film on calypsonian Lord Kitchener and calypso bands; however, many students were absent from this rehearsal, including my colleague. “Weren’t you at the first rehearsal this semester?” said the director. He then paused, could not give an answer, and proceeded to move on with rehearsal, assuring my friend that he would look it up and report back next rehearsal. Needless to say when the next rehearsal came along, the director (who is a fine percussionist and steel pan player) was still at a loss for information, and perhaps had forgotten about the conversation.

The ethnomusicologist in me found this interesting on several levels. First, a majority of steel drum ensembles’ music is written in a calypso/soca style.<sup>235</sup> How could

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<sup>235</sup> Traditional steel band music in Trinidad is often adapted from the annual calypso competitions held throughout the islands in fall leading up to Carnival and it wasn’t until the early 1970s when Ray Holmen

our ensemble function if our director didn't understand the basic stylistic components of our repertoire? Given the rich cultural roots steel drum ensembles have with the culture of Trinidad and Tobago, wouldn't this information be useful in order to gain a performance perspective? Or, considering the director's lack of concern for performing the proper calypso style, was an understanding of these cultural roots even necessary to properly perform a calypso?

I have since learned that my experience is not all that uncommon among those learning steel drums at an American university, primary school, or secondary school. Instructors often have only a superficial knowledge of steel band music, even less an understanding of the socio-cultural background that fostered this music's development. A hallway conversation with the late Dr. Mirjana Lausevic, then assistant professor of ethnomusicology at the University of Minnesota, further promulgated my interest in seeking answers. She commented, after hearing the University of Minnesota steel band ensemble performance under my directorship, "You guys sound like a bunch of westerners playing western art music very 'nicely' on pans." This comment, and the rest of our conversation, left me with further questions. Why does our steel drum ensemble sound different than a Trinidadian ensemble? Are we alone in this stylistic tendency, or do ensembles in America all sound this way? Have I failed my ensemble in not fostering a more Trinidadian sound? Is the Trinidadian sound possible to attain in America with

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was successful in winning the Panorama steel pan competition with an "own tune" which is an original composition for steel band not adapted from an existing calypso. With the rise of the soca style in the 1970s, many steel band arrangers also found this new style appropriate for Panorama steel band arrangements. As a consequence, a majority of contemporary steel band arrangements are written in these styles with the exception being adaptations of western classical music called "bomb tunes." For more information on bomb tunes, soca, or calypso musical style please see Shannon Dudley "Judging "By the Beat": Calypso versus Soca," *Ethnomusicology* Vol. 40, No. 2 (Spring – Summer 1996) : 269-298, and Shannon Dudley "Dropping the Bomb" Steel Band Performance and Meaning in 1960s Trinidad" *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Winter 2002) : 135-164.



American-born players? Do other ensembles spend time educating their members and audience about cultural issues concerning steel drum ensembles? Should they? Would this make a difference in the authenticity of the ensemble sound, or should American ensembles even strive for a sound that is authentically Trinidadian? What is the ultimate reason for universities to have steel bands and what functions do they serve?

It became evident that I would have to learn about steel pan the traditional way; by finding successful steel band leaders and learning by rote. The books and instructional materials just did not exist in this case, and Pete Seeger's how-to steel band manual, the lone exception, was not available. With no experienced steel band teachers available in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area I opted to further explore these issues and to learn best practices by conducting fieldwork that would provide useful data for my study of American steel bands, as well as provide me with tips, resources, and methods for steel band ensemble pedagogy. The fieldwork for this particular project was conducted in the form of email interviews, phone interviews, in person interviews, and an email survey. Over the course of six months (September 2004-February 2005), I interviewed key figures who represented a broad spectrum of methods and viewpoints concerning the steel drum ensemble, its function, its repertoire, and its instruction.

In order to broaden the test group, I sent a survey to approximately eighty university steel drum directors nation-wide. The participants of the survey were gathered from across the United States though in an effort to narrow the target pool, the survey was only sent to college and/or university steel band directors. Many of these target ensembles were located through word of mouth, previous research, and online keyword searches. However, a majority of the survey participants were contacted through their

registration on the website [www.pan-jumbie.com](http://www.pan-jumbie.com), which continuously updates a listing of active steel bands in various countries and regions throughout the world. In September of 2004, the beginning of the survey, [www.pan-jumbie.com](http://www.pan-jumbie.com) listed seventy-one college or university steel bands with contact information active in the United States; each was contacted as part of the project.<sup>236</sup> As of 2010, this number has grown to over 120 active college or university steel bands on the pan-jumbie website, which is still short of the site's estimate of 300 steel bands in American colleges and universities today.<sup>237</sup> From the roughly seventy survey targets, I received thirty-eight responses to the email survey for a response rate of 54%. The survey was supplemented by six independent phone interviews, two email correspondences, and two in-person interviews.

### **American steel bands versus Trinidadian steel bands: Can they compare? Should they?**

The survey questions used for this inquiry were crafted with the aid of Dr. Lausevic, and were purposefully open-ended in order to generate meaningful responses and useful data. Dr. Lausevic frequently used the term “engine room,” which is a phrase that colloquially means “percussion section” in Trinidad as a metaphor for steel band’s representation of local pride and participation demonstrated in many world musical cultures. In Trinidad, the term “engine room” is often employed as both a physical entity (the actual percussion instruments) and a spiritual embodiment (the community spirit and reputation of a neighborhood) which contribute equally to the sound and rhythmic feel of a steel band. Another common phrase for this phenomenon is “If you iron is good, you is

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<sup>236</sup> For more information, please see <http://www.pan-jumbie.com/index.php?page=united-states> <accessed August 5, 2010>

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

king.”<sup>238</sup> With this socio-musical understanding in mind, Dr. Lausevic and I surmised that by asking questions that focused on the engine room of American steel bands the results would reflect the depth of musical and cultural understanding of the survey participants. Moreover, considering the cultural importance of the engine room in Trinidadian steel bands, this survey further attempted to gather data on possible cultural marginalization in American steel drum education. I wanted to see if current cultural marginalization and the American public’s perception of the steel drum generated during the calypso craze, and discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, impacted repertoire choice and educational mission.

With the above discussion in mind, in the first portion of this inquiry I set out to analyze the “Engine Room.” I wanted to find out what other steel band directors used for their engine room instrumentation; moreover, it was made clear to me by several Trinidadian steel pan players that the more solid and rhythmically accurate an engine room was the better and more musically consistent an ensemble would sound.<sup>239</sup> To this end, the first question posed in the survey was “*What is the typical instrumentation of the engine room for your steel drum ensemble?*” This question, like many of the questions within the survey, on the one hand aims to discover the instruments used by the respondent, while on the other hand indicate through the content of the response the degree of cultural understanding. As expected from the onset of the survey, a majority (80%) of responses included drumset. Besides being a staple of American popular music and jazz for the past century, the drumset has been a favorite of Trinidadian steel bands since the 1960s. Interestingly, only half of the responses included a mention of brake

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<sup>238</sup> Kim Johnson, *If yuh iron is good you is king* (Pan Trinbago: Port of Spain, Trinidad, 2006).

<sup>239</sup> This idea was conveyed to me on several occasions during my fieldwork in Trinidad, January 2008.

drums. Arguably the single most defining sound of the engine room in Trinidadian steel bands, the brake drum is an important instrument that has historically accompanied steel band music from its humble start as bamboo in the 1930s.

A brake drum (Below) is an instrument salvaged from worn out automobile braking systems. Each drum is round, ranges in size from roughly nine to twelve inches in diameter, and weighs between five and fifteen pounds. The sound of a brake drum is a piercing, raw, bell tone that is extremely distinctive and can cut through any sound texture and carries great distances outdoors. Contemporary Trinidadian ensembles always include brake drum and sometimes use as many as four or five in the same piece. Besides its sonic characteristics, many Trinidadians believe the brake drum is a symbolic representation of the people's eventual triumph over colonialism.<sup>240</sup>



**Example 1, Brake Drum**

During my fieldwork in Trinidad in 2008, I witness firsthand the power and importance of the steel band engine room. The concept of the engine room, which manifest itself as not only the heart of the steel band but as an extension of the heart of the community the

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<sup>240</sup> Kim Johnson, *If yuh iron is good you is king*, p 1-8.

steel band represents, was on full display during Panorama semi-finals. The brake drum, or “iron” as it is known in Trinidad, is the timeline of a steel band. As the title to Kim Johnson’s monograph on steel band suggests—“If yuh iron is good you is king”—a steady iron player is paramount to a steel band’s success.<sup>241</sup>

To expand on the instrumentation question and to probe further, or at least clarify, the cultural angle of the above question, I also asked, “*Are there any instruments that are essential to the engine-room, i.e. without which the steel drum ensemble could not function?*” In Trinidad during Carnival 2008, I witnessed engine rooms in excess of fifty players; however, considering that the average size of the steel drum ensembles within my study group ranged from 10-25, the fact that drumset was the number one response made sense considering the economy of the instrument. With such small numbers, these ensembles simply do not have enough players to staff a large engine-room, and chose to devote personnel resources to playing steel drum parts. However, some responders suggested that if they were playing “traditional” steel drum music, they would emphasize “other” instruments. In this case, the “other” instruments were brake drum, maracas, and/or jam blocks (synthetic wood blocks). This practice was perhaps best articulated by Professor Kenyon Williams (Associate Professor Percussion, Minnesota State University-Moorhead) who replied:

Drumset (unless imitating a historical pan-round-de-neck group, in which case 3-4 brake drums pulse the band). For Socas, GOTTA have the brake drum.

Williams’ response is rich and displays a true understanding of the steel pan and its history with his acknowledgment of the early pan-around-de-neck tradition of steel pan playing. However, his is the exception and not the rule; most responses did not offer such

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<sup>241</sup> Kim Johnson, *If yuh iron is good you is King* (Pan Trinbago: Port of Spain, Trinidad, 2006).

useful and culturally sophisticated replies. Yet, it also suggests that perhaps much of the repertoire of American steel bands does not necessitate brake drums or other percussion instruments, marking a separation from traditional Trinidadian steel bands. Are these responders suggesting that they approach steel band music differently if it is “traditional”? And if so, what, accordingly, is “traditional” steel band music?

An average Trinidadian steel drum ensemble will have anywhere from 50-150 players and enjoy the aid of hundreds of supporters to push the giant ensembles through the streets of Port of Spain and also onto the stage of Panorama. Moreover, these ensembles have large panyards to store, rehearse, build steel drums, and tune steel drums. It is clear that the overall ensemble sound and aesthetic of the American ensembles of my study group is inherently different due to ensemble size and the scarcity of dedicated ensemble storage and rehearsal space. Throughout the course of my interviews and surveys, it became apparent that ensemble size also directly affected ensemble sound and choice of steel drum construction. When asked the question *“How would you describe the difference in sound and aesthetic between your ensemble and an ensemble from Trinidad?”* Williams again offered perhaps the most articulate response:

Our ensemble is focused upon sound production/sound quality and flow while complimenting the music. Trini = volume production and heavy emphasis on basic groove, little focus on complementing the music...

Williams, a veteran of multiple Panoramas as a performer, is perhaps coding his answer here in the sense that Trinidadian bands often push for faster, louder, more complex polyphony rather than aim for a sweetness of tone and melody. When asked the same question, Matthew Dudak (artistic director of the University of Akron steel band) had a

similar response, though he makes an important distinction between Trinidad-made pans and American-made steel pans:

The pans in Trinidad are tuned to get a very loud unfocused sound I would say. It's just that you're looking for volume, actually when I was down about three of my colleagues went with me and two of the guys bought pans, the pans they played with Phase II, and the pans there had deep skirts... they sound loud and kind of brashy, where as the pans we have at the university [of Akron] are not meant for that full volume played with 150 different people, it's a different kind of setup...

Compared with Williams' above comments, the remarks of Dudak point to the stylistic difference in tone production between Trinidadian and American steel bands. Yet, these comments may also subtly point to the necessity of a tone-quality difference because of the different repertoire. Further explaining the approach that the University of Akron uses in contrast to a typical Trinidadian ensemble, Dudak again signals tone as an important goal of his steel band:

...we play reputable and try to keep a good tone, because it is a small ensemble you know and if you have 100 people, 40 tenors let's say, all playing full volume your going to have a pitch center because there is 40 people, but if you have five tenor pans playing full volume you're going to have a wang and its going to sound bad, so we try to develop a good sense of tone. You need to hit hard sometimes but you also need a good touch...

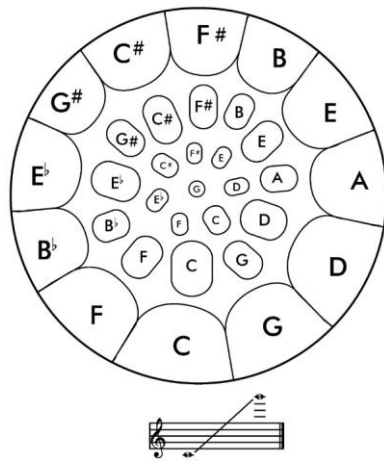
Trinidadians mainly perform outdoors whereas American steel bands mainly perform indoors and the full volume "wang" indicated above is far less forgiving when performed in an indoor setting. Regardless, in Williams and Dudak's own words it becomes clear that controlled tone is an important element of the American steel band sound; however, the reasoning for this is still murky. Williams' suggests that the audience of an American steel band is listening for melody over groove far more than a Trinidad audience. But is this theory alone responsible for the practice of American steel bands to dedicate significant effort towards tone production?

The discussion of tone, sound, and repertoire is further predicated on the instruments themselves. Dudak and Williams indicate a difference between Trinidadians and Americans in playing style and approach to the steel band. Dudak further indicates a difference in the construction of steel drums in Trinidad versus in America. A side-by-side comparison of an American-made steel drum and a Trinidadian counterpart does indeed reveal several differences in construction. The American-made steel pans consistently display a more focused and refined tone; however, is this refinement a result of improved construction methods, audience/performer demands of the instrument, or both? It appears, then, that the sound difference between American and Trinidadian steel bands may rely, in part, on the origin of the actual steel drums.

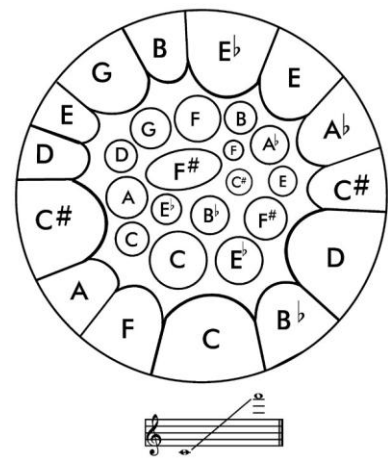
Although not a question of the survey proper, my initial question of steel band “sound” pointed to the importance of steel drum origin, and led to an analysis of steel pan acquisition among American universities. Shipping steel drums from Trinidad to America has always been expensive, and the violent nature of shipping the steel pans often has catastrophic results for intonation. For early steel band programs interested in establishing a permanent steel band program—NIU for example—this presented a significant problem. Therefore homegrown American steel band makers needed to be found or cultivated, and a suitable factory, able to handle the administrative burdens of college purchase orders, was necessary for the proliferation of steel bands on a large scale. Since the early 1960s, the traditional model consisted of tuners and builders such as Cliff Alexis and Ellie Mannette traveling across the United States on Greyhound buses in order to build steel pans and tune existing ensembles. Still the demand for instruments far



surpasses the supply.<sup>242</sup> Because of the relentless pursuit of steel pan perfection for the past fifty years, many of the steel drums found in universities throughout America are based on the designs of steel drum pioneer Ellie Mannette. Before immigrating to the United States from Trinidad in the 1960s, Mannette was the leader, tuner, and designer for the Invaders steel band in Port of Spain, and as discussed in Chapter 4 the primary tuner and builder for the United States Navy Steel Band.



**Mannette Chromatic Lead Pan<sup>243</sup>**



**Mannette Invader Lead Pan<sup>244</sup>**

Mannette was the one of the first drum makers to align the steel drums pitches in a systemized chromatic pattern (Mannette Chromatic Lead Pan) that is further based on the western European notion of the circle of fifths harmonic relationship. This style of pitch location has become the standard for American ensembles. It should be noted that many Trinidadian ensembles still favor the original pitch alignments (Mannette Invader Lead

<sup>242</sup> Personal Interview with Dennis Jansson May 6, 2009, and personal interview with Ray Funk July 16, 2010.

<sup>243</sup> This image is courtesy of [www.mannettesteeldrums.com](http://www.mannettesteeldrums.com) <accessed February 2009>

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

Pan) of the Invader lead pan, and more still have pitch alignments that are unique to a given regional steel band or individual tuner.<sup>245</sup>

Also in play are the material and construction methods of the actual steel drums. Though an in-depth study of this subject is far beyond the scope of this study, it is worth observing that steel drums destined for American university steel bands are often tuned more precisely and the harmonic overtones are blended (similar to the way a piano tuner blends the overall tone of a piano; that is, adjusting natural harmonics to keep from skewing pitch fundamentals) to conform to other western instruments such as brass and woodwinds in jazz, etc. As Dudak suggests above, Trinidadian ensembles tend to follow a “close counts” method of tuning: when forty drums are playing “close,” a distinct tonal center forms. This concept of relative tonal areas descends from the West African roots of steel band music. Many afro-Trinidadian’s descend from areas spread across sub-Saharan Africa, and the Gyill xylophones of the Dagara people of Northern Ghana and mbira music of the Shone people found in modern day Zimbabwe both display the same concept of tonal relativism prevalent in Trinidadian steel bands.<sup>246</sup>

With these fundamental sound, tone, and construction differences in mind it seems unlikely that a Trinidadian-style steel band sound could be achieved unless a university is committed to buying the extra equipment and recruiting the necessary players to fill the ensemble. Furthermore, large ensembles like the University of Akron or NIU which could feasibly produce this authentic Trinidadian sound instead choose to create their own sound based on influences relative to their region of America. This

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<sup>245</sup> Observation by the author during fieldwork conducted in approximately twenty panyards located in and around Port of Spain, Trinidad, January 2008.

<sup>246</sup> Alan Waterman, *African Patterns in Trinidad Negro Music* (diss. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University, 1943).

personalized ensemble trademark sound is analogous to the individuality of major American symphony orchestras. In Akron, for example, the audience prefers a clean, well-tuned ensemble sound suitable for performing popular music arrangements such as Christmas carols. As Pete Seeger suggests in Chapter 3 of this study, the steel band will surely adapt to local musical taste if given the chance, and Williams, Dudak, and the other respondents of the survey are doing precisely this; however, if the American ensembles are not striving for an authentic Trinidadian sound and style, then what is the function of these ensembles and what is the reason for importing them and their culture?

### **Why steel drum? Why education?**

To answer these questions, I first looked towards my surveyed group of American steel band directors. According to scholar Ted Solis, as of 2004 the steel band was the third most common non-western performing ensemble in American universities, with over 100 universities nation-wide housing steel drum ensembles.<sup>247</sup> Solis' research suggests that university administrators and/or music department chairs see value in the steel band and, for one reason or another, want a steel drum ensemble enough to invest the capital funds required to purchase the equipment. Pete Seeger saw the steel band as an educational tool that could develop both a strong sense of rhythm and cultural appreciation among ensemble participants. But the mission of American steel bands and their fit within the overall educational scheme of the home university is inconsistent. Moreover, the larger question of "why do American universities have steel drum bands?"

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<sup>247</sup> Ted Solis. "Teaching What Cannot Be Taught: An Optimistic Overview." *Performing Ethnomusicology*, ed. Ted Solis (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), p 7.

and “do these universities believe in the steel drum’s pedagogical ability to teach both musical and cultural?” still remains.

To lead this discussion I turn to the University of Minnesota, where Director of Percussion Studies Fernando Meza describes in a poignant way his reason for starting a steel drum band at this music school of some six hundred music majors (as of 2008):

We live in global climate and it is our ability as individuals to understand and be able to function in this climate. Steel drums are just another tool in the toolbox for us as musicians. Being able to tie the cultural side of things may be the difference between getting or not getting a job.<sup>248</sup>

Meza is not alone in feeling that the survival of his percussion graduates as working musicians depends in large part on an exposure and general knowledge of steel drums and other non-western styles of music. In fact, nearly every respondent in my study shared Meza’s enthusiasm for participation in non-western music ensembles, and working percussionists across the country are seeing the demand for world percussion skills as a growing trend. Furthermore, the data discussed in the above question is consistent with the research of Solis and his study of non-western ensembles in higher education. But the acknowledgment of this trend on the part of Meza does not really get at the question of why, out of countless non-western music ensemble possibilities, a university would choose to form a steel drum ensemble. One could assume, as Solis observes, that African drumming or Cuban percussion, which have the same marketability as steel drums, are equally likely to appeal to percussion students at universities across the country eager to gain another skill to place in their gig-repertoire.

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<sup>248</sup> Personal Interview with Fernando Meza October 1, 2004.

One advantage steel band ensembles have over other non-western performing ensembles is, as Pete Seeger suggests, their ability to adapt to local musical traditions while drawing significant attention and publicity. As early as the 1950's Trinidadians recognized the potential of steel drums to draw attention and established the Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra (hereafter known as TASPO) to serve as international ambassadors for the colony. As mentioned above, the University of Minnesota launched its first ever steel drum ensemble in 2002, and, utilizing the TASPO model, used the ensemble to draw attention to the University's school of Music. Meza was adamant about the ability of the steel drum ensemble to bring visibility to the percussion department, and the University of Minnesota as a whole beyond campus.

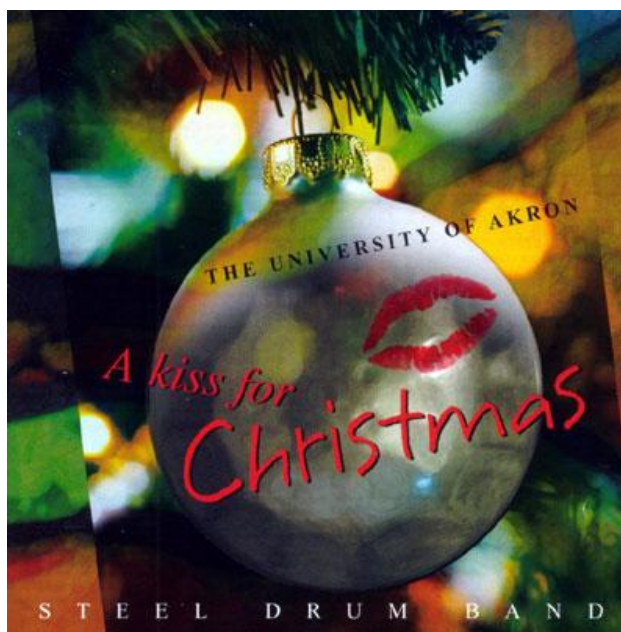
People see and hear this instrument and they stop, watch, and listen. This instrument is mainstream, and people associate with it in light of all the pop music that utilizes steel pans in the United States.<sup>249</sup>

Though Meza was enthusiastic about the educational benefits of the steel band he was much more excited about the steel band's capacity to serve as the public face of the University of Minnesota percussion department.

Meza is not alone in this regard. Matthew Dudak, director of the University of Akron steel band, was open about the ability of his steel band ensemble to bring visibility to his program. Indeed Dudak looked to the steel band to secure financial donations to the percussion department at Akron. For example, Dudak's ensemble made a Christmas album in 2002 with all sales proceeds going directly to the percussion department scholarship fund.

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid.



**The University of Akron Steel Drum Band *A Kiss for Christmas* (2002)<sup>250</sup>**

According to Dudak this is one of the only revenue streams available to the percussion department, and the realities of music department budgets raises many question about fundraising and its implication to the educational goals of American steel bands.

Furthermore, if the goal of a college steel band is fiduciary, this may call into question the educational mission of the ensemble and could subsequently have an impact on the content. However, despite the possible banality of a Christmas album, the University of Akron steel drum band is known to uphold a high level of artistic integrity. The Christmas album is well constructed, and the arrangements display a high degree of musicality with exceptional ensemble playing.

Thus, in unpacking the educational benefit of the Christmas album, we must also remember Seeger's words of adaptability and consider that Trinidadian steel bands also play holiday arrangements, which would suggest that the University of Akron steel drum

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<sup>250</sup> <http://www.uasteelband.com/proddetail.asp?prod=A%5FKiss%5FFor%5FChristmas%5FCD> <accessed May 14, 2010>

band's educational mission falls squarely within the boundaries of stylistic and cultural appropriateness. More importantly, the University of Akron steel drum band, like ensembles across America and the world, has adapted into an ensemble that is responsive to local tastes and amenable to its individual university situation. The impact this fundraising has on the educational mission of American steel bands does raise interesting questions regarding repertoire choice. For instance, are "bomb" tunes and other western classical arrangements commercially viable for gigs? Or, are these classical tunes pedagogical tools used for technique and culture study? I will discuss these questions later in Chapter 8 while discussing the work of Chris Tanner and Liam Teague.

The educational benefits of a particular steel band ensemble, adapted to its population, undoubtedly vary from situation to situation. For instance, a brief series of interviews with the University of Minnesota steel drum ensemble in fall of 2005 identified the complex rhythmic studies and physical performance aspect of performing steel band music as particularly beneficial. However, one insight offered by a respondent to my line of questions was that many of the answers go beyond the physicality of playing the steel pan and reflect the student experience of stepping out of their western culture comfort zone. I asked one of the students named Jon—a twenty year old engineering major—"what interests you the most about the steel drum?"

It's the process; in engineering we have steps and rules. You go from point A to point B all the way up to point Q where you formulate an answer. With pan, I found it extremely challenging that there are no rules and the notes make little sense. You just sort of need to figure things out for yourself. It's a different kind of problem solving.

Jon would later clarify that by "no rules" he simply meant that the pan didn't align in a linear path as a piano does or any other western keyboard instrument for that matter. To

this end, Jon was commenting on the lack of standardized sticking patterns for scales, and he found the circular note alignment and harmonic arrangement based on the interval of a perfect fifth of Ellie Mannette's spider web lead pan design (as seen above), also known as chromatic lead pan, very challenging to learn. I asked another one of the students, a twenty-two year old French horn player, about the off-beat strumming patterns of the double-second steel drums, which are notoriously complicated and prone to endless strings of offbeat rhythmic ostinatos (known as "strumming)."

ARM: As a Horn player, do you think playing double-seconds could help your timing when playing off-beats?

Student: Are you kidding, I wish I had gone through a semester of pan before I got serious about Horn. In the future I am going to recommend to all of my students that they either listen to or play in a steel pan group. It helps your feel without you even knowing it.

These responses are compelling, and many of the other participants of the University of Minnesota steel band study corroborated the above statements about the transferable benefits steel drum ensembles offer students of traditional western European classical ensembles. I was still left wondering, however, if steel band was not a means to an end for many American steel band participants in university ensembles; that is, was the steel band important because it had musical benefits on the performance of their primary instruments or was it inherently valuable?

Beyond the pedagogy of technique and ensemble playing discussed in the 2005 interviews above, my discussion with Dudak from 2004 raised the question of educational benefit; in particular, what type of educational benefit does steel drum heritage have to offer? As I have demonstrated in the previous chapters of this study, steel drum heritage is an example of many things. One possible function of steel drum



bands in America is as a tool for education. This ability can be capitalized on twofold in that steel drum bands can serve to educate the public about Trinidad and Caribbean cultural issues as well as provide the American public with a vehicle to help deal with its own cultural problems and issues. The ability of steel drum bands to function as tools for education are perhaps best described by calypso scholar John Patton:

The rhetorical functions of calypso (steel drums) include the ability of performance to articulate and symbolize the thoughts and values of a particular audience, the dynamics of defining and redefining issues of central importance to the shared cultural world of performer and audience, and the development of critical cultural self-awareness and understanding that resonates after the immediate act of performance has passed.<sup>251</sup>

If, as Patton suggests, the steel band reflects the thoughts and values of a given audience then perhaps the energy directed towards the elements of repertoire and tone production reflect the broader mission of a particular steel band.

For instance, the University of Minnesota's School of Music is generally considered a classic example of an American university music school. The curriculum is geared towards western classical music, and the school is not widely progressive in its course offerings. Of course, the University of Minnesota's School of Music regularly offers courses in world music, popular music, ethnomusicology, periodically offers courses in jazz, and the school, until recently, had performing ensembles including an Indonesian gamelan, steel drum band, African drum ensemble, and gospel choir.<sup>252</sup>

However, these ensembles are considered ancillary and are minimally funded. The steel band reflects the school's focus on western classical music in many ways. First, the

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<sup>251</sup> John Patton, "Calypso as a Rhetorical Performance: Trinidad Carnival 1993," *Latin American Music Review*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Spring – Summer 1994) : 55-74.

<sup>252</sup> In the spring of 2010, the School of Music at the University of Minnesota cut the funding for the gamelan, steel band, African drum ensemble and it remains to be determined if the groups will be revived in the future. Moreover, the gospel choir was cut in the spring of 2010 over concerns related to the sacred nature of the courses mission and content, challenging the appropriateness of a sacred music ensemble in a public university.

ensemble performs only catalog-purchased arrangements of calypso, Latin jazz, and contemporary American popular tunes. The ensemble tends to avoid performing western classical tunes and in doing so perpetuates one of the biggest ironies of steel pan in America; that is, musically conservative home institutions tend to reserve the classics for the traditional ensembles such as orchestra and are seemingly unaware of the “bomb” tradition in Trinidad. Second, the sound of the ensemble is focused more exclusively on tone production, which in turn leads to a rhythmic integrity of the group that is less developed. Third, the group only performs indoors along with the University of Minnesota percussion ensemble and rarely makes outdoor appearances.

The steel band is more than capable of fostering discussions on race, social justice, and history. Yet, as Patton suggests above, the steel band’s ability to “articulate and symbolize the thoughts and values of a particular audience” is heavily reliant on the ensemble director in order to come to fruition. As a steel band director at the University of Minnesota and Inver Hills College, I regularly give public clinics and workshops where I use steel drums as a vehicle for talking about issues such as slavery and colonialism. Moreover, many other successful steel band educators, including Chris Tanner, Eugene Novotny, and Matthew Dudak, attempt to holistically utilize steel pan to teach the music and culture of Trinidad. However, despite a growing number of qualified individuals running steel bands in academia, an integrated approach of teaching music and culture does not appear to be the rule in the case of steel band instruction. As a clinician, Dr. Chris Tanner has nearly twenty years of working with steel bands as a guest artist. He observes:

I would say that when I have had less than pleasing musical experiences working with a steel band, it is usually because of one or both of the following factors:

1. The members themselves have not had enough rehearsal or practice time to be comfortable with whatever repertoire they are working on.
2. The director has little (or no) idea how to coach the ensemble or the repertoire.

In these cases, I always hope that the situation at the particular school will improve, but sometimes it cannot, for a number of reasons. What is disappointing, however, is to see a band that is sub-par, and to know that it is being run sub-par because the director has not educated him or herself properly.<sup>253</sup>

The first bullet of Tanner's observation is certainly not unique to steel bands; however, the second is, considering that it is rare to find a college or university boasting about a sub-par wind ensemble. Furthermore, it is even rarer to see a sub-par wind ensemble with an incompetent director. Tanner's second point comes into focus when considering the disparity between full-time and part-time steel band directors running American steel drum bands. According to my survey less than 5% of steel band leaders surveyed were also full-time faculty members at their institutions, and these adjunct directors and unprepared Teaching Assistants, often running from job to job, may not have the time to properly prepare for rehearsal. In the end, Tanner's larger point in this conversation targets a reality that most American audience members are not discerning among steel bands, and lack the ear and tools to accurately assess the steel band ensemble quality.

In light of Tanner's comments, the issue of audience cultivation comes into focus, and indeed many interview and survey respondents addressed the subject in various ways. Considering the diverse student populations of universities across the country, audiences for steel band concerts also vary. For ensembles such as the University of

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<sup>253</sup> Personal interview with Chris Tanner 2009.

Akron steel drum band and the Miami University steel band this includes concerts on and off campus including performances at primary and secondary schools. For many school programs across the country in desperate need of art and music programming, a visit from a steel drum band offers more than simply a plug in the lesson plan. Across the United States, school outreach varies among steel bands and steel band leaders. The following is an example of a typical outreach performance by Dudak and the University of Akron steel band in which he describes the script for performing and teaching at primary schools in the greater Akron area:

We use it a lot for outreach, you know there are a couple of after school programs in town where we use steel band, it either an after school program for inner-city kids or it just a, we'll bring kids in as kind of a workshop thing or we'll go and do a concert at a schools in Cleveland were we'll talk about history or how the instruments are made and we'll play like five or six tunes of classical arrangements and just give the kids a little overview of what it is, and we'll talk about the cultural history as well.<sup>254</sup>

Dudak's philosophy is reflected in his approach to outreach making the efforts all the more effective. Moreover, because of the sound, arrangements, and visual appeal of steel drums Dudak is able to bring this approach into any school situation; particularly those in the inner-city or with diverse student populations.

Perhaps one of the steel drum ensemble's most useful quality is the instrument's ability to represent community both literally (the members of the band) and figuratively (the band's representation of a particular geographic area). Historically, America has supported community building as a way to strengthen and invigorate towns, cities, and neighborhoods and to assimilate the many new immigrants residing in a given area. In recent years, with the proliferation of events like "National Night Out," the United States

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<sup>254</sup> Personal Interview with Matthew Dudak, October 18, 2004.

has steadily been ramping up support for events geared towards building stronger communities and developing cultural/racial understanding. Steel bands historically have played an extremely important role among the under-privileged social classes of Trinidad. Most young men were only educated through secondary school (if they even finished), lacked job skills, and lacked jobs, leading to the broad failure of motivation and generalized youthful angst and malaise. Early in the steel band story of Trinidad, one of the many reasons neighborhood gangs formed steel bands as a way to attain status within the community. Steel band leaders served double duty as community leaders, who many times wielded more power than local government officials. In general, Trinidadians believe that “knowing your neighbor” and having close knit communities serves to ward off crime and elevate living standards. Steel band leaders care for the wellness of their neighborhoods and pledge to protect it.<sup>255</sup>

Compared to their Trinidadian counterpart, American steel bands and steel band leaders do not have the same history of community involvement or activism; however, university steel bands do, to some extent, represent their university community. But beyond representation, I further pursued the issue of audience cultivation by American steel band directors. In particular, I was curious to learn if covering the cultural and social history of steel band music is necessary for cultivating an audience. All of the directors who responded to the survey and interviews made a conscious effort to educate either their own ensemble or the public on the cultural and musical elements of steel bands.

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<sup>255</sup> The funeral of Rudolph Charles, one of the best known and iconic steel band leaders and longtime leader of the Desperados steel band, resembled that of a prime minister in magnitude and public support. Many leading government dignitaries including the Prime Minister (many of them Afro-Caribbean and from the “People’s National Movement” political party) attended the service, and thousands of people lined the streets of Port of Spain to watch the funeral procession. A funeral attendee and Charles supporter claimed that “Rudy was the Moses of the people of Laventille. We do not even need the police there. Rudolph was a leader and he controlled us all.”

What is at question is to what extent the directors pursued education, and did the students or public really care?

Matthew Dudak legitimately strives to educate his students and the public about steel drums and their musical and cultural implications; this is evident not only by his contributions to this study but by the consistent record of excellence of the University of Akron, which has won awards ranging from the Akron Area Arts Alliance to a Grammy nomination for their album *Live at E.J. Thomas Hall* (1999). However, even he admits that, despite devoting a great amount of time and energy to educating the public on extra-musical matters, the retention is questionable. This sentiment was also expressed by Chris Tanner and is a point of discussion in Chapter 8 of this study. Perhaps the fun-in-the-sun listening and playing experience so commonly associated with steel band by American audiences since the calypso craze is too deeply entrenched for American steel band audiences to overcome despite any attempt at education? I pressed Dudak on the matter, and he responded to this question during several different points of our discussion, each time adding or clarifying his response. His initial response addressed the question in terms of the audience at his home university and fundraising concerts.

ARM: Do you think your colleges or graduate assistance from around the United States are concerned with teaching their students about the cultural implications and significance of steel drums?

MD: We try to really educate people not only about just the history, how it came to be, but I've heard stories of our tuner Cliff Alexis, about how he used to get beat up for playing steel pan and just like two years [2000] ago he was meeting the prime minister of Trinidad to talk about education. . . .

Dudak's response refers to the early struggles of steel panists in Trinidad who, because of their involvement with steel pan, often risked ostracism and, in extreme cases, violence, from family, friends, Trinidadian society, and rival steel band gangs. Moreover, the

Trinidadian steel drum movement has undergone a transformation in the past sixty years. Since its early representation as the voice of an oppressed class of Trinidadian people beginning to rise above colonialism, the instrument has become the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago and in the past fifteen years many early pioneers of the movement, such as Ellie Mannette and Cliff Alexis, have been awarded Medals of Honor by the Trinidadian government.<sup>256</sup>

Telling this story to an American audience is one matter; measuring the effectiveness of this message on a concert audience is quite another. Dudak later returned to the question when he was discussing his steel band's work with inner-city kids and school clinics:

Especially when we're doing outreach where we're going to school that is predominantly African American kids, we talk about the slave trade we talk about how they banned the African drums, tamboo bamboo, how the groups were like gangs, and that kind of thing. Whether the band or the kids grab it is a different story, we're definitely aware of it and were trying to take the instrument to new levels and new places...

I found the last statement particularly interesting. Is audience retention really that pressing of an issue and does it impact the overall concert experience? To this end, groups like the University of Akron are going to strive towards bringing this music and culture to "new places" regardless of the result; however, it is clear from his comments above that Dudak is skeptical regarding the overall effectiveness of teaching the Trinidadian story to his audiences and one wonders if his apathy negatively impacts the educational mission of other steel bands across the country in a similar position.

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<sup>256</sup> Cliff Alexis was recognized by Pantrinbago in 2002 for his "lifelong dedication to steel pan" and Ellie Mannette received the Chacaonia Silver Medal for outstanding cultural achievements in 2003 from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.



**Cliff Alexis, Co-Director of Steel Pan Activities,  
Northern Illinois University<sup>257</sup>**

One figure of potential interest in teasing out these issues is Cliff Alexis, who was mentioned by Dudak many times in his survey responses, and currently is head of one of the largest steel drum departments in the United States at the University of Northern Illinois. Prior to accepting the position at NIU Alexis, a native Trinidadian, was employed by the Minneapolis/St. Paul public schools for twelve years as a director of steel drum bands and teacher of cultural studies at St. Paul Central High School. Alexis won the Twin Cities Outstanding Black Teacher award three times for his service in the aforementioned position. Since Alexis's departure, however, his ensembles have been disbanded and teachers of other disciplines assumed his cultural studies classes. Alexis was not terminated; he left on his own accord in order to take the position at Northern Illinois University, and he obviously left a pair of large shoes to fill. Yet, by not trying to

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<sup>257</sup> <http://www.niu.edu/northerntoday/2003/july21/cliffalexis.shtml> <accesses May 14, 2010>



refill the vacancy, one wonders if the administration was really listening to and retaining his message of cultural expression and unity, and it further calls into question their level of support for his endeavors.

Considering that the students of the steel band directors who participated in this study retained pertinent cultural information on unequal levels, the results of this issue raise more questions. Assuming that students and/or the general audience of an American steel band do not retain or care about cultural information, one could argue that the reason so many universities have steel drum ensembles lacking in cultural education is that this information isn't perceived as necessary for ensemble success. On the other hand, assuming students do retain the pertinent cultural information, one could question the necessity of this information in order to properly perform steel band music. Is the sound difference and aesthetic between American and Trinidadian steel bands a result of more than just ensemble size and drum construction? Beyond the ensemble sound, how much does the audience perception and taste really matter? Judging by the repertoire range and the willingness for ensembles to cater to whoever is interested in booking engagements, many of the American steel bands surveyed in this study appear generally to assume the identity of the immediate public's perception of a steel band image; that is, fun, sun, beaches, and margaritas. The willingness of university steel bands in America to adapt to their immediate public perception does not, I would argue, cheapen the educational mission of these ensembles. It is simply another example of the chameleon-like quality of steel band ensembles to be all things for all people.

Thus far in this study, it is clear that American steel bands are willing to play different repertoire than their Trinidadian counterparts and alter certain techniques such

as tone production in order to adapt to local tastes. However, I was also interested in discovering if American steel bands would chart a new course in performance etiquette. I asked two questions: *Do you think it's important to move around and look the part? Do you think that body movement is inherently within steel band music and if you're correctly playing this music you should be moving?*

We don't ham it up, but we do tend to try and move around... personally, if you're playing a Soca and you're not movin', there's something wrong with you, there's gotta be something moving...

This responder's comments were shared by several others from the study and as a whole, the responders reiterated the fact that steel pan music is dance music, and when played correctly, the music should support favorable dance conditions. Moreover, Trinidadians are legendary for their propensity to jump, dance, move, sing, climb, spin, etc., when playing steel pans. One interview responder commented that movement of a given steel band is a positive thing, but:

Yeah, I don't think you need to be climbing up on top of the pans like they do in Trinidad.... But it really helps the groove...

The legendary extraneous activity of Trinidadian steel bands is striking to anyone familiar with the practice, and this author witnessed many impressive feats at Panorama 2008, including a pre-adolescent boy playing the entire eight-minute performance while standing above his steel pans on the supporting rack and periodically jumping in the air rotating back and forth 180 degrees. It does indeed contrast with American steel bands that are often reserved and immobile (as they would be if performing in an orchestra). However, the reserved nature of many American steel bands is certainly consistent with the demographics the immediate region and consistent with Patton's above theory.

The issue of image is not limited to performance etiquette. The fact that a majority of steel bands in academia are comprised mainly of white performers tends to bring forward issues of race and acceptance. Kenyon Williams observes that in Port of Spain, some Trinidadian panists, and a silent majority of tourists, do not always approve of non-traditional (lower-class West Indians of West African descent) players. His experiences performing in the United States and Trinidad prompted him to expound that:

Even if I played today, and was playing the fattest groove that you've ever heard, people would still come up to me and say you not the right color...

The above comments may perhaps be further inspired by the hotels, harbors, and cruise ships of most major Caribbean resort islands such as Jamaica or St. Thomas. These tourist areas often harbor many small steel bands which cater to a demographic that is 75% white tourists.<sup>258</sup> In the end, the issue of image appropriateness among American steel band audiences has not been fully reconciled. What is clear, though, is that without many of the same financial struggles plaguing the demographics of Trinidadian society, the issue of race and image in American steel bands will be far less inflammatory.<sup>259</sup>

Thus far it appears that in Trinidad and America there is disagreement as to who should be allowed to participate and what is and is not appropriate behavior for a steel drum ensemble. However, these disagreements make perfect sense when considering the immediate public of a given region and the steel bands of academia appear to adapt to the situation. What is also clear is that many American steel drum ensembles often exist without the cultural or historical ties so vital to the existence of the steel band movement

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<sup>258</sup> Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago  
<http://www.ttconnect.gov.tt/gortt/portal/ttconnect/GoRTTHome> <accessed November 1, 2010>

<sup>259</sup> Currently, the population of Trinidad is comprised of approximately forty percent Afro-Trinidadians and forty percent Indo-Trinidadians. However, the Indo-Trinidadian population controls a disproportionate amount of the county's wealth. For more information, see the State Department  
<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35638.htm> <accessed August 1, 2010>

in Trinidad. To this end, efforts to recreate the Trinidadian tradition, when possible, do not often yield a similar reception and respect for the music and culture. So far this study has suggested that steel drum bands can offer more than just “fun” music for universities and public to participate and enjoy, but this is more often the exception than the rule. Further research is necessary in order to generate a more accurate portrayal of the growing differences between Trinidadian and American steel drum ensembles.

### Chapter Conclusions

Trinidad’s musical heritage is often described as one of colonialism and hybridity, giving equal claim to Beethoven and African spirituals. Furthermore, constructing a solid foundation for Trinidadian music and identity is a dynamic issue, especially when fueled by clashes between regional styles and their encroaching global hegemonic counterparts. A classic example of this confluence is the socio/musical identity forged by the steel band movement throughout the past sixty years. One early steel band pioneer recounts that “we [steel bandsmen] had to bring up [steel band] to the level or art, now, it’s not just religious mumbo jumbo.”<sup>260</sup> Moreover, the elevated social status enjoyed by steel bands during the 1950s benefited directly from the practice of incorporating calypsos *and* western classical tunes into the main repertoire of major steel bands, effectively forcing the Trinidadian public to rethink tightly-held concepts and ideologies of folk and/or indigenous music.

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<sup>260</sup> Shannon Dudley, *Making Music for the Nation: Competing Ideas and Aesthetics in Trinidad and Tobago’s Panorama Steel Band Competition*, diss. (University of California at Berkeley, 1997), pg 39-40.

Americans must now rethink their tightly-held concepts and ideologies of steel bands and steel band music. The ethical and artistic consequences of the American perception of steel band permeate the steel pan in America as it continues to develop in academia. Now that steel band has firmly situated itself in the American university, a bit of an identity crisis has emerged as steel bands adapt to their regional situations. To this end, choosing repertoire for steel bands in American universities poses an interesting quandary for steel band directors interested in balancing the traditional steel band with contemporary and regional musical tastes. To most Trinidadians, Britney Spears, Lord Melody, and Bach all carry equal weight as sources of repertoire. However, for a university steel band director starting a fledgling ensemble, both Spears and Bach will certainly turn heads, one may lead to conflict from audiences, administration, and the ensemble. In the end, the integration and proliferation of steel band into academia is a complex issue that aided with the above case studies engages a broader trope of assimilation and authenticity. As we move to Chapter 6 and a discussion of jazz and steel pan, these issues will become even more apparent.

## Chapter 6

### **Steel Pan Finds its Voice: Calypso-Jazz, Pop Music, Southern California, and Jimmy Buffett**

Despite harboring the early stages of the development of steel pan in America, the world of academia and regional hotbeds of New York City were not the exclusive sanctuary for American steel bands and American steel band music. Rather, American popular music, jazz, and the commercial advertising industry have all appropriated and assimilated the unique sound and visual characteristics of the steel pan and are players in the overarching development of steel pan in America. For example, in its 2002-2007 television advertising campaign, *Treasure Island Resort and Casino* faced a marketing challenge; the casino is not located on an island, as the name suggests, nor is it situated near the ocean or any large body of water. In fact, *Treasure Island Resort and Casino* is located in Redwing, Minnesota on a northern portion of the Mississippi river that is, for all intents and purposes, landlocked for two thousand miles in any direction.

The television commercial attempted to overcome these obstacles through a musical invocation of “the island,” complete with tropical birds, a narrator with a Caribbean accent, a contemporary sounding cruise ship party band, and a melody played by Trinidadian steel pans in the foreground. The semiotic potential of steel pan to serve as both a visual image and musical signifier lies at the heart of the cultural negotiations at work in this advertising message. The *Treasure Island Resort and Casino*’s adaptation of steel pan for their advertising campaign is an apt reminder of the multi-faceted collaboration of sound and image. Divorced from their socio-political roots, the paradoxical reversal of steel bands as an instrument of social change in post-colonial

Trinidad to one of consumerism in modern American life is a testament to the semiotic adaptability of the instrument. Yet the very inclusion of the steel pans within the framework of the above television commercial, and their seamless integration with standard western instruments such as keyboard and guitar, is a testament to the instrument finding and embracing its voice in the American cultural mainstream.

This chapter seeks to trace the course of Trinidadian steel pan music as it found its voice in American popular culture beyond the Belafonte-fueled calypso craze of the 1950s. In particular, this chapter will first explore the impact of the calypso craze fueled by Harry Belafonte on the American jazz scene of the 1950s with a focus on the role of Sonny Rollins as one of the primary agents of the Caribbean jazz movement. This chapter will then turn its attention to an analysis of the impact of entertainer Liberace and early touring Trinidadian steel bands in the United States and, with the case studies of Andrew de la Bastide and Robert Greenidge, the development of the early steel band scene in Southern California. The analysis concludes with a discussion of Jimmy Buffett's creation of a pan-Caribbean musical style and identity. The three subject areas explored in this chapter share a common thread; the adaptability of the steel pan sound to any musical situation. Moreover, much like the explosion of rock'n' roll bands that emerged from the stylistic vacuum created by the Beatles upon the groups cessation in 1970, the subject areas explored in this chapter emerge, in different ways, from the vacuum created by the rise and collapse of the calypso craze the late 1950s. Ultimately, whether it is the tuneful style of calypso music, the strong association of the steel pan sound with the Caribbean, or the ability of the steel pan to trigger visions of island happiness, the steel

pan displays an amazing degree of adaptability while seeking to discover its voice in the American cultural mainstream, of which this chapter aims to explore several examples.

### **Harry Belafonte: The Reluctant Calypso King**

Using the calypso craze as the starting point, the influence of steel pan and calypso music on other American musical styles can first be found in the realm of jazz. However, in order to explore how the steel pan sound and calypso music were able to engrain themselves into the cultural fabric of America, this analysis must first return to the calypso craze of the 1950s and take a closer look at the reception of Harry Belafonte's music during this decade.

In the fall of 1956, Belafonte released the *Calypso* album; by late 1957 the disc had become the first LP to sell one million copies. As Belafonte's career soared, the overnight success of the album and the brief but wildly popular calypso craze that ensued prompted many to anoint Belafonte the "King of the Calypso." However, for many reasons—including his complicated political ties, career trajectory as a Caribbean folk singer, and a strong personal pride in his Caribbean heritage—Belafonte did not embrace his regal title. Moreover, after becoming frustrated with the constant insinuation that his calypso music was going to silence rock'n'roll, Belafonte was once quoted as saying:

"I'm a singer, period. I sing all types of folk material—English, Irish, Israeli, from every section of the world. I don't believe in being cultish and I don't want to be known as the guy who put the nail in the coffin of rock 'n roll."<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Arnold Shaw, *Belafonte: An Unauthorized Biography* (New York: Chilton Company- Book Division, 1960), 228-229.



In hindsight, the seemingly preposterous thought of calypso usurping rock'n' roll's place as *the* popular music of the next seventy years must have seemed as improbable to Belafonte in 1960 as it does today. Moreover, in an attempt to keep his musical repertoire from being marginalized, Belafonte constantly fought his public label as "King of the Calypso," and often reminded reporters and the public that two of his biggest hits of the period, "Jamaica Farewell" and "Banana Boat [Day-O]," were themselves not true calypso but Caribbean folk songs. Surely Belafonte's efforts to clarify his use, or non-use, of calypso were first and foremost an attempt to protect his career from being pigeon holed. Like any performer he too sought a long career as a recording artists and Belafonte was determined to outlive the brief calypso craze. Regardless, despite his best efforts to dodge the superfluous title, the name "King of the Calypso" remained for the rest of his career.

As Belafonte became more popular in the public sphere throughout the course of the 1950s, he also became more politically outspoken. Following his military service in the Second World War, Belafonte enrolled in acting classes at the famed dramatic workshops of Erwin Piscator at the New School for Social Research in New York. Here Belafonte also associated with many leading figures in the American socialist movement, including Pete Seeger and Paul Robeson, which would later contributed to the singer's blacklisting by Hollywood movie studios. Belafonte's reluctance to embrace the title of "King of the Calypso" and the increasing degree to which he publicly displayed his politics may have led his contemporaries, including early biographer Arnold Shaw, to later re-christen the singer the "*Reluctant King of the Calypso.*"

Belafonte's music and reputation were synonymous with the American version of the Caribbean song genre and the influence his brand of calypso music had on scores of other musicians across other musical genres is witnessed by the explosion of calypso films, calypso clubs, and imitating Manhattan-style calypso singers. Regardless of his feelings on the matter, Belafonte's calypso reign spread like wildfire and scores of eager subjects flocked to see and hear their chosen monarch. As discussed earlier in this study, because of the popularity of Belafonte's recordings calypso was able to briefly grab a chunk of the American public's attention. However, more important to the current study is the reality that his music and success also engrained a lasting image of the calypso craze in the memories of this same public. Because of his infectious melodies and stereotypical dress during appearances on television shows such as the *Ed Sullivan Show*, Belafonte's music—Caribbean folk music and steel band—came to aurally trigger memories of the calypso craze's visual representations discussed in Chapter 2. The familiarity of Belafonte's music allowed other musicians experimenting with calypso music and steel pan an opening to appeal to the American cultural mainstream. One such musician to benefit from this opening was jazz saxophonist Sonny Rollins.

## Sonny Rollins: Jazz's [Un]Reluctant Calypso King



**Sonny Rollins (far left) with Clifford Brown and Max Roach 1956<sup>262</sup>**

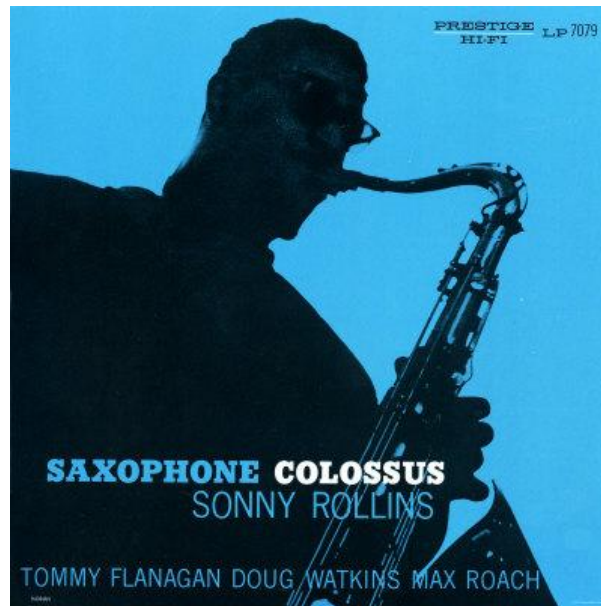
If Belafonte was the leading figure of the calypso craze and its most recognizable face, he was not the only West Indian American to enjoy success with a groundbreaking calypso album in 1956. On October 5, 1956 the young and soon-to-be iconic jazz saxophonist, Sonny Rollins finished the final recording session for the album *Saxophone Colossus*.<sup>263</sup> Similar to the quiet release of the *Calypso* album, *Saxophone Colossus* was initially released with little fanfare. In 1956 Rollins was still a relative newcomer to the New York jazz scene, and the musicians contracted for the recording of this album comprised a group of talented performers at the cusp of promising careers. The quartet, who by the end of their lives would all achieve legendary status for their careers in jazz, included Rollins on tenor saxophone, Max Roach on drums, Tommy Flanagan on piano, and Doug Watkins on bass. *Saxophone Colossus* offers a variety of tunes showcasing the

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<sup>262</sup> <http://www.sonnyrollins.com/bio.php> <accessed April 1, 2009>

<sup>263</sup> For more information on these recording sessions, see Scott Yanow, "Saxophone Colossus" *Sonny Rollins* [www.allmusic.com](http://www.allmusic.com) <accessed September 10, 2010> and Peter Wilson, *Sonny Rollins: The Definitive Musical Guide* (Berkeley, California: Berkeley Hills Books, 2001), p 124.

talents of Rollins and his outstanding sidemen. But its standout number is the calypso-based opening track “St. Thomas,” which became an instant jazz classic, and is widely considered one of the great masterpieces of jazz. In contrast to Belafonte, Rollins was eager to embrace calypso on all levels.



**Sonny Rollins, *Saxophone Colossus* (1956)<sup>264</sup>**

Though recorded in the late summer of 1955, Belafonte’s calypso-inspired *Calypso* album was not released until fall of 1956. Also released in fall of 1956, *Saxophone Colossus* was well ahead of the ensuing calypso craze, which exploded less than half a year later as a result of the Belafonte’s *Calypso* album. Rollins was not artistically influenced by Belafonte’s *Calypso* album, nor was there yet any “calypso craze” upon which to capitalize by including calypso-themed tunes on his new soon-to-be released album. History would prove, though, that the success of *Saxophone Colossus* was due in part to the pro-calypso climate created by Belafonte during the latter half of the decade. *Saxophone Colossus* was simply another album for Rollins in which he drew

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<sup>264</sup> Sonny Rollins, *Saxophone Colossus* (New York: Prestige Records, 1956), LP 7079.

inspiration from his life, which includes a Caribbean heritage. The session went off without much fanfare and there is an absence of notable build-up or extraordinary circumstances surrounding the recording date.

Despite their independent conceptions, the two albums are similar in many ways. First, *Saxophone Colossus*, like Belafonte's *Calypso* album, is an artistic masterpiece and is arguably Rollins' finest and best-known album.<sup>265</sup> Second, both albums were also commercial successes with Belafonte selling some three million albums by 1959 and Rollins enjoying comparable commercial success in his field by selling approximately one hundred thousand records by the same year. In his monograph on Sonny Rollins, *New York Times* jazz critic Richard Palmer suggests that *Saxophone Colossus* "deserves its fame as both a work of art and as a pivotal moment in Rollins' career."<sup>266</sup> Yet, the album's popularity and strong sales are likely a direct result of the favorable calypso consumer climate created by Belafonte's *Calypso* album. Moreover, Palmer further suggests that, despite occurring early in his career as a jazz musician—Rollins was twenty-six years at the time of the recording—*Saxophone Colossus* marked an early career benchmark that displayed a culmination of his early development as a musician. The album marked Rollins' arrival to the elite level of jazz improvisation. To this end, the improvisation and thematic development displayed on the album's signature tunes "St. Thomas" and further signaled a stylistic turn towards the creative improvisation indicative of Rollins' later career.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Eric Nisenson, *Open Sky: Sonny Rollins and His World of Improvisation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

<sup>266</sup> Richard Palmer, *Sonny Rollins: The Cutting Edge* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Groups, 1998), pg 42.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid*, pg 43. Furthermore, it should be note that the improvisation work on "St. Thomas" is often overshadowed by the work on "Blue Seven" of the same album.

Riding the momentum of *Saxophone Colossus* and working in the consumer space created by Belafonte and the calypso craze, Rollins quickly earned a reputation as the jazz equivalent to Belafonte. Later in his career, Rollins would release several other albums with calypso-based tunes, including the “Everywhere Calypso” (from the album *Sonny Rollins’ Next Album* released in 1972), “Little Lu” (from the album *Love at First Sight*, released in 1980), and later “Don’t Stop the Carnival” (from the self-titled album released in 1989) but nothing would match the commercial and artistic success of “St. Thomas” and the album *Saxophone Colossus*. The jazz audience of the late 1950s and early 1960s was not historically as particular in choosing stars as the pop audience and talent of the performer still set the benchmark. This relaxed attitude allowed the talented Rollins more artistic freedom to explore calypso music—a relatively unknown genre to jazz—without fear of losing his audience. Moreover, this popularity was further embraced by Rollins without the fears of a career-crippling association to calypso and folk music. He was thus free to explore the calypso and other avant garde styles without fear of losing ground to the next musical fad to capture the ears and hearts of Americans. In contrast, Belafonte was never able to escape the associations, and his calypso styling was, in a sense, the central construction of his career.

Unlike Rollins, Belafonte did not have the full support of his label for his calypso ambitions, and his parent label (RCA) was determined to package the singer in the most profitable way possible. His desire to record and release Caribbean folk music and calypso was seen as a radical move away from the popular crooner style that RCA had envisioned for Belafonte’s success. Conversely, Rollins’ was able to proudly explore his Caribbean musical and cultural roots through his self-chosen medium of art without the

trepidation of repercussions—especially those generated by the casually racist sentiments of the 1950s American public—and unlike Belafonte he did not have the threat of a controlling parent music label imposing career confines and blocking the fluidity necessary for the style manipulation so coveted by Belafonte.

Rollins and Belafonte also shared a similar first generation American upbringing. The saxophonist grew up in Harlem, his childhood home located on 137<sup>th</sup> street between the thoroughfares of Lennox Avenue and Seventh Avenue. During this time, Harlem housed a large population of Caribbean immigrants, and Rollins grew up firmly rooted in the music and culture of the West Indies. Rollins' parents were both Caribbean immigrants: his father was from island of St. Croix and his mother was from the island of St. Thomas though her maiden name—Valborg—suggests that she may have been Haitian. Rollins recalled that many of his earliest memories were of his mother singing Dutch West Indian calypsos at home.<sup>268</sup>

“St. Thomas” anticipates the bouncing and infectious melodies of 1950s calypso craze “fun in the sun” style of cocktail party music. Though Rollins is given the writing credits for the version of “St. Thomas” found on *Saxophone Colossus*, the arrangement is a version of a similar tune that he first heard as a child. He describes the origins of “St. Thomas” thus:

[T]he melody from “St. Thomas” is a song that mother used to sing. It’s a traditional tune. Its etymology is very interesting. I called it “St. Thomas” because it was just a tune that I knew and since my mother was from St. Thomas I called it that. In the Virgins islands, it had different names. The Virgin Islands were Danish. And there was a Danish song I heard sung by Lauritz Melchior in an old Hollywood movie.<sup>269</sup> So I just arranged that

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<sup>268</sup> Charles Blancq, *Sonny Rollins: The Journey of a Jazzman* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983), 16-18.

<sup>269</sup> The film that Rollins refers to is the 1947 release *This Time for Keeps* starring Melchior and Esther Williams. The song with a similar tune of St. Thomas is “Pagan Love Song” and Rollins is most likely referring to this tune in his reference.

tune and gave it the title “St. Thomas.” It actually originated as a Scandinavian folk song.<sup>270</sup>

Rollins’ explanation is certainly plausible, and the history of colonialism in the United States Virgin Islands suggests that the Danish/Caribbean origin of the song could well be accurate. Moreover, the song, and its calypso feel, is consistent with the popular music of the United States Virgin Islands during the 1950s and 1960s, and the tune for “St. Thomas” is indeed suitable for adaptation into the formulaic theme and variation style of jazz improvisation characteristic of Rollins.

Precisely how Rollins was able to integrate calypso into his unique style of jazz improvisation represents an interesting example of musical hybridity. Trinidadian calypso, by nature, is a vocal genre and as discussed in Chapter 2 the weight placed on primary and secondary lyrical meanings allowed Trinidadian calypsonians to instantly capitalize on the genre’s inherent ability as a medium for protest, sexual explicitness, and auditory invocation of societal woes. As an instrumentalist, Rollins had to rely on the strength of the tune, the feel of the groove, and his legendary ability to improvise thematic variations in order to accomplish a similar amount of heavy lifting.<sup>271</sup> Interestingly, the version of “St. Thomas” found on *Saxophone Colossus* oscillates back and forth between two distinct rhythmic feels throughout the course of the tune, morphing from a hybrid of calypso to a straight-ahead jazz feel. During the 1950s, Rollins was attempting to establish a personal style of improvisation reliant on thematic variation, and his solo on “St. Thomas”—along with his work on the tune “Blue Seven” of the same album—is perhaps one of the finest examples of this improvisatory style.

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<sup>270</sup> Eric Nisenson, *Open Sky: Sonny Rollins and His World of Improvisation* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 88-89.

<sup>271</sup> For more in this structural improvisatory ability, see Gunther Schuller, “The Challenges of Thematic Improvisation” *The Jazz Review*, No. 1, Vol. 1 (November 1958).



This recording is markedly different from most of Rollins' later calypsos in that "St. Thomas" is stylistically more accurate of Caribbean music (calypso, merengue, mambo, etc.) in comparison to the extended hard-bop solos for which Rollins would also garner international acclaim later in his career.

The oscillation back and forth from jazz feel to calypso rhythmical feel on "St. Thomas" is a unique element of the tune that demonstrates a successful fusion of jazz and calypso elements. According to Rollins, calypso has always had the potential to facilitate his style of thematic improvisation:

Calypso has been around a long time, they just haven't been done a lot. I happen to think there is a lot of possibility in them. Anything that has rhythm is good for a jazz player. There is a lot of rhythm and a compatible chord structure. Guys are always looking to imbue the music with fresh approaches. Jazz is the type of music that can absorb so many things and still be jazz. Calypso is an optimistic sound. It implies happiness about life. Even when done in instrumental form, there is a certain sophisticated slyness. It makes people feel better about things.<sup>272</sup>

His description of calypso perhaps foreshadows the very elements of the musical style that would capture the fascination of the American public during the calypso craze. To this end, the "sophisticated slyness" and implied "happiness" are two factors that give "St. Thomas" a freshness of sound previously unknown to the jazz world. Rollins was the first notable jazz artist to attempt such a fusion of jazz and calypso, and he is without question the most noted example of such a synthesis.

The critical and commercial success of "St. Thomas" aside, Rollins' musical fusion of jazz and calypso also earned him a fan following from New York's West Indian population. Newton Kirby, Jr., an American of West Indian descent who grew up in

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<sup>272</sup> Ken Frankling, "Calypso Bubbles Forth in Jazz," *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 30, 1988, p. 2, Col. 5.

Brooklyn during the 1950s and 1960s was adamant in suggesting that Rollins and Belafonte were a source of great pride for many West Indian immigrants at the time.

Both my parents had spent time living in several Caribbean Islands before immigrating to New York, but my father was from St. Vincent and my mother was from Aruba. Growing up in an immigrant family in Brooklyn during the [19]50s and 60s meant, for whatever reason, that we had to constantly prove ourselves to everyone, even the other black kids in the neighborhood. My father was a big jazz nut, and for him, [Sonny] Rollins' was it. Not because he was the best, everyone knew that was Miles [Davis], but because he [Rollins] was Caribbean and played calypsos. My mother felt the same way about [Harry] Belafonte. I think since they grew up in those islands which were former colonies, they heard from day one that the only music worth listening to was classical, you know, Mozart and whatnot. And for calypso or steel pan music to be loved by millions of people, not just my community in Brooklyn, was a major source of pride.<sup>273</sup>

The success and musical creativity of these two men, paired with the growing West Indian population in New York, Toronto, Miami, and Southern California during the 1960s, laid the groundwork for significant social and cultural progress for West Indian immigrants and, more importantly to this discussion, further implanted the music and sounds of steel band and calypso in the consciousness of the American cultural mainstream for an entire generation. More than just being of West Indian descent, Belafonte and Rollins successfully sold the music and culture of the Caribbean to the American public.

In his study of post-WWII literature, Robert Bennett states that in the 1950s “many writers used images of jazz to promote a specific conception of jazz as a radical cultural, political, epistemological, or existential paradigm shift.”<sup>274</sup> To this end, it appears as though in the recording of *Saxophone Colossus* Rollins adopted the sound of

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<sup>273</sup> Personal Interview, Newton Kirby, Jr. Minneapolis, Minnesota, November 4, 2006.

<sup>274</sup> Robert Bennett, *Deconstruction Post-WWII New York City: The Literature, Art, Jazz, and Architecture of an Emerging Global Capital* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 70.

calypso as his new “radical” in promoting a new type of authenticity and hipness that many contemporary American and Trinidadian steel panists are still attempting to replicate. In closing this section, it is apparent that long before steel panists such as Andy Narell and Othello Mollineaux attempted to forge careers as jazz soloists, Rollins’ integration of calypso music into his repertoire of jazz tunes had wide-reaching influence on the American jazz scene and steel panists alike. However, it should also be noted that Rollins’s success, however deserving, is also a product of the climate created by Belafonte and the calypso craze.

### **Liberace, Robert Greenidge, and Southern California**

In their essay “Will Calypso Doom Rock’n’Roll?: The U.S. Calypso Craze of 1957,” Ray Funk and Donald Hill discuss the meteoric rise and fall of the American calypso craze from late 1956 to 1957.<sup>275</sup> At its height, the calypso craze, fueled by the popularity of Belafonte, was the anticipated dethroner of rock’n’roll. However, reality soon brought the movement back into orbit and the fall of the calypso craze out of the American public’s consciousness was nearly as abrupt as its meteoric rise. The historical importance of calypso is marked in part by its contemporary influence on other musical genres of the 1950s, such as rock’n’ roll, and by the many musical imitators that followed the craze, such as exotica specialists Martin Denny and Arthur Lyman. Moreover, propelled by Belafonte’s success the American cultural mainstream lexicon adopted the term “calypso” to encompass all English-lyric music of the Caribbean. This was a

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<sup>275</sup> Ray Funk and Donald Hill “Will Calypso Doom Rock’n’ roll?: The U.S. Calypso Craze of 1957” *Trinidad Carnival: The Cultural Politics of a Transnational Festival*, ed. Garth Green and Philp Scher (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2007).

convenient catch-all for describing “Jamaica Farewell,” “Banana Boat,” and many other Caribbean folk songs and lullabies, most of which, as I stated previously in Chapter 2, were anything but calypsos.

Perhaps the most important residual effect of Belafonte’s success in singing Caribbean folk music across the country was the geographic spread of Caribbean music throughout the United States and the world; or at least anywhere American radio stations and/or records could be heard. Americans from across the country sought out the music of the Caribbean, and steel band began to gain in popularity among several new scenes, without historically large West Indian populations. In particular, steel drum bands found work in hotels, cocktail parties, and other performance venues in the vibrant Southern California music scene; home of a significant portion of America’s popular music and an ideal incubator for the development of early American steel band music. Following the fall of the calypso craze in the late 1950s, Southern California emerged as an important scene for early steel band activity in the United States and is a key contributor to the development of steel pan in America.



**Promotional Postcard, 1968<sup>276</sup>**

The large hotels, coliseums, and performance venues of the entertainment capitals of the western United States, Las Vegas and Los Angeles for example, hosted a variety of exotic acts throughout the 1960s and 1970s. During this time, several Trinidadian steel bands embarked on long tours which crossed the United States in order to earn money during the long Carnival off-season. One such act, the Esso Tripoli Trinidad steel band, gained wide exposure throughout the Western United States while touring the area from 1967-70 serving mainly as an extended opening act engagement with pianist and entertainer Liberace (Above).

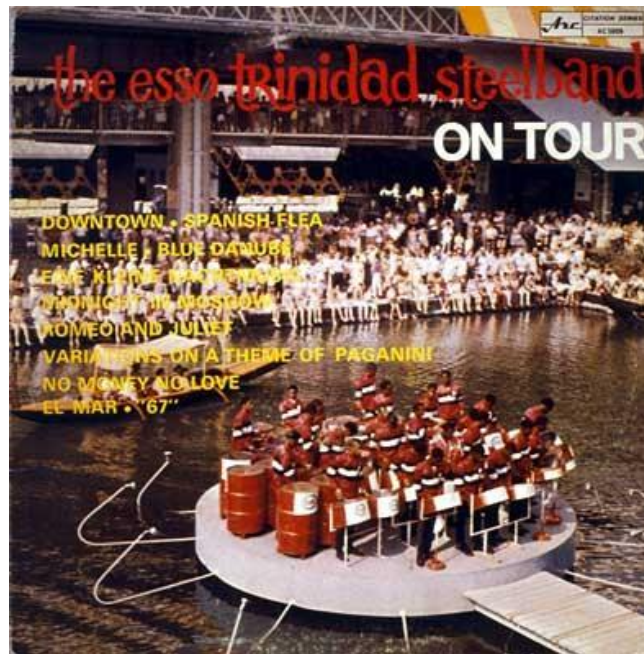
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<sup>276</sup> Author's collection: 1968 advertising postcard of Liberace for May 28th through June 10th performances at John Ascuaga's Nugget casino, in the Circus Room theater restaurant in Reno, Nevada. Also featured at these concerts was the Trinidad Tripoli Steel band. The reverse side of the card promotes other upcoming acts including Bertha and Tina, "the world's most talented elephants," as presented by C. J. Madison.

Liberace's discovery of the Esso Trinidad Tripoli steel band is a result of a government sponsored tour. The government of Trinidad had, since TASPO (Trinidad All-Steel Percussion Orchestra) in 1951, used steel bands as goodwill ambassadors, and sponsored the groups on domestic and international tours. The adoption of the steel pan as the representative musical sound and image of Trinidad was firmly in place by the end of the 1950s; however, the adoption of the steel pan as the official instrument of Trinidad is a recent phenomenon and became official in 1995. The measure to certify steel drums as the "national instrument" of Trinidad was proposed by PNM (People's National Movement) administration in honor of Trinidad's first elected president Eric Williams who died in 1981, and finally adopted by the Ministry of Culture in 1995. Afro-Trinidadians comprise only half of Trinidad's population, with the other majority is of South Indian descent, making a singular adoption of an Afro-Trinidadian instrument (steel drums) the national representative a politically charged proposition. Furthermore, the action to adopt steel band as the representative cultural image for Trinidad and Tobago sparked Indo-Trinidadian Islamic militants to stage an unsuccessful military coup in 1990. Regardless, outside of Trinidad the association—steel band as pan-Caribbean image—has roots to the formation of TASPO in 1951.

In 1967, the Esso Trinidad Tripoli steel band accompanied the Trinidad and Tobago National Steel Band which was sent to America by the government of Trinidad and Tobago. The Esso Trinidad Tripoli steel band was co-sponsored by the Esso Oil Company and both groups represented the nation's musical heritage at the Montreal Expo 67 World's Fair. Since the famous story of Debussy's exposure to Indonesian gamelan at

the Paris World's Fair of 1889, the annual fair has long served as a meeting place for the music of different people and cultures of the world.



### **Esso Tripoli Trinidad Steel Band, Expo 1967<sup>277</sup>**

At the 1967 World's Fair, the Esso Trinidad Tripoli steel band performed for two weeks (Above) and caught the ear of one of the most popular American entertainers of the day: Liberace.

The flamboyant pianist was so taken by the fresh, luminous sound of the steel band that he immediately seized the opportunity to contract the Trinidad Tripoli steel band to perform with him on tour for the next two years. At the outset, the seemingly unlikely nature of this collaboration actually makes perfect sense, considering that both are visually ostentatious, unique, and wildly entertaining. Yet, the far-reaching effects of this collaboration are magnified by the actual geographic locations toured by the group; mainly, small towns, state fairs, and the Southern United States.

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<sup>277</sup> Esso Steelband, *The Esso Steelband on Tour* (Toronto: ARC Records, 1967).



### **Esso Tripoli Steel Band at Liberace Concert<sup>278</sup>**

Liberace, his rhinestone-encrusted white piano, and twenty-eight black Trinidadian steel panists, played the requisite important venues in the large cities throughout the United States; but, they also played the Deep South and smaller Midwest venues, including the Iowa, Nebraska, and Wisconsin State Fairs, which was near Liberace's childhood home of West Allis, a suburb of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Liberace may have been eccentric to a fault, but he keenly understood the importance of mood, atmosphere, and spectacle for his performances. The impressive visual display of steel bands was a perfect pairing. Attending a Liberace concert was an event—an experience—and what more memorable experience could one have than seeing Liberace play piano for a dancing elephant or with a stage full of black Caribbean steel panists. Liberace sought to transcend the boundaries of reality and transport his audience into a dream-like state of fantasy, wonderment, and glamour. In this way, Liberace capitalizing on the general American public's cognitive visual association of steel bands with a pan-Caribbean island fantasy, suggests that this associative phenomenon discussed above and

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<sup>278</sup> <http://www.npr.org/programs/Infsound/images/030304.liberace.band.jpg> <accessed May 1, 2009>



in Chapter 2 lasted far beyond the 1950s calypso craze and was in still firmly place during the early 1970s.



**Van Dyke Parks Presents: *The Esso Trinidad Steel Band*<sup>279</sup>**

While on tour in the Western United States, the Esso Trinidad Tripoli steel band also made strides in the commercial recording industry in Southern California by working with the well-known artist, songwriter, and producer Van Dyke Parks. Parks had been a fan of steel pan since the early 1960s, and he first saw the Esso Trinidad Tripoli steel band on tour with Liberace in 1970. He was immediately taken by the sound and rhythmic appeal of the group of Trinidadian steel panists and soon after began collaboration. According to Parks:

In 1962, I worked with my first steelband in Southern California. It opened my eyes to what I think is the greatest music of the 20th century, on a popular level – calypso music. Like Ulysses, I went on an adventure with calypso music. Steel drum impressed me a great deal, because I had always been interested in tuneful percussion. The best group to express the

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<sup>279</sup> Van Dyke Parks, *Van Dyke Parks Presents the Esso Trinidad Tripoli Steel Band* (Los Angeles: Warner Brothers Records, 1971).

love that I had for calypso was the Trinidad Tripoli Steelband. Tripoli, why Tripoli? *Shores of Tripoli*, the movie –an homage to the Yanks.<sup>280</sup>

Van Dyke Parks would go on to follow the Esso Trinidad Tripoli steel band until 1971 and shot and produced a documentary film about the group, serving, too, as executive producer of the band's first album, *Van Dyke Parks Presents The Esso Trinidad Tripoli Steel Band* (Above).

Thanks in large part to collaborations with Van Dyke Parks and Liberace, the Esso Trinidad Tripoli steel band made their mark in the Southern California steel band scene during the latter part of the 1960s. Furthermore, working in the same scene were several other steel panists including Andrew de la Bastide and Robert Greenidge. Their stories are crucial to understanding the process by which the American popular music scene adapted traditional steel band music and adopted the instrument into the mainstream commercial music industry.



**Andrew "Pan" de la Bastide<sup>281</sup>**

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<sup>280</sup> This interview with Van Dyke Parks can be found at <http://www.npr.org/programs/lnfsound/stories/030304.liberace2.html> <accessed November 8, 2007>

<sup>281</sup> <http://www.bestoftrinidad.com/steelband/delabastide.html> <accessed June 1, 2010>

Andrew de la Bastide is one of the earliest known Trinidadians steel pan players to immigrate permanently to the United States, and he settled in the Southern California area in the early 1960s. But his life in steel pan began long before, in the heart of Port of Spain, Trinidad. Bastide is often mentioned in the same breath as Ellie Mannette, Winston “Spree” Simon, and Emmanuel “Fisheye” Ollivierre as one of the first steel band pioneers to create actual notes on waste basket lids in the 1930s. In Port of Spain, Trinidad, the late 1930s was a time of discovery and development for the steel pan. Many circulating stories that single out Bastide as *the* first man to create a steel drum are popular among Trinidadian ex-patriots who now reside in Britain and the United States, though they are vehemently disputed by other current Trinidadians.<sup>282</sup> There is little question, though, that Bastide was a pioneer in the development of the steel band movement in Trinidad.

Bastide first came to America as a member of the legendary TASPO (Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra) that toured the United States and the world in 1951. Like many young Trinidadian men in the 1950s, Bastide was rich in steel pan knowledge and poor in every other category. Along with Ellie Mannette and several other notable early Trinidadian panists, Bastide was part of an early wave of brain drain that left Trinidad for the United States. Bastide was unlike many of the recently arrived unskilled migrant Trinidadian workers in New York in that he was less concerned with recreating Carnival in Brooklyn than with earning a living wage playing the steel pan. Furthermore, it was his desire to play steel pan year-round that sparked Bastide to bypass a life in New York for the sunny shores of California.

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<sup>282</sup> Personal Interview with Michael Stevens, a British National and pan enthusiast on Holiday in Trinidad. This particular conversation took place in the Phase II panyard on January 23, 2008.

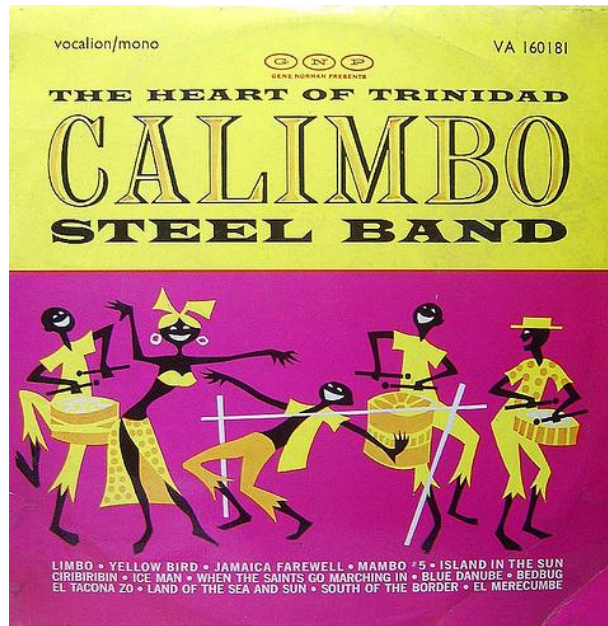


**The Virgin Island Steel Band, Los Angeles, California (1962)<sup>283</sup>**

Without the Carnival tradition of New York and Trinidad, or the sponsorship of a patron like Liberace or the government of Trinidad to support large performing steel bands, it became clear to Bastide that a large-group steel drum ensemble was unsustainable and would never survive in Southern California. Instead, he charted his course with a small ensemble of approximately ten players, secured a union card, and began performing with his ensemble on steel pans built and tuned by himself in Los Angeles. Bastide and his group, later named the Virgin Island Steel Band, was very successful performing in Los Angeles and Southern California for several decades, also making several tours throughout the United States, Caribbean, and South America.

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<sup>283</sup> Virgin Island Steel band, *Calimbo: The Heart of Trinidad Steel Band*, VA 160181 (Vocalion Records: New York, 1962)



***Calimbo* by Andrew de la Bastide and the Virgin Island Steel Band (1962)<sup>284</sup>**

In 1962, the Virgin Island Steel Band recorded and released their first commercial album titled *Gene Norman Presents: The Heart of Trinidad Calimbo Steel Band*. The album was sponsored by the Texaco Oil Company and, according to the liner notes, was boastfully recorded in high fidelity. As we have seen in the case of the United States Navy Steel Band, recording a steel band has historically presented a host of technical audio problems, and the *Calimbo* album exemplifies these struggles. Despite the attempt at high fidelity, the overall quality of the recording displays the lost bass tones and piercing treble tones that plague early Trinidadian and American steel band recordings of the 1950s and 1960s.

Like other steel band records of this era, the liner notes of the album are both instructional and self-promoting. In this case, the instructional angle comes as a description of the limbo dance, and the self-promotion takes the form of enthusiastic prose which attests to the recent success of the group and explains the group's namesake:

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

The Calimbo just wound up six weeks at the El Mirador in Palm Springs, Calif., where they jammed the South Pacific Room night after night. Before coming to the United States, they toured South America—Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile and Peru—and worked their way north through Central America and Mexico. Everywhere, they were a smash hit. Naturally, the limbo dance—in which the dancer worms his or her way under a constantly lowering crossbar between two uprights—is most popular with crowds.<sup>285</sup>

The limbo was one of several Caribbean dances that enjoyed popularity during the calypso craze of the late 1950s, and was particularly popular at hotels and resorts in America and the Caribbean. The United States Navy Steel Band used the limbo dance as early as 1957, and the dance remained a major element of the group's touring shows well into the early 1970s.<sup>286</sup> When the *Calimbo* album was released by the Virgin Island Steel Band in 1962, the Vocalion Record label was attempting to capitalize on the limbo, which was still a very popular dance in America.<sup>287</sup>

Vocalion was a subsidiary of Decca Records and was originally used as a race record label during the first half of the twentieth-century. In the 1950s and 1960s, Decca Records USA and Decca Records UK revived Vocalion as a budget label for back-catalog reissues and for some new attempts at marketing exotic artists.<sup>288</sup> The Virgin Island Steel Band was an example of precisely the type of exotic artist used as a throwback to the calypso craze of the 1950s. Decca UK attempted to market the *Calimbo* album to British audiences spanning the entirety of the Commonwealth, and besides the limbo songs the album also contains several Manhattan-style calypso arrangements that were sure to appeal to a similar audience. These include Caribbean folk music and

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

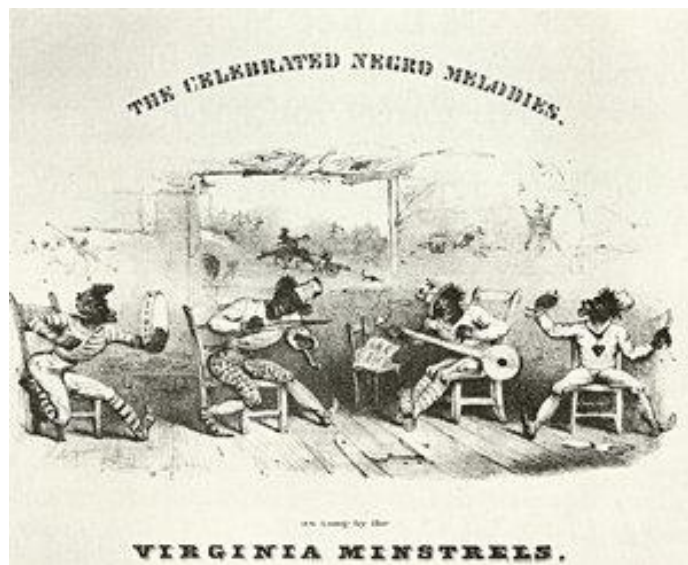
<sup>286</sup> Email interview with Calvin Stewart of the US Navy Steel Band, July 21, 2010.

<sup>287</sup> Personal interview with Ray Funk, December 12, 2009.

<sup>288</sup> For more information on the history of the Vocalion Record label, see Steven Barr, *Brunswick and Vocalion: History of Recorded Sound in Canada* [www.capsnews.org](http://www.capsnews.org) <accessed August 9, 2010>

calypso hits “Yellow Bird,” “South of the Border,” and “Jamaica Farewell.” The album title further presses the point with its contraction of the words “calypso” and “limbo”: “calimbo.”

Every element of the *Calimbo* album was utilized to push the limbo theme, often in ways directed at making the dance more accessible and socially comfortable for white patrons. For instance, beyond the liner notes, the cover art displays the seemingly joyous act of dancing limbo with steel band accompaniment. The overt nature of the black figurines depicted on the album cover was, apparently, less politically dangerous and offensive to the American public in 1962 than one would initially suspect.



**Virginia Minstrels Advertisement (1843)<sup>289</sup>**

Moreover, similarities between the “happy savages” gracing the cover of the *Calimbo* album and nineteenth-century minstrel advertisements (see above) are striking. In this sense, Decca used the images found on the *Calimbo* album to perpetuate derogatory social stereotypes of Afro-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans in order to separate the music

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<sup>289</sup>Kenrick, John, “The History of Minstrel Shows,” <http://www.musicals101.com/minstrel.htm> <accessed November 11, 2010>

from its social context; thus, making it lighter and more appropriate for the frivolity of the limbo.

Bastide's early success with the Virgin Island Steel Band is an interesting contribution to steel pan America; yet, it is evident from Bastide's steel band work that the American perception of steel bands was, by the early 1960s, consistent from coast to coast. The Manhattan calypso-filled repertoire required of working steel bands in New York was the same in Southern California, and Bastide and the Virgin Island Steel Band did little to escape this reality.

Bastide's role in the formation of the Virgin Island Steel Band and the album *Calimbo* are seemingly equaled in importance by his role in aiding Trinidadian steel panists Robert Greenidge to immigrate to the Southern Californian steel band scene in 1971. Robert Greenidge was born in Trinidad in 1950. Prior to his 1971 arrival to the United States, Greenidge served as a longtime arranger and performer with the Port of Spain, Trinidad-based Desperados Steel Orchestra, winning several Panorama large-band category titles and countless other accolades.<sup>290</sup> Greenidge's uncle Carl Greenidge was a renowned steel drum tuner and arranger, and much of Robert Greenidge's musical foundations were developed under his uncle's tutelage.

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<sup>290</sup> Greenidge is still an active Trinidadian Panorama-style arranger and as of Panorama 2010 continues to arrange for Desperados Steel Orchestra of Laventille, Port of Spain, Trinidad.





**Robert Greenidge Press Photo (2009)<sup>291</sup>**

As a young steel panist, Greenidge toured Africa, Canada, Europe and the United States during the late 1960s with the Trinidadian stateside configuration (small group of approximately twenty-four players) of the Desperados Steel Orchestra. Greenidge also took part as a soloist and band member of the government sponsored Trinidad National Steel Orchestra (NTSO) during their 1970 North American tour. Following the tour, Greenidge decided to relocate to the United States in order to pursue steel pan as a full-time occupation. His first stop in the land of opportunity was New York.

While in New York, Greenidge studied classical music composition and arranging techniques at the Third Street Music School Settlement, further expanding his “academic” musical knowledge. The Third Street Music School Settlement is the nation’s oldest community music school and, as we will see in Chapter 7, was part of a large network of settlement houses that aided new immigrants and poor residence of New

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<sup>291</sup> <http://www.chabotsteeldrums.com/images/guestArtists/RobertGreenidge.JPG> <accessed September 15, 2009>

York.<sup>292</sup> While studying at the Third Street Music School Settlement, Greenidge met many developing jazz musicians, and the school provided him with a gateway to the legendary New York jazz scene.<sup>293</sup> New York also provided Greenidge with temporary work as an arranger for the many steel bands that participated in the Brooklyn Carnival each year over Labor Day in late August.

Andrew de la Bastide and Greenidge were acquaintances from their days in Trinidad, and Bastide was friends with the Greenidge's uncle Carl, who was also a panist. In constant search of better players for his steel bands in Southern California, Bastide arranged for Greenidge to join his Los Angeles-based group the Music Makers Steel Orchestra (founded after the Virgin Island Steel Band) for an extensive tour of the Western United States following the Brooklyn Carnival in August of 1971. For the next several years, Greenidge worked on both the east and west coast, playing and arranging steel band upon request. By 1974, having secured several major recording contracts and freelance studio jobs in Southern California, Greenidge left New York to settle permanently in Los Angeles. Through the next several years, he performed and recorded with Earth Wind and Fire, John Lennon, Ringo Starr, Grover Washington Jr., Barry Manilow, and many other major recording artists. Greenidge has made many television

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<sup>292</sup> For more information on the Third Street Music School Settlement, see <http://www.thirdstreetmusicschool.org/index.htm> <accessed September 1, 2010>

<sup>293</sup> I use the word "academic" here in quotation because many steel pan players, especially in Trinidad, are considered to be living separate lives from those academically affiliated or trained. Because most Trinidadian steel band players are not literate in notated music and formal music theory, and learn material through aural transmission, arrange pieces by ear, and have little working knowledge of functional jazz and western classical musical harmony and theory. For a native-born Trinidadian steel pan player to either leave Trinidad and study abroad at a music conservatory or to somehow acquire these academic skills in Trinidad, is a significant feat and worthy of special mention; though it should be noted that times are changing and this is becoming less of a rarity. This situation is still the case today, though there are more opportunities to remedy the deficiencies. Many more steel panists are now going to music conservatories at places such as Northern Illinois University and Government programs such as the Pan Literacy Trust founded by Mark Louquan and others are gaining some popularity within Trinidad. For more information on the Pan Literacy Trust, see <http://guardian.co.tt/features/entertainment/2009/09/22/music-literacy-trust-archives-pan-works> <accessed October 1, 2010>

appearances on shows such as the *Jackson Five Special* (1977), *Love Boat* (1981), *Dynasty* (1982), and *Arsenio Hall* (1990), and, since 1987, has been appeared annually on the Tonight Show, with Johnny Carson (and in later years Jay Leno and Conan O'Brien).<sup>294</sup> He played, too, at the nationally televised performance of President Bill Clinton's inauguration party in 1992, and again at Clinton's birthday celebration in 1995.

Greenidge was active in founding the Los Angeles Despers Steel Orchestra (1978), which, along with the New York Despers, are the American extension of the original WITCO Desperados of Success Village, Laventille, Trinidad. Under Greenidge's directorship, the Los Angeles Despers, consisting of approximately twenty steel panists, enjoyed significant success with performances at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics and several national and international tours. In 1985, Greenidge stepped down as the Los Angeles Despers' acting director and arranger in order focus his arranging energies on the WITCO Desperados of Trinidad. This move proved extremely fruitful for both parties. With Greenidge serving as lead arranger, the WITCO Desperados won Panorama titles in 1991 (with the tune "Musical Volcano") and again in 1994 (with the tune "Heat" which is also the title track of Greenidge's third solo album).<sup>295</sup> Despite his position as lead arranger with the WITCO Desperados; Greenidge continues to reside in Los Angeles and only returns to Trinidad for the Carnival season in January and February.

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<sup>294</sup> [www.robertgreenidge.com/biography](http://www.robertgreenidge.com/biography) <accessed May 1, 2009>

<sup>295</sup> The term "own-tune" is a phrase used to describe a Panorama steel band arrangement that does not use a calypso or a soca tune as the melodic basis for the work. The melody is freshly conceived and is therefore regarded as the composer's "own" tune.



**Jimmy Buffett (Center) and Robert Greenidge (Center back)**<sup>296</sup>

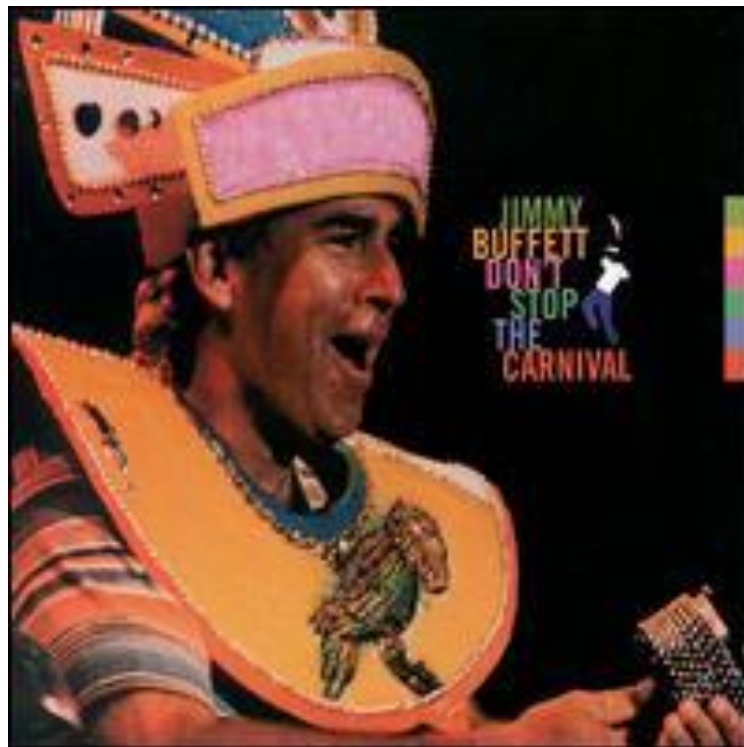
Despite Greenidge's many marquee performances, his best-known work has been nearly thirty-years of continued performing and recording with the popular American recording artist Jimmy Buffet. Greenidge joined Buffet's back-up group, the Coral Reefers Band, in 1983, and has been a regular member ever since. Greenidge was first enlisted to join Buffett for the album *One Particular Harbor*, recorded and released in 1983. The album features several songs which would eventually become Buffett's signature hits, including the title track "One Particular Harbor." By the time of Greenidge's arrival, Buffett's career as a recording artist was already a decade in the making; however, the addition of the pianist punctuated a major stylistic and artistic shift for Buffett.

Despite his initial career success as a country singer, which began in the early 1970s in Nashville, Buffett didn't hit his stride until he shifted his focus away from country music in favor of a decidedly tropical style. A breakthrough came in 1977 with "Margaritaville," and it was following this success that Buffett sought to sustain his

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<sup>296</sup> [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/6/66/Coral\\_Reefers\\_band.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/6/66/Coral_Reefers_band.jpg) <accessed September 9, 2010>

newly-created pan-Caribbean sound. This new sound, however, was not to be heard as representative of the Caribbean from an insider's perspective. Rather, Buffett's new sound was intended as an Americanized take on Caribbean music much the same way Manhattan-calypso remade traditional calypso into a style favored by the American cultural mainstream. Buffett's pan-Caribbean sound that resembles American country music, in which the slide guitar and violin are replaced by the steel pan, and the whole package is backed by Latin percussion. At its core, the resulting style is essentially a hybrid American folk-inspired country and Caribbean music amalgam with little musical substance that supplies a surprisingly effective foundation for Buffett to croon songs reminiscing about island life and vacations past.



**Jimmy Buffett's *Don't Stop the Carnival* (1998)<sup>297</sup>**

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<sup>297</sup> [http://www.altnet.com/album/2061300/Dont\\_Stop\\_The\\_Carnival.aspx](http://www.altnet.com/album/2061300/Dont_Stop_The_Carnival.aspx) <accessed November 11, 2010>

For his part, Greenidge fit perfectly into the sound and image of Buffett's creation. His excellent musicianship provided the Coral Reefers Band with timely melodic accompaniment on the steel pan, which served to enhance the island sound desired by Buffett. Greenidge's Afro-Caribbean heritage further served to lend racial authenticity to Buffett's pan-Caribbean image in a way that Buffett could not claim as a white Southerner from Alabama, despite his attempts at dressing in Carnival mas costumes during concerts and for press photos. Another example of Buffett using the island imagery is the programmatic album *Don't Stop the Carnival* (1998), his twenty-third studio album, which loosely follows the plot of the 1965 novel of the same name written by Herman Wouk. The twenty original compositions of the album were drawn from a stage play of the same name created by Buffett in collaboration with Wouk.<sup>298</sup> The show opened in Miami in 1998 but was a short-lived, running for six weeks, and the positive review from Miami critic Howard Cohen did little to warrant a long-term run of the show.<sup>299</sup> Regardless of the show's shortcomings, Buffett understood public relations and had grander intentions for the musical. According to a critic from the *Palm Beach Post*:

Like his *Don't Stop the Carnival* main character Norman Paperman, Palm Beach pop composer *Jimmy Buffett* understands public relations. He knows that getting his reggae-and-steel-band island-tinged theater score into the hands and heads of his fans might move him closer to the Broadway hit he so craves. So, as Paul Simon did with his short-lived Capeman, Buffett has recorded a pre-Broadway "concept album" of the show's songs. . . .<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> <http://www.margaritaville.com/> <accessed November 22, 2010>

<sup>299</sup> Howard Cohen, "Jimmy Buffett," *Miami Herald*, Miami, Florida, April 24, 1998, pg G 16.

<sup>300</sup> Staff Writer, "Buffett Shops 'Carnival'; Rap Mob Delivers Goods," *Palm beach Post*, West Palm Beach, Florida, April 24, 1998, pg 19.

The album, however, reached the top twenty of the *Billboard* charts later that year based in large part to its pan-Caribbean sound and Buffett's loyal fan base. Moreover, it should be noted that throughout the course of the 1980s and 2000s, Buffett earned more money from touring than from album proceeds, and the addition of Greenidge to the Coral Reefers Band helped Buffett's success by visually and aurally supported the island theme and identity of his music.<sup>301</sup>

Ultimately, Greenidge's worldwide exposure as a recording artist and his membership in the Coral Reefers Band paved the way for many other steel panists to find work in the popular music context. Greenidge is particularly significant as an early pioneer in the style of mixed ensemble (steel pan plus other electro-acoustic instruments, such as piano and bass guitar) playing in the United States. Following the lead of Greenidge, many steel panists became successful in jazz and popular music settings. Because of the pioneering work of Greenidge and Basitide, the current steel band scene in Southern California is a hotbed for performers and aficionados alike, boasting more working steel bands than anywhere in the United States.<sup>302</sup>

## Chapter Conclusions

In a sense, Jimmy Buffett is a caricature of Manhattan Calypso and his music perpetuates many of the same fun-in-the-sun stereotypes that Belafonte and Rollins sought to transcend. Yet, Buffett's music, much like Belafonte's, has the unique ability to

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<sup>301</sup> Steve Eng, *Jimmy Buffett: The Man from Margaritaville Revealed* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997).

<sup>302</sup> This statement should perhaps be qualified. There is no concrete numbers to fully conclude this statement; however, based on the union figures for New York and Southern California including San Diego, Los Angeles, San Jose, etc., the later does indeed have more union registered steel bands.

capture the imagination of the American mainstream and has come to sonically represent the island sound for many listeners. As mentioned previously in this study, due in large part to the popularity of Belafonte's work as a Caribbean folk singer, any musical style, instrument, or sound that was associated with the calypso craze adopted the a pan-Caribbean identity. This sound/image connection is channeled by any pan-Caribbean experience spanning a broad array of elements from Caribbean themed parties, casino vacations, summertime coastal festivals, cocktail hour at wedding receptions, to calypso recordings and the sound of steel drums. It is precisely *this* relationship, the relationship of the consumer/tourist's desire to be transported to the Caribbean islands either literally or figuratively, where the steel pan and calypso music found their voice in post-calypso craze America.

In the end, the musical agents discussed in this chapter display a varying range of Caribbean and American popular music styles that each contributed to the steel pan's representations of sound and image within the development of steel pan in America. Belafonte became a famous singer, and the success of his *Calypso* album, despite its unlikelihood, was aimed at broadening the focus and scope of Caribbean music. Rollins utilized calypso as a vehicle for his art and infused his virtuosic skills into the tuneful music of his Caribbean heritage. The critical and commercial success of "St. Thomas" and the *Saxophone Colossus* album allowed Rollins the opportunity to find his stylistic voice by freely explore the integration of Caribbean musical styles into jazz. Bastide and the Virgin Island Steel Band forged a steel pan path through Southern Californian music scene. Belafonte, Rollins, the Esso Trinidad Tripooli steel band, and Bastide laid the groundwork for panist Robert Greenidge to enjoy the success with Jimmy Buffet as he



found his pan-Caribbean voice in the feel-good conscious of the American cultural mainstream.

All of the subjects explored in this chapter display the adaptability of steel pan and steel panists and whether it is the tuneful style of calypso music, the strong association of the steel pan sound with the Caribbean, or the ability of the steel pan to trigger ephemeral visions of island happiness, the steel pan has an impressive degree of adaptability. The malleability of the steel bands sound, as described by Seeger in the beginning of Chapter 3, has, in a way, succeeded in cloaking the cultural baggage and politics of traditional steel band music in favor of a newly constructed American identity.

## Chapter 7

### The Making of Andy Narell: Jazz Pan Pioneer



Andy Narell (2009)<sup>303</sup>

If the music itself were just another version of Harry Belafonte’s diluted “rum and coke” brand of 50s Day-O drivel, then Narell’s *Treasures* would remain hidden. As it is, Andy gives new dignity and stature to the steel drum.<sup>304</sup>

Andy Narell has dedicated his life to playing and advocating for the steel pan.

One can argue that Narell, more than any other American (or arguably Trinidadian) steel panist with the exception of Ellie Mannette, is responsible for establishing and fostering

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<sup>303</sup> Photo courtesy of [www.andynarell.net](http://www.andynarell.net) <accessed May1, 2010>

<sup>304</sup> Lee Underwood, “Andy Narell” *Down Beat Magazine*, Vol. 47, No. 6 (June 1980), Pg. 56-57.

an American steel pan scene and is a key agent in propelling steel pan to its current state of global recognition. Narell's story is unique within the American steel pan narrative, and his contributions to the development of steel pan in America become even more improbable considering his middle-class New York roots and Jewish-American heritage. Interestingly, unlike his Trinidadian predecessors who progressed through the steel band ranks performing and arranging Trinidadian-style Panorama tunes in the Carnival competition circuit, Narell's route to steel pan greatness took a different path, firmly entrenched in the stylistic mediums of jazz and fusion.

The following discussion is a study of Andy Narell's career, highlighting early successes, his work with the Steel Bandits steel band, his move to California in 1970, and his embrace of jazz music. Narell's father Murry was a key agent in the early development of the American steel band in the 1960s, and a discussion of Murry's career—particularly his involvement with the Lower East Side Settlement House in Manhattan—is essential to understanding Andy Narell's steel pan heritage. Moreover, the early musical influences that led Narell to become the world's most recognizable steel panist draw largely from his father's work as a social worker in Manhattan. The steel pan roots of Andy Narell are in many ways the roots of steel pan in America and this chapter aims to discuss Narell in terms of his involvement with the Lower East Side Settlement House steel band project, his membership in the American steel drum ensemble *The Steel Bandits*, and his later solo jazz career. As such, this chapter begins with an in-depth discussion of Andy Narell's father Murry Narell and the Lower East Side Settlement House steel band project in Manhattan. The elder Narell was a true pioneer in the steel band movement in New York and his efforts in Manhattan laid the

foundation for the current development of steel pan in America. The second section of this chapter is a thorough discussion of the *Steel Bandits* which were an American steel drum ensemble comprised of Narell family members that featured the young Andy Narell on tenor steel pan. The group—born out of Murry Narell’s work with the Lower East Side Settlement House—was a major regional success from 1962 to 1970, recording an album for *Decca* and appearing on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. The third section of this chapter is a discussion of Andy Narell’s solo jazz steel pan career. It chronicles Narell’s success in establishing his solo jazz career, his work with the *Caribbean Jazz Project*, his popularity in South Africa, and the process of finding his own voice as a musician and performer of jazz on the steel pan.

The narrative of Narell’s life in steel pan is important for locating many of the driving factors behind the global success of the steel pan during the past fifty years. As Lee Underwood of *Down Beat* magazine suggests in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, Narell displays a concerted effort towards elevating the stature of, and giving dignity to, the steel pan.<sup>305</sup> To this end, this chapter explores the delicate balance between tradition and creative growth juggled by Narell while simultaneously attempting to find his personal voice as a musician. His integration of jazz and steel pan, and an analysis of the attitudes, perceptions, and struggles Narell encountered, and continues to encounter along his life-journey in steel pan, serve as an excellent case study for the perils and triumphs endured and celebrated by a successful American steel panist and global steel pan icon.

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<sup>305</sup>Ibid.

## **Steel Pan, A Family Affair: Murry Narell**

For Andy Narell, steel pan has always been a family affair. For the past forty years, Narell and his older brother Jeff have been two steadfast members of a small but growing number of steel panists that earn a sustainable income from the performance of steel pan. Andy Narell has released eighteen studio albums since 1979, and he has consistently been a highly sought after clinician and steel pan soloist for the past thirty years. How a Jewish boy from Manhattan emerged as one of the leading international figures of the steel pan, the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago, is a fascinating story. It is one that began in New York in the early 1960s, where Andy Narell's father, Murry, was a social worker on Lower East Side of Manhattan. According to Andy:

I got into this [steel pan] when I was about seven years old, my dad was doing social work with street gangs, on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. He kind of happened upon steel band music accidentally, there was a guy who wasn't working out at another job and they asked him what else he knew how to do and he said he could make and play these. And he had him build one set of instruments and teach one group, and it went through the roof.

By introducing Andy and his brother Jeff to the steel pan and helping Ellie Mannette move permanently from Trinidad in to New York in 1967, Murry Narell was no doubt one of the driving forces behind the early development of steel pan in America. How Murry Narell became acquainted with steel pan is worth discussing, as it laid the groundwork for much of Andy Narell's early steel pan career.

Murry Narell had been a social worker on the Lower East Side in Manhattan for some time prior to his discovery of steel pan. He worked for a social outreach program

called the Educational Alliance, which had an outreach center at the Lower East Side Cultural Center. Murry earned a reputation throughout the Lower East Side as a caring public servant and dedicated social worker; however, social work was not his first career choice, and he initially chose a different path in life. In the early 1940s, Narell attended the Connecticut teachers college—then called the Normal School, now Central Connecticut State University—and set out on a course towards a life in education.

Following his matriculation from the Normal School in 1945, Narell accepted a teaching position at Greenburgh High School in Greenburgh, New York where he taught classes in science and mathematics. A conservative suburb of New York City, it appears as though Greenburgh was not ready for the young Narell and his progressive politics, and, following a contentious school board meeting, he was fired in 1946.<sup>306</sup> Narell was accused of overtly integrating discussions of politics and religion into his lessons on mathematics and science, perhaps a foreshadowing of his future life in the American communist party and as a social worker in Manhattan. According to newspaper reports, with a raucous gallery and police presence, the school board voted not to renew Narell's contract. For his part, Murry Narell denied the claims against him, including one that claimed he criticized the Catholic Church. In the end, Narell admitted to calling the Pope and Cardinal Francis Spellman fascists, but defended himself nonetheless and argued "If the Pope can get into politics, why can't I?"<sup>307</sup>

Leaving the fallout of the Greenburgh behind, Murry Narell turned his attention to New York City and enrolled in the prestigious Columbia Teachers College. At Columbia, a chance meeting led to Narell's acquaintance with his future wife Irena (Andy's

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<sup>306</sup> *Herald Statesman*, Yonkers, New York, June 18, 1946, pg 4.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*

Mother), a politically active student who hailed from a family of politically active Polish immigrants. Irena had traveled with her father to New York in 1939 to attend the World's Fair. While they were abroad Poland was invaded by Nazi forces, leaving her in exile in the United States.<sup>308</sup> In their native Poland, Irena Narell's father was a lawyer and socialist/communist party official and organizer. Murry Narell was greatly influenced by his spouse and became a socialist, joining the American Communist Party, organizing workers from around New York into unions, and becoming active in the American socialist movement (known as the Progressive Party) led by Henry Wallace in the late 1940s. Murry Narell would later rescind his devotion to socialism following a disenchanting trip to Poland in the late 1950s. But as a result of his involvement with Wallace's Progressive Party, Murry Narell was never able to land a teaching post as he was blacklisted from the profession in New York and elsewhere. Following his graduation from Columbia in 1950 Narell bounced around New York, relying on nepotism for odd jobs. With the realization that his teaching career was behind him, Narell focused his energy and passion on social work, which proved a good match for his training as a teacher and his leftist political conscience. One of his former associates from his communist party days helped Narell secure employment in Harlem, working in street gang cessation projects. Narell soon found himself working with Jewish, Caribbean, Puerto Rican, and other immigrant communities at the Lower East Side Settlement House as a project coordinator and social worker.

Murry Narell was a fan of folk music and jazz, and he regularly exposed his family to the rich musical fabric of New York City in the 1950s and 1960s. Perhaps swept away by the calypso fever that struck America during the late 1950s and early

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<sup>308</sup> Email correspondence with Dr. Jeannine Remy, August 17, 2010.

1960s, Murry and his family regularly attended the calypso-themed concerts still popular in and around New York during the early 1960s. At one particular concert in 1960, Narell was enchanted by a touring steel drum band from St. Thomas that was making a well publicized appearance in New York.<sup>309</sup> After the show, Murry Narell went backstage and introduced his family to the steel band. Here he further questioned members of the ensemble for more information on steel drums, and he immediately became taken with the unique and somewhat mystical sound of the instrument. But more importantly, upon hearing the stories of the birth of the steel band movement in Trinidad Narell recognized similarities between the young Caribbean men performing on the steel drums and the young gang and at-risk youth with whom he worked on a daily basis. Thinking holistically about his social work and the utility of the arts, Narell began a quest to tap the potential of the instrument's ability to create a sense of community.

What became immediately apparent to Narell, though not immediately to the American public, was that the steel pan ensemble offered Manhattan juveniles the perfect opportunity to participate in music instead of in trouble. Narell may have been a political radical, but he also could identify opportunity, and logical utility, when it presented itself. Andy Narell addressed his father's knack for seizing opportunity in the liner notes to his album *Down the Road*. The album was released in 1992, one year after Murry Narell passed away:

A radical thinker and a fighter for his beliefs, he [Murry Narell] gave me my sense of direction. He also gave me a steel pan that he brought home from Trinidad—the same one that I play at the end of this recording. Even though he had no musical background, he saw the enormous potential of the instrument, and he became obsessed with the idea that the pan would

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<sup>309</sup>Touring steel bands was a common practice of early Caribbean and Trinidadian steel bands during the 1950s and 60s. Please see chapter 3 and 6 for more information on this practice and its implications towards the American steel band movement.



become a positive force in our culture. He started steel bands all over New York City and organized the first steel band festival in the U.S. in 1962.<sup>310</sup>

For Murry Narell, the inherent possibilities of steel band were endless, and following his discovery of the instrument he immediately sought to incorporate steel band ensembles into his curriculum at the Lower East Side Settlement House. Moreover, Narell wanted to provide access to free steel drums for the youth of his district, many of whom were first generation and/or newly immigrated persons of West Indian lineage. It will become evident over the course of this chapter that Andy Narell, following clearly in his father's footsteps, is committed to making steel pan accessible for new audiences. Moreover, Andy Narell is far more interested in steel pan being a positive force capable of social change than in selling albums.

### **The Educational Alliance and “Operation Street Corner”**

Murry Narell's desire to start a steel band ensemble at the Lower East Side Settlement House initially stalled due to lack of funding. The chance finally presented itself by means of “Operation Street Corner” a groundbreaking program launched a decade earlier (1956) by the parent organization of the Lower East Side Settlement House called the Education Alliance. By the mid 1960s “Operation Street Corner” was picking up steam. The founding initiatives of the program were aimed at curbing drug addiction and violence in juveniles who were deemed “at-risk” by society. Furthermore, the youth targeted by “Operation Street Corner” displayed what a *New York Times* columnist describes as “anti-social behavior, but had not yet got into trouble” or in this case legal

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<sup>310</sup> Andy Narell, *Down the Road* (Palo Alto, California: Windham Hill Records, 1992).

trouble.<sup>311</sup> The Education Alliance was originally a Jewish organization formed in 1889 to serve the at-risk youth of the predominantly Jewish neighborhoods surrounding lower East Broadway in Manhattan.<sup>312</sup> According to the Educational Alliance, “Operation Street Corner” was further born out of necessity in the 1950s due to the changing neighborhood demographics which, though still predominantly Jewish, saw a marked increase in the Puerto Rican, Caribbean, Chinese, and Black populations in the late 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>313</sup>

“Operation Street Corner” featured several programs and opportunities to engage juveniles from varying socioeconomic and racial backgrounds in order to create a sense of community pride and, more importantly, to occupy the impressionable youth during the at-risk hours of 3-8pm on weekdays. The program included remedial education classes, group counseling, paid internships, and a plethora of educational offerings in the arts, including visual arts, theater arts, dance, and music.<sup>314</sup> The partnership between the Education Alliance and the various settlement houses throughout New York City was fruitful, and boasted a formidable list of alumni who received training and/or social services from “Operation Street Corner” and/or the organization’s many other programs.<sup>315</sup> In particular, both the Lower East Side Settlement House and the Educational Alliance had a strong tradition of supporting educational efforts in visual art.

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<sup>311</sup> “Youthful addicts aided on the east side,” *New York Times*, May 25, 1961.

<sup>312</sup> The Educational Alliance is still in active at the time of this study. More information can be found at <http://www.edalliance.org/>.

<sup>313</sup> <http://www.edalliance.org/> <accessed June 27, 2010>

<sup>314</sup> “East Side Service Marks 7<sup>th</sup> Year,” *New York Times*, April 14, 1966.

<sup>315</sup> The Educational Alliance, and by extension the Lower East Side Settlement House, was particularly known throughout New York for their innovative approaches to social service during the 1950s and 1960s. Their approach was heralded for the unique and productive combination of innovation and tradition. “Operation Street Corner” marked an expansion in range and scope of cultural programs offered by the Educational Alliance and a successful attempt at reaching out to the increasing Caribbean population of the area. The steel band program at the Lower East Side Settlement House was the most popular of these new offerings and a shining example of the program’s diversity.

Artists such as Ben Shahn, Mark Rothko, Jacob Epstein, Peter Blume, Leonard Baskin, Chaim Gross, Jo Davidson, Isaac and Moses Soyer—a formidable roster of graduates—all studied in the organization’s programs at some level. Outside the visual arts, the organization’s success in shaping successful and productive citizens is further born out in the figures of several other notable contemporary alumni include David Sarnoff (the one-time head of the Radio Corporation of America), Dancer/Entertainer Arthur Murray, several State of New York district court judges, college professors, and other public officials, such as the New York Commissioner of Corrections.<sup>316</sup>

The Lower East Side Settlement House itself was an independent organization that partnered with the Education Alliance in order to implement targeted local help and initiatives that often rivaled or overlapped with similar programs as a 1966 *New York Times* article summarized:

The settlement provides a number of other programs for all ages including art, day nursery, mental health services, workshops and vocational guidance. It also serves as a training center for a number of graduate students from the city’s seven graduate schools of social work, each of whom does 21 hours of weekly field work. The alliance is staffed by 24 professional social workers and 19 day-care teachers.<sup>317</sup>

The ample supply of social workers and the frequently rotating supply of social work graduate students would provide Murry Narell with a diverse supply of assistants eager to implement his steel band experiment and learn from his own unorthodox approach to social work.

Following the inspiring 1960 St. Thomas steel band concert, Narell anxiously waited for his opportunity to attain the instruments and implement his steel pan curriculum at the settlement house. With grants from “Operation Street Corner” Narell

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<sup>316</sup> “Alliance looks at its 76 Years,” *New York Times*, June 1, 1965.

<sup>317</sup> “East Side Service Marks 7<sup>th</sup> Year,” *New York Times*, April 14, 1966.

saw his chance, and, this time with adequate funding and support from administration, immediately began implementing his steel band curriculum. One of the core mission goals of “Operation Street Corner” was community service, and Narell capitalized on the visibility of steel band to perform countless community concerts, benefits, parades and other highly visible affairs promoting the Lower East Side Settlement House and “Operation Street Corner.” For the Narell family and the Lower East Side Settlement House steel band groups, a typical community service event would involve driving to the Lower East Side on a Saturday, loading a bus with kids from the Educational Alliance, and traveling to Rockaway Beach in Queens, New York, for an afternoon of performing.<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Phone Interview with Andy Narell [in Paris], August 18, 2008.



**Executive Director Louis Berkowitz (center) and Robert Kennedy (Right) at an “Operation Street Corner” Fundraiser (1962)<sup>319</sup>**

“Operation Street Corner” and the steel band program initiated by Murry Narell was a sufficiently effective demonstration of the Educational Alliance’s mission that the organization used the initiative in promotional materials. For example, a select group of steel pan students performed a special concert for Attorney General Robert Kennedy (Above) when he toured the facilities of the Lower East Side Settlement House in 1962 as a representative for the President’s Committee on Juvenile Delinquency. Kennedy was particularly interested in the “Mobilization of Youth” programs at the Lower East Side

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<sup>319</sup>[http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.edalliance.org/files/2006/09/21/12/49/18/circusweb.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.edalliance.org/index.php%3Fsection%3Darticle%26album\\_id%3D12&h=335&w=200&sz=75&hl=en&start=20&um=1&tbnid=lAKYrmuPNgRQJM:&tbnh=119&tbnw=71&prev=/images%3Fq%3DOperation%2BStreet%2BCorner%2Band%2Beducation%2Balliance%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den%26rlz%3D1T4DKUS\\_enUS245US247](http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.edalliance.org/files/2006/09/21/12/49/18/circusweb.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.edalliance.org/index.php%3Fsection%3Darticle%26album_id%3D12&h=335&w=200&sz=75&hl=en&start=20&um=1&tbnid=lAKYrmuPNgRQJM:&tbnh=119&tbnw=71&prev=/images%3Fq%3DOperation%2BStreet%2BCorner%2Band%2Beducation%2Balliance%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den%26rlz%3D1T4DKUS_enUS245US247) <accessed May, 16, 2009>

Settlement House, but did take time to ask several question steel band members during his visit.

If the Educational Alliance saw fit to use the steel bands for public relations, Narell had other ideas for “Operation Street Corner.” One of these was as a teaching tool for the counselors and young social workers working under him. Narell and company sought to channel the energy of the underserved and notoriously violent youth of the Lower East Side into positive music making rather than delinquency and crime. Narell thought the raw, unbridled, and dynamic rhythmic nature of steel pan music, and the cooperative teamwork and social equality attached with steel band in Trinidad, was precisely the medium by which these New York youth could occupy their afterschool hours in a positive way. In this cause, Narell had an ally in folklorist and folksinger Pete Seeger who, as we have seen had already helped Trinidadian Kim Loy Wong establish a similar program at the University Settlement, New York. Seeger, other well-known musicians, and steel drum players such as Rudy King, held workshops throughout New York. One such performance caught the attention of *New York Times* columnist Gay Talese, who wrote about the workshop in Greenwich Village under the headline “70 in Village Given Lessons on How to make Steel Drums.” Under the article heading “Some More Noise,” Talese summarizes the public’s sentiment concerning the “strangely evocative” steel drums, while Seeger argues for their worth as musical instruments, community builders, and as tools for juvenile control.

When played by skilled young drummers, such as those who performed yesterday in the basement of the Judson Memorial Church on Thompson Street, the sounds are thrilling, vibrant and strangely evocative. Some in this city may wonder: Does New York need such sounds? “Yes” said Pete Seeger, the folk singer, before introducing the teen-age drummers from the University Settlement House to the gathering. His view is that youths who

pound drums have less energy for pounding each other in juvenile gang fights. “Also,” he said, “there’s a kind of raucous democracy about a steel band...”<sup>320</sup>

This article—written in June of 1961—shows that the need for such an outlet for youth was present in New York during this time. In this sense, Narell was at the cutting edge of a potentially exciting new social movement. Moreover, steel pan advocates, such as Seeger, envisioned a future in which the steel pan ensemble could rise out the ashes of the imploded calypso craze and function as a legitimate vehicle for public good.

Seeger, Murry Narell loved the culture and politicized music of Trinidad; however, unlike Seeger he was not a trained steel panist or musician. He also knew that acquiring steel pans was a difficult proposition, and their significant upkeep and maintenance require trained professionals. How Narell actually acquired steel drums and the working knowledge required to run an ensemble is another extraordinary circumstance, one that relies on a failing social work student named Rupert Sterling.

Sterling was an Antiguan exchange student who worked under Murry Narell and, as Andy Narell suggest, was not working out in other social work capacities for the Lower East Side Settlement House:

There was a guy there they [Lower East Side Settlement House] hired to work at a summer camp and his name was Rupert Sterling, and he was from Antigua, and he wasn’t working out too well at his job, and they asked him what else he knew how to do, and he said “I play steel pan.” He knew how to make them, as well...<sup>321</sup>

Desperate to find the right match for Sterling, Narell was delighted to discover that the young West Indian could make and play steel drums. In fact, Sterling was one of only a

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<sup>320</sup> Gay Talese, “70 in ‘Village’ Given Lessons on How to Make Steel Drums,” *New York Times*, June 19, 1961.

<sup>321</sup> Phone Interview with Andy Narell [in Paris], August 18, 2008.

few West Indians living in New York at the time with such a package of skills.<sup>322</sup>

Sterling was immediately charged by Narell to make a set of drums and begin teaching a group of students the basics of playing steel drums. Sterling excelled at his new assignment, and the newly created steel pan ensemble was instantly successful, quickly becoming an important draw and resource for Narell and the other social workers in their district.

According to Andy Narell, Sterling was adequate and knowledgeable in the current tastes and styles of steel band music both in the Caribbean and New York. However, his instructional prowess aside, perhaps Sterling's greatest contribution to the ensemble was his ability to build steel pans and to supply the fledgling program of the Lower East Side Settlement House with the equipment they so desperately needed. At its height in 1967, the Lower East Side program boasted some twenty different steel bands. Sterling built two complete sets of pans for the program, enough for approximately twenty students in each band, and the different groups cycled in and out of two separate rooms for rehearsals.

According to Jeff Narell, a diverse population of kids participated in the steel pan program. He further notes that the kids who participated in the steel pan program were drawn from the dominant ethnic demographics of each particular local neighborhood from the area surrounding the Lower East Side Settlement House. African-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and other at-risk kids came to the community center for weekly practice sessions. Each individual band was comprised of social groups segregated by race and heritage, largely in an effort to curtail violence and to create a sense of ethnic pride. Jeff Narell indicates that each band was a particular street gang, and that in the interest of

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<sup>322</sup> Most notably among the others were Kim Loy Wong and Rudy King.



friendly musical competition and logical autocratic governance the segregation of each ensemble was enforced.<sup>323</sup>



**Narell led Groups of the Lower East Side Settlement House,  
Pan American Day New York City, 1963<sup>324</sup>**

For Sterling, the gang-like atmosphere of the steel pan program was reminiscent of his personal childhood experiences in Antigua and he connected well with the students in the program.

Besides his daily duties as a social worker and steel drum builder, Sterling was also a professional-level panist. Outside of his tenure with Murry Narell and the community center, Sterling was the leading of his own steel band, the *North Star Steel Band*, which recorded albums and performed for cruise ship audiences on various vessels of the North Star Cruise lines.

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<sup>323</sup>A. Myrna Nurse, *Unheard Voices: The Rise of Steelband and Calypso in the Caribbean and North America* (New York: IUniverse Press, 2007), Pg 162.

<sup>324</sup>Janine Tiffe, "The Arrival of Steel Pan in the United States," *Percussive Notes*, Vol. No. June 2007.



**Rupert Sterling, Center-Kneeling (1963)<sup>325</sup>**

The North Star Steel Band contained approximately nine members and played a variety of contemporary American calypso-craze influenced tunes including arrangements of “Swanee River,” “Heart and Soul,” “Lazy Man,” and “Azul Panchanga.” The players on Sterling’s album, seen on the album cover above, were all Lower East Side Settlement House youths who went through the steel band program and were recruited by Sterling to play in his band. In fact, this group performed throughout New York and competed at the

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<sup>325</sup> Rupert Sterling, *Rupert Sterling and his North Star Steel Band*, TLP 865 (New York: Treasure Productions, 1965).

Steel Band National Championships held in 1964, which was organized at the behest of Murry Narell.<sup>326</sup>

The North Star Steel Band appeared on national television multiple times—the most notable of these was a performance on the Mike Wallace PM East-PM West Show in 1967—and made countless appearances on the university circuit, including Cornell University and many other East Coast universities. Like other working steel bands in New York, Sterling and the North Star Steel Band played primarily Caribbean-themed parties, calypso clubs, and night clubs throughout the East Coast and the English speaking American Caribbean Island vacation destinations such as the Bahamas and Antigua. Sterling and North Star Steel Band were undoubtedly influenced by the exotica and calypso craze of the late 1950s and 1960, and this influence is made increasingly apparent by the cover art of group’s self-titled album TLP865 (see above) which depicts the players in straw hats and vibrant, gaudy, costumed shirts, with the following liner notes:

This group [Rupert Sterling and the North Star Steel Orchestra] has also performed at many of the smarter clubs along the east coast, and has been featured through the Westchester—New York City area. The band led by Rupert Sterling from Antigua, West Indies, transcends the very nature of this tropical paradise. Sterling and his band assert tone variations and rhythms obtained from the drums that will astound the young and make the old feel “like young”.<sup>327</sup>

The concept of bringing the *other* to your own living room stereo system is a common trope among exotica records of this era, and the “astounding rhythms that make the old feel young” is a play on the hegemonic notions of youthful exuberance so commonly attributed to Harry Belafonte and other Manhattan-style calypso craze music. Yet Sterling

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<sup>326</sup> Phone Interview with Andy Narell [in Paris], August 18, 2008.

<sup>327</sup> Rupert Sterling, *Rupert Sterling and his North Star Steel Band*, TLP 865 (New York: Treasure Productions, 1965).

was much more than this for the youth of the Lower East Side Settlement House steel band project, and his early guidance was key in shaping the program. Sterling's influence at the Lower East Side Settlement House was also felt by Andy Narell, a point to which I will return later in this chapter.

Murry Narell's background in political activism made his work with steel bands a natural transition. At Sterling's suggestion, Murry Narell also formed his own family into a small band that would often accompany the Lower East Side Settlement House steel bands in concert. In a *New York Times* article from April 9, 1967, columnist Raymond Ericson wrote a promotional piece for the Steel Bandits (the Narell family steel band) titled "It's Not Just Saturday Nights Anymore at Hunter," previewing an upcoming Philharmonic (Avery Fisher) Hall concert in which both the Steel Bandits and the Lower East Side Settlement House steel bands were to perform:

Several young Steel Bandits will invade Philharmonic Hall next Saturday afternoon. For from being delinquents, they are performers on the relatively new form of instruments created from oil drums. Called "pans", a full ensemble of them makes up the steel band of Caribbean origin and current popularity. What seems most important about the Steel Bandits is a sidelight on their craft. Murray Narell, father of two of the boys in the group, is a social worker. Some time ago he became fascinated by the instruments and had them demonstrated to the kids of the Lower East Side with whom he was dealing. The youngsters took to them eagerly. Some who had never participated in group activities quickly became proficient, discovering a talent for playing by ear. Mr Narell also introduced the instruments to his family and experimented with American tunes and arrangements. The sons' group, the Steel Bandits, caught on at country club dances, then went on to concert programs. "Mr Narell says that pans can be homemade, but he does not recommend it...A complete ready-made set for schools costs \$300. He thinks it's worth it as a means to win over and make beaters out of beats."<sup>328</sup>

The last sentence of this quote is particularly significant as it summarizes Murry Narell's motivation for the steel band program at the Lower East Side Settlement House and

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<sup>328</sup> *New York Times*, April 9, 1967.

explains the environment in which Andy Narell was introduced to steel pan. The notion that steel pan is ideal “as a means to win over and make beaters out of beats” resonates, too, with Pete Seeger and his 1956 ‘how-to-build’ manual for steel drums. As Seeger comments in a letter to Admiral Daniel Gallery:

What I am sure of is that right now the steel band can fill a niche unoccupied in American life since the decline of the fife and drum corps. Here is something for a gang of young people to latch on to, and let the whole world know that they are around. Steel Pans are cheap, hard to break, and can be played in the rain or snow. Everyone can participate on his or her own level.<sup>329</sup>

Narell, Seeger, and Admiral Gallery all foresaw the capacity of steel pan to reach the masses, reform the delinquents, and fill a void in American life. And Narell and Seeger—more than Gallery—exemplified the social ideal of actually attempting to implement an actual steel pan program in a public setting. Moreover, Andy Narell’s respect for the history and cultural of Trinidad, and his deeply-held passion for the preservation and global promotion of steel pan, are direct influences of his father’s social conscious.

Despite ties to communist party and folk music that paralleled Murry Narell, Pete Seeger did not directly aid the steel band program at the Lower East Side Settlement House. According to Jeff and Andy Narell, Seeger and Murry Narell were acquaintances and the two met a few times in New York.<sup>330</sup> Seeger came to the settlement house multiple times to perform folk concerts, and Andy Narell met the folklorist as a young child. As discussed in Chapter 3, Seeger was certainly enthusiastic about steel pan, but his energies appear to have missed the Narell family and focused on the United States Navy Steel Band and Trinidadian Kim Loy Wong.

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<sup>329</sup> Letter from Pete Seeger to Daniel Gallery, collected papers of Daniel V. Gallery, Nimitz Library, United States Navy.

<sup>330</sup> Personal Interview with Jeff Narell September 30, 2008 and Phone Interview with Andy Narell [in Paris], August 18, 2008.

## Enter Ellie Mannette

Rupert Sterling served as the primary steel pan builder and educator for the Lower East Side Settlement House steel band project for approximately seven years, outlasting Narell, who left his post in the late 1960s to take an assistant directorship at a YWCA in Hackensack, New Jersey. Upon his resignation from the Lower East Side Settlement House, Murry Narell successfully arranged for famed steel pan builder and tuner Ellie Mannette to permanently emigrate from Trinidad to Manhattan where he would take over the production and tuning of the steel pans for the Lower East Side Settlement House in 1967. Mannette's arrival in New York was years in the making; Narell had made several trips to Trinidad throughout the 1960s in search of qualified steel pan builders and tuners willing to come to the New York and work for his steel pan project. Because of Mannette's growing international reputation, and through the recommendation of Chief Musician Franz Grissom—who was leader of the United States Navy Steel Band from 1957 to 1964—Narell was able to locate the steel pan legend, who at the time was working for Shell Oil Company in Trinidad. In 1967, Mannette was still the leader and tuner of the Invaders Steel Band, though relying on a desk job at Shell Oil to pay his bills.<sup>331</sup>

The move to New York in 1967 was not Mannette's first visit to the United States, nor was it his first attempt at living and working permanently in America. As

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<sup>331</sup> During the 1960s in Trinidad, being a nationally recognized steel drum celebrity was not the full-time job one might think, and fell well short of earning Mannette a living wage. Moreover, the massive time commitment required to build and tune steel pans for the Invaders Steel Band of Trinidad was, in reality, a full-time engagement with part-time wages, and Mannette, like most Trinidadian steel panists, was forced to take a day job.

discussed in Chapter 4, Mannette worked in the United States off and on for the better part of five years (1957 to 1962) as a tuner and builder for the United States Navy Steel Band, initially in Puerto Rico and later throughout the continental United States. Because of his specialized work as an artist/craftsman, and the political connections of Admiral Daniel Gallery, Chief Musician Franz Grissom, and the other Navy officers, Mannette was granted a special H1B visa in 1959.<sup>332</sup> One residual of this arrangement was a significant reduction in red tape in the processing of his emigration petitions in 1967; a considerably less problematic situation for both parties.<sup>333</sup> Mannette was an inspiration and driving creative force for the younger Andy Narell, and his early and continued influence has evolved into a lifelong partnership for the tuner/builder [Mannette] and the performer [Narell]. Mannette was instrumental in ushering Andy Narell through his lifelong steel pan education from an early age, and their partnership in steel pan has lasted some forty years. However, as we transition into a discussion of Andy's first ensemble, the Steel Bandits, one must note the importance of Rupert Sterling's influence on the young and impressionable Andy Narell which is arguably as important an early influence as Mannette.

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<sup>332</sup> For more information on this visa and Mannette's work with the United States Navy Steel Band please see Chapter 4 of this study.

<sup>333</sup>The USNSB had facilitated an H1B visa for Mannette which was a classification that meant the foreign individual had "highly specialized skills." According to the US Immigration department "The H-1B Non-Immigrant Work Visa may be issued to applicants seeking temporary work in a "Specialty Occupation" which requires the skills of a professional. "Specialty Occupations" include: accounting, computer analysts, programmers, database administrators, web designers, engineers, financial analysts, doctors, nurses, scientists, architects and lawyers. The petitions are submitted by employers based on their need for the non-US.-resident employee. H1-B Visa holders must possess a minimum of a bachelor's degree. However, requisite experience can substitute for education, depending on the individual case." <https://www.usimmigrationsupport.org/h1b-work-visa.html> <accessed July 12, 2010>

## Meet the Steel Bandits



*The Steel Bandits Play Decca (1967)*<sup>334</sup>

Aloca has a nice group of kids (“The First Edition”) singing paeans to its aluminum around the country but the Grace Line beat them to it by several years with a group of cleancut lads (ages 12 to 18 honor students in high school and college) called “the Steel Bandits” who thump their West Indian barrel-drums with amazing virtuosity, everything from Bach to Rock. It’s a great notion that Grace Line pioneered: fight uglier elements of the rock-roll revolution with an attractive antidote of the same. . . Steel Bands have a lovely romantic sound—like liquid percussion.<sup>335</sup>

While conducting fieldwork in Port of Spain, Trinidad in 2008, I was engaged in a discussion with Gaston Miloy, a Trinidadian and dedicated pan enthusiast who now resides in the Cayman Islands. Like many Trinidadian expatriates, Miloy religiously returns home on an annual basis for the Carnival season. Gaston and I discussed many

<sup>334</sup>The Steel Bandits, *The Steel Bandits Play Decca*, DL 74794, (New York: Decca Music Group, 1968).

<sup>335</sup> *Oswego Palladium Times*, March 27, 1968, pg 18.



things, including the spirit of steel band, and how the instrument's sound and culture infiltrates the soul, becoming so passionately ingrained in people Trinidadian, foreign, young, and old, throughout the globe. Gaston echoed the often-used Trinidadian saying, "Pan Jumbie" or pan spirits, commenting that "well, Andy, my friend, evidently yuh bitten by de Jumbie."<sup>336</sup> According to Milory and many of the Trinidadians I encountered in 2008, love for steel pan is often infectious, and is cause for people from all walks of life to submit to the instrument.

One could say that Murry Narell, too, was bitten by the Pan Jumbie in 1960, and considering the blurred lines between work life and family life often experienced by dedicated social servants it is no surprise that Narell's family was also heavily involved in the steel band. In 1962, when Andy Narell was seven years old, Murry formed the family into a small steel band. Andy and his brother Jeff showed the most interest in the group. As Andy recalls:

He [Murry Narell] was getting totally enthusiastic about this thing and we just got to see it and got interested too; you know we were pretty young. He brought some pans home, and I started out, we started out as a little family band thing. My dad wanted to play and he played the tenor pan; he even got my mother to play. She didn't last very long; she didn't really want to do it so she dropped out as quickly as possible.<sup>337</sup>

The Narell brothers immediately excelled on the steel pans and quickly outpaced their parents in skill. In the interest of progressing as a band, and with childhood reputations on the line, a reorganization of the ensemble was inevitable and resulted in the jettison of family members (Murry and his wife) in favor of other neighborhood children.

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<sup>336</sup> The "Pan Jumbie" is the folkloric term used in Trinidad to refer to a person who is smitten with an enthusiasm and love of steel pan. The phrase is often used with somewhat of a spiritual connotation.

<sup>337</sup> Phone Interview, Andy Narell August 18, 2008.



**Steel Bandits,  
Andy Narell 1<sup>st</sup> row R, Jeff Narell 2<sup>nd</sup> Row Center (1962)<sup>338</sup>**

In many ways the Steel Bandits were a result of the brother's early steel pan exposure via the Lower East Side Settlement House steel bands.<sup>339</sup> Both Andy and Jeff heard steel pan on a daily basis because of their father's occupation, and the Narell brothers wanted to be like all of the other kids Murry Narell helped at the Lower East Side Settlement House and play in steel drum bands. Later in his life, Andy commented on the sights and sounds of his early pan exposure at the Lower East Side Settlement House: "I loved the vibe at the place and I loved going to work with my dad." In particular, Narell states that he was fascinated by the "beautiful sound" of the steel pans and was taken with the multitude of kids that gathered to participate in the Lower East Side Settlement House steel band ensembles.<sup>340</sup> Interestingly, Andy Narell's early steel pan experiences and education oddly parallels the traditional Trinidadian steel pan experience. Many Trinidadians I talked with during Carnival 2008 believe that his

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<sup>338</sup> This photo is courtesy of [www.JeffNarell.com](http://www.JeffNarell.com) <accessed February 6, 2010>

<sup>339</sup> Personal Interview with Jeff Narell September 30, 2008.

<sup>340</sup> George Robinson, "A Feel For STEEL: Andy Narell, a Jewish kid from Queens, is the world's best known steel drum player, and he's made a career of straddling two cultures" *The New York Jewish Week*, New York, Vol. 212, Iss. 17, September 17, 1999, pg 40.

Trinidadian-style steel pan upbringing, courtesy of the Lower East Side Settlement House, is one of the most important reasons for Andy Narell's legendary pan prowess.<sup>341</sup> Andy was surrounded by the steel pan all his life and the acculturation process that resulted from this habitual exposure rivals the Trinidadian experience.



**Andy Narell, right (1967)<sup>342</sup>**

The new formation of the Narell family steel band—minus the adults—was, as previously mentioned, named the Steel Bandits. As stated above, the original allocations of instruments found Andy briefly playing the bass pans before switching to the lead pan, and the group quickly became proficient enough to start playing public performances and paid engagements. With Murry Narell out of the group as a player, the Steel Bandits relied on Rupert Sterling to provide the early musical compass for the group. Sterling

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<sup>341</sup> Personal conversation with Kim Johnson, Cliff Alexis, Gaston Miloy, and George Majara, January 17-19, 2008, Port of Spain and San Fernando, Trinidad.

<sup>342</sup> Janine Tiffe, "The Arrival of Steel Pan in the United States," *Percussive Notes* Vol. 45 No. 7 (June 2007) : 10-16.

provided a traditional Trinidadian rote-style steel pan learning experience for the boys, and Andy recalled that:

I started out on a little four-note bass, Rupert called it a Bongo Bass... It had C, G, D, and A on it. Everything in those days in terms of music that Rupert taught to us was first change, second change, and third change. Which we came to realize after a little while was the first change was C major, the second was G, and the third was F. But actually, in the beginning we, the steel bandits—my brother and our friends—actually used that system for a while until we learned that there were more chords. So yeah, first change, second change...<sup>343</sup>

Sterling also used these traditional pedagogical techniques, which were the dominant contemporary teaching method in Trinidad, in his work as steel pan instructor and social worker at the Lower East Side Settlement House. This method—also used by Kim Loy Wong at the University Settlement House discussed in Chapter 3—was the pedagogical method favored by steel bands throughout New York during the 1950s and 60s.<sup>344</sup>

Sterling influenced the group, undoubtedly, though he actually rehearsed with the Narell boys only occasionally. As indicated above the Steel Bandits took his lessons, however periodic, and created their own arrangements. Andy and Jeff Narell often accompanied their father to work and this proximity to the Lower East Side Settlement House meant that the brothers received constant exposure to Sterling and saw him lead steel bands on a weekly basis, perhaps accounting for some of the Steel Bandits ensemble knowledge.

Sterling also taught the Steel Bandits strumming patterns, bass patterns, chord voicing, arrangement techniques, and typical melodic rhythms; however, in terms of creating new repertoire Andy Narell suggests that he and the Steel Bandits learned a great deal from listening to records of all genres including calypso, jazz, rock, pop, etc.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Phone Interview, Andy Narell August 18, 2008.

<sup>344</sup> Ray Funk, Personal conversation with Kim Loy Wong, August 22, 2002.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

The process—outlined above—by which the Steel Bandits learned music offers insight into the relationship between early American pan education and its Caribbean roots. By orally providing chord changes in the form of “first change, second change” to the Steel Bandits, Sterling upholds the oral Trinidadian traditional of steel pan education while transmitting harmonic and musical information. This pedagogical approach is different from other American steel pan ensembles of the period such as the United States Navy Steel Band in which the members all read music and studied harmony in the Armed Forces Academy School of Music. The intuition and curiosity of Andy Narell and the Steel Bandits’ to explore harmony and learn the complexities of musical construction shows, if anything, a desire to become well-rounded musicians and transcend some of the traditional barriers facing Trinidadian panists. Furthermore, there are many similarities in the childhood of Andy Narell and that of a Trinidadian including growing up in the panyard and learning music by rote; yet, as Andy attempted to transcend the limitation of his teacher and explore further studies in harmony and theory his American roots become increasingly evident.

As the popularity of the Steel Bandits increased throughout the mid-1960s, the band saw a proportional increase in the number of paid performances that ensued. For Murry Narell, who acted as the manager and booking agent for the group, the Steel Bandits soon became a second full-time job. By late 1964, the Steel Bandits maintained an active performance schedule and joined the local musicians union in order to gain access to a broader array of performance venues. A union card allowed the group access to performances in hotels, restaurants and other union-controlled industries previously unavailable to them. From 1964 until the dissolution of the Steel bandits in 1969, the

boys performed approximately 150 engagements per year.<sup>346</sup> By the time Andy Narell was approaching the age of fifteen in 1969, the Steel Bandits had already notched and surpassed some 175 performances annually in a variety of performance venues throughout the New York City area.<sup>347</sup>

The last breaths of the calypso craze of the mid 1950s and early 1960s gave the Steel Bandits a steady stream of gigs and the middle-aged American audiences nostalgic for the music of previous decade represented the bulk of their performance schedule. Beyond country clubs, Eagles, Elks, and Lion's club lodges the group did, however, gain noteworthy popularity throughout many of the performance venues in the New York's downtown jazz scene. As a young man, Andy Narell was particularly drawn to the New York jazz scene and in an article for *Downbeat Magazine*, some twenty years later, he reminisced about performing regularly at bassist Major Holley's jams sessions in the Jacques club in Greenwich Village.<sup>348</sup> On one particular occasion:

He [Major Holly] heard that I could kind of play; he was tolerant enough to let me hang out and play a few solos. I was such an enigma to him, he didn't know what to call me, he could never remember my name, that was one thing, he would refer to me as things like "the Black man's white man" and stuff like that when he was introducing me. He always thought "what is this little white Jewish kid coming out here from Queens playing a black man's instrument from the Caribbean, in black music—jazz—the world is turning upside down." It was really extraordinary for me to be in the situation with really world-class musicians.<sup>349</sup>

Narell's desire to learn jazz transcended his outward appearance, and this anecdote uniquely encapsulates his conundrum as a white musician trying to overcome stereotypes and make his art with an Afro-Caribbean instrument.

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<sup>346</sup> Phone Interview, Andy Narell August 18, 2008.

<sup>347</sup> Robinson, "A Feel For STEEL," pg 40.

<sup>348</sup> Underwood, *Down Beat Magazine*, p56-57.

<sup>349</sup> Phone Interview with Andy Narell July 18, 2008.



**Andy Narell and Sir Ellis Clark,  
Trinidadian Ambassador to the United States (1964)<sup>350</sup>**

Shortly after joining the Local 802 of the Musicians Union of New York in 1964 the Steel Bandits won the National Youth Steel Band Championship held in New York.<sup>351</sup> The steel band competition was a particularly interesting side note to the Narell story which ties together, if for only a moment, the contemporary pulse of steel band movement in New York at the time. Narell described his role in the event below:

ARM—In 1964 the Steel Bandits apparently won the Youth Steel Band Championship?

AN—Yes we did! I don't know if it was really a national championship... You have to put it into context, 1962 was first steel band competition in America; and my dad organized that. It was at Washing and Irving Park on the Lower East Side, Manhattan. Here, two kinds of things happened: he had a youth competition, which was basically these groups from the "edgies" [Educational Alliance students] and a few other groups that were playing around. Kim Loy Wong had a program at a place called University Settlement House, and I think by that time he had taken it out [gigging], my dad was trying to take the programs out to Grant Street Settlement and Henry Street Settlement and the other settlement houses on the lower east side

Anyway, 1962 was the first one and it was a youth festival and competition. We [Steel Bandits] didn't enter, we just played... it was one

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<sup>350</sup> Photo courtesy of Ray Funk.

<sup>351</sup> The Steel Bandits, *The Steel Bandits Play Decca*, 1968.

of our very first gigs, and I was like eight years old. We played as unofficial non-competing contestants. They had an adult competition too, made of all professional bands. And it's interesting because there was a handful of gigging steel bands around and they were all ready to come and do this competition. Rupert [Sterling] had a band, Kim Loy Wong had a band, Tommy Ray Reynolds—he won. He played, I can tell you what he played, he played “Love Is A Many Splendored Thing” and “C'est si bon” and he mashed it up with C'est si bon. It was bedlam in the place, I can still remember the arrangement...He mashed it out, the crowd went nuts, and the judges loved it. Joe Brown was there too, he was very active. I've known him since I was a little kid because my dad hired him to help with the Edgies. You see, Rupert wasn't the only guy he hired and he hired some other guys to teach. Joe is from Trinidad and he also taught at the Edgies; he is still involved with steel band stuff and lives in Toronto.

Anyway, it was two years later when we did the next one and this time we [Steel Bandits] entered. There was a preliminary round, which was in the same park, I don't know why we did it like this...I think it was Washing and Irving again, and then we went somewhere else for the final. I can't remember where it was...it might have been someplace like Town Hall, but I don't remember. Big deal, we won! I wouldn't jump up and down and call it a national championship of anything...it was the youth bands of New York.<sup>352</sup>

Narell's comments offer interesting insight into the early days of the Steel Bandits, but it also reflects the interconnected nature and regional appeal of the early steel band movement in New York and describes the expanse of the groups and steel pan practitioners during this time.

### **Repertoire and Marketing: The Steel Bandits' Album**

Stylistically, the music of the Steel Bandits was similar to other working steel band ensembles in New York. This meant the group's repertoire was heavily influenced by the tastes of the non-Trinidadian American audiences who, as a rule, preferred melody over rhythm and were still enchanted with calypso. Encompassing the music of both

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<sup>352</sup> Phone Interview with Andy Narell July 18, 2008.



American and Trinidadian cultures, the intentionally hybrid nature of the Steel Bandits' repertoire is represented on the group's only studio album *The Steel Bandits Play Decca*, recorded in 1967. According to the liner notes of the album:

America's own top steel band, THE STEEL BANDITS,[sic] have taken the rhythmic beat of Trinidad's discovery, the steel pan, a giant stride forward. By judicious use of rhythm, melody and sonority they have blended what is best in the music of the Islands with that of the United States.

Though all the sensualness [sic] of the rhythm remains, the Bandits have emphasized the melody as the primary element of their playing. The repetition and sometimes monotony of Island style have been modified by this remarkable group, to be replaced by tunefulness and a full exploitation of the natural sweetness of the instruments.<sup>353</sup>

Here again we see in the liner notes the contrast between two the opposing musical styles and cultures at work in the development of steel pan in America. However, these liner notes are written from an American perspective, like many Manhattan-style calypso albums, imply a degree of Western cultural superiority. In the above example, the Steel Bandits, much like the United States Navy Steel Band, elevates the "monotony of Island style" into something truly unique and beautiful. Or put another way, the Steel Bandits play Manhattan-style calypso music for Upper-class New Yorkers. In either case, setting culturally hegemonic concerns aside, it is obvious that the album is an amalgam of musical genres and styles. The diversity in the oeuvre of the Steel Bandits points both to the skill of the ensemble and the specific elements of performance practice required of contemporary steel bands.

Despite its importance in the overall history of the ensemble, the album represents only part of the Steel Bandits' available repertoire. Andy and Jeff studied piano and harmony along with playing steel pan, and the Steel Bandits were thus capable of taking

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<sup>353</sup> The Steel Bandits, *The Steel Bandits Play Decca*, 1968.

on a wide variety of music including 60s calypsos, classical music arrangements, rock'n' roll tunes, and Broadway tunes. The influence of Harry Belafonte and the American preference for Manhattan-style calypso is apparent from the track listings of the Steel Bandits album, which sports an array of stock (Americanized tunes such as “Yellow Bird” and “The Spanish Flea”, in lieu of current Trinidadian favorites such as “Jean and Dinah”) calypso and Caribbean folk tunes. According to the liner notes:

This album contains but a small sampling of the huge repertoire of this remarkable group. Their versatility is enormous, encompassing everything from calypso to rock'n' roll, along with waltzes, marches, folk songs, Latin rhythms, romantic show tunes and major classics.<sup>354</sup>

The claims of an enormous and versatile repertoire found in the liner notes are in reference to the Steel Bandits' entire catalog; however, the tracks from the album are stylistically similar to Manhattan-style calypso and display marked dance beats and calypso/crooner-style melodies. Despite including waltzes and marches are set to calypso grooves, the actual musical style of the songs on the album is perhaps more representative of the various musical styles that the ensemble's arranger adapted for the group to be recorded as calypso-style dance music of 1950s and 60s. However, similarities among the tracks is a small matter and the marketing technique of claiming “variety” in popular music is certainly not exclusive to the Steel Bandits and was ostensibly a standard industry practice.

An examination of the individual tracks and their arrangers provides a useful insight into the discussion. The chart below lists the album track information:

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<b>Side One</b>	
<b>Tracks:</b>	<b>Arranger/Composer</b>
<b>1. Medley: Hold on to your Man Mas</b>	<b>A. Roberts and F. Alexander</b>
<b>2. A taste of Honey</b>	<b>Bobby Scott and Ric Marlow</b>
<b>3. I wish you love</b>	<b>Charles Trenet and Albert Beach</b>
<b>4. Malaguena</b>	<b>Ernesto Lecuona</b>
<b>5. Downtown</b>	<b>Tony Hatch</b>
<b>6. Compadre Pedro Juan</b>	<b>Louis Alberti</b>

<b>Side Two</b>	
<b>Track:</b>	<b>Arranger/Composer</b>
<b>1. Spanish Flea</b>	<b>Julius Wechter</b>
<b>2. Begin the Beguine</b>	<b>Cole Porter</b>
<b>3. Yellow Bird</b>	<b>Norman Luboff, Marilyn Keith, Alan Bergman</b>
<b>4. Waltz of the Flowers</b>	<b>Peter I. Tchaikovsky</b>
<b>5. Love me with all your heart</b>	<b>Carlos Rigual, Michael Vaughn</b>
<b>6. The Happy Bandit</b>	<b>Andy Narell</b>

This list is a fine sample of contemporary tastes, revealing much about what was expected of an American steel band performing in the early 1960s. The chart indicates that the only tune directly attributed to a Steel Bandit is “The Happy Bandit” written by Andy Narell; however, both Narell brothers contributed to preparing and creating several arrangements for the album. Yet, the Steel Bandits often took a more collaborative approach in creating charts and arrangements for the group, and many tunes from their book were created and via a collaboration among all members of the group. Each member seems to have contributed to the extent of his abilities. Arthur Lymen, for instance, was particularly known for contributing the group’s western classical

arrangements; this included an attempt at recreating an arrangement of the overture to George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* that was cut from the album.<sup>355</sup>

The compositions on the Steel Bandits' *The Steel Bandits Play Decca* album do, however, reach towards a broad audience eager to relive the booming economic post-war Eisenhower era. Nevertheless, this was a group of young boys and the repertoire made connecting with a similar age audience that embraced rock'n' roll and the folk revival of the 1960s problematic. I discussed the origin of the Steel Bandits' with Andy during the summer of 2008 in order to clarify his father's role as manager of the group, the process of tune selection, and the connection of the boys to the repertoire:

ARM—The tunes and repertoire that you guys [Steel Bandits] did, were those ones you wanted to do or needed to do? Who governed the repertoire choices?

AN—Well, it started a little bit with some of the repertoire we got from Rupert, and then my dad had a big influence on us in terms of repertoire to get gigs...this is what people want to hear, calypso, pop tunes...Gradually, as things went on we began to play more of what we wanted, or were interested in, some more contemporary pop music, and we wanted to sing and stuff like that...and everything went to hell! It was nothing but conflict, and we weren't ready to go off in a pop direction either...it was kind of disastrous, as for doing rock tunes, etc...we weren't really good at it either.<sup>356</sup>

Clearly, for gigging and engagements, the outreach of repertoire targeting an over thirty target audience was warranted; yet, the group performed this repertoire with a high degree of musicality. This dedication to the music along with attempts at progressive arrangements of new jazz and pop tunes is a creative force that drives and governs Andy Narell's career to this day. During one of my interviews with Narell, he identified Miles

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<sup>355</sup>In recent years, the compositional prowess of each Narell brother has proved to be a very successful element of their careers in music. Although Andy's compositional output is more critically successful than Jeff's, both brothers have enjoyed significant commercial success writing for films, television commercials, and co-writing or contributing to other artist recordings.

<sup>356</sup>Phone Interview, Andy Narell August 18, 2008.

Davis as an influential personal hero; in this sense, it seems perfectly logical that Narell would never be complacent and, even from his young age, strove towards creativity as a musician.

The Americanized calypso repertoire and unusual sound of the steel drums represents only one half of the marketing appeal behind the Steel Bandits' promotion; the "genius" of Andy Narell represents the second half. As with many musical families—the Jacksons of Motown or the Heath brothers of jazz royalty—Andy's star shined much brighter than the other Bandits, and he was a more accomplished panist in his youth than his siblings. Over time Jeff Narell has rivaled Andy in skill and creativity on the steel pan, but Andy Narell is currently a significantly more well-known steel pan performer/arranger/composer on the national and international stage. This harsh reality is something that the brothers have dealt with since an early age; for example, Andy's distinctive abilities as a performer lay near the heart of the Steel Bandits early marketing strategy. We glimpse as much in the liner notes of the Steel Bandits' album, where tenor of the prose glorifies Andy and singles him out from among the other members:

Much of the fire in calypso and the romantic mood of pop tunes in the music of THE STEEL BANDITS [sic] are due to the performance of their melody player, Andy Narell, just turned twelve.

Andy has a talent which is regarded with respect by his contemporaries and by seasoned musicians. He is several years ahead in school, is a math and science wiz, and hopes to become a nuclear physicist. But all his other abilities seem dwarfed by his remarkable memory for tunes and his sense of timing on the lead, or melody, pan.

This instrument has thirty-six notes and is the most complicated in the steel band, playing the melody to the accompaniment of the other drums. All the players depend on the melody pan for tempo and rhythm of each number. Andy Narell's virtuoso playing of the first lead, and his older brother Jeff's assists on the second lead, endow THE STEEL BANDITS with their special quality.[sic]<sup>357</sup>

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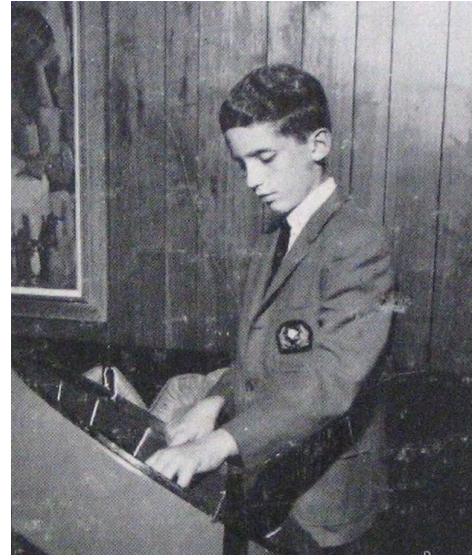
<sup>357</sup> The Steel Bandits, *The Steel Bandits Play Decca*, 1968.

Andy's star power is evident throughout the entirety of the liner notes, and the above example punctuates the way in which Jeff, the elder brother, is dwarfed by the towering praise and wonderment of Andy's skill.<sup>358</sup> Interestingly, as if the description of Andy was not enough, the level of Andy's ability, and his looming shadow, is driven home later in the notes with the caveat "His [Andy's] brother Jeff, five years his senior and now an excellent lead player in his own right, acknowledges the band's debt to Andy's ability."<sup>359</sup> Despite featuring a picture of Andy alone on the back cover of the album (see below) the Steel Bandits management (Murry and Irena Narell) assures the listener that the inherent sibling rivalry sure to erupt from such a competition is benign, and Andy's skill so far exceeds the elder brother that Jeff, too, concedes and submits to the wonderment of Andy.

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<sup>358</sup> Here we also see an interesting commentary on the American understanding of steel band which suggests that everything, and everyone, is dependent on the melody player. Suggesting that they the players look to Andy, the lead player, for "tempo and rhythm" is in actuality the opposite process. In contemporary practice the rhythmic patterns of the accompany steel pans form an interlocking aggregate pattern that supplies the temple and rhythmic basis of any given piece; all while the melody floats over the top. In this sense, the Steel Bandits would lead Andy and not vice versa.

<sup>359</sup> The Steel Bandits, *The Steel Bandits Play Decca*, 1968.



**Back Cover of the Steel Bandits Album<sup>360</sup>**

**Andy Narell**

Promoting the individual star of a particular band is a common enough practice in American popular music industry. During an interview with Andy Narell, however, I was surprised to find out the true origin of the album liner notes:

ARM—I have the steel bandits album and am interested in the Liner Notes and I wonder if you know who wrote them and how that all came about?

AN—Those liner notes have been a big embarrassment for me for my entire life from almost the moment they came out...It was my parents basically who put that together. There was a strategy behind the marketing of the Steel Bandits and it was to push me out front as the prodigy.

ARM—Quoting the liner notes “His [Andy’s] brother Jeff, five years his senior and now an excellent lead player in his own right, acknowledges the band’s debt to Andy’s ability”.

AN—Yeah well, consider the source; it was my mother who wrote that...<sup>361</sup>

I will discuss Murry Narell’s role as the manager of the Steel Bandits later in this study; however, the marketing strategy of pushing Andy forward as a prodigy makes sense and explains more clearly the tenor of the seemingly over-the-top liner note prose. Pushing

<sup>360</sup> The Steel Bandits, *The Steel Bandits Play Decca*, 1968.

<sup>361</sup> Phone Interview with Andy Narell, August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

further at the potential subtexts, one could argue that the Cold War mentality of American cultural supremacy is subtly at play here. That is, in an effort to distance the Steel Bandits from other American or Trinidadian steel band acts, such as those fostered by Pete Seeger, Murry Narell may have attempted to engage in a decidedly pro-American tone to the liner notes. The sameness of the white faces of the Steel Bandits paired with the exotic and unusual sound of the steel pan was an effective combination. In this sense, the steel pan could be seen as the newest object of a foreign culture for exploitation; an item of cultural capital which even the youngest Americans could adapt and master with ease and control. Furthermore, in this instance the steel pan also is held up, though subtly, as a mechanical and somewhat industrial instrument; perhaps a literal association drawn from its material construction of steel. This may also explain the strategy of building up Andy's prowess in mathematics and science, as if they naturally contribute to the striking effortless by which he masters the steel pan. In any case, there is clearly a marketing strategy at work here and Andy is at its heart.

Later in the liner notes, the narrative of Andy as steel pan wunderkind is spun by his mother to almost mythic proportions. Under the section heading "About the Group" the prose describe the serendipitous circumstances of Andy's steel pan beginnings:

The steel pans had a fascination for Murry Narell. He had a set made for a family "fun" band. Jeff Narell, then thirteen and Andy, then eight, were intrigued by these instruments their father had brought home. They enlisted the aid of four neighborhood youngsters and formed their own American versions of a steel band.

One morning Andy simply walked over to the lead pan and picked up the rubber-wrapped sticks. By evening of that same day he could play a number of tunes. No one understands how this occurred—least of all Andy himself. His brother Jeff, five years his senior and now an excellent lead player in his own right, acknowledges the band's debt to Andy's ability.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> The Steel Bandits, *The Steel Bandits Play Decca*, 1968.



The story of Andy teaching himself how to play lead steel pan in the span of a single day is somewhat inflated; however, it appears that rather than a marketing creation the story holds water and is confirmed by Andy himself.<sup>363</sup> Andy had, for years, experimented with all of the various steel pans of the steel band and he suggest the in that “single day” described in the liner notes he was able to transfer tunes previously learned on other steel pans to the lead pan.

What this legend does get right is that Andy abruptly switched from bass steel pan to lead steel pan in his youth; lead steel pan remained his primary instrumental voice for several decades.<sup>364</sup> The follow expert from my interview with Narell gives a foretaste of the natural abilities, intuitive nature, and superior ear for melody displayed on Andy’s later recordings. Andy described the story as follows:

In the beginning they wrote stuff in chalk on my pan so I could remember what was going on when I was like seven years old. I drifted over to the tenor pan one day and found that I could just play it. If I knew the melody then I could play it...it was sort of a direct connection, I didn’t really have to think about it, the melody and the notes that meant what you had to play made sense, a sort of direct line...At least when it came to playing the pan. So, I started playing and we convinced my father to stop playing. He didn’t have much of a feel for any kind of music, kind of a non-grooving player...<sup>365</sup>

Like the violin or saxophone families the steel pan family, though similar in basic construction of materials, have significantly dissimilar note layouts and it is quite common for someone to feel more comfortable on one and not another. In this sense,

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<sup>363</sup> Personal Interview with Andy Narell, August 18, 2008.

<sup>364</sup> Currently, Andy regularly plays a hybrid version of a double second steel pan as his primarily instrument, yet, he is fluid in all of the steel pans of the steel band and for his recent album *Tatoom* Narell wrote and recorded all of the parts on all of the individual steel pans.

<sup>365</sup> Personal Interview with Andy Narell, August 18, 2008.

Andy's ability to transition from one steel pan to another may simply be a case of a performer finding the right instrumental fit.

The overnight success of Harry Belafonte's *Calypso* album in 1956 and rock'n'roll artists such as Elvis had many record companies convinced that the American public placed a higher premium on stars seen as undiscovered talent rather than journeymen who finally broke through in the industry such as Bill Haley. Andy's seemingly natural talents on the steel pan that were "discovered" fit this mold and represent another subtle angle pursued by the liner notes of the Steel Bandits' album. This was an interesting marketing strategy to pursue for Decca and it is impossible to know if it resulted in larger record sales. In any case, this approach supported the Steel Bandits' marketing strategy as well as the exotica themes that drove early steel band and calypso music. As I have described previously in Chapter 2, during the 1950s and 60s steel band was considered an exotic *other*. To this end, middle to upper-class patrons were certain to delight in the novelty and unusual nature of a group of white youth gifted with an innate ability to play black Caribbean music and, as I will discuss later, the Steel Bandits were a popular act for high society parties. Yet, with abilities so unbelievable that, as the liner notes suggest, "even Andy is at a loss to describe them" the album's liner notes aim to create a certain degree of mystery and wonderment about the young steel panists.

By the early 1960s, the American record industry was well aware of the techniques and promotion required to create cultural icons and musical superstars (Colonel Parker and Elvis come to mind). Within an industry eternally searching for new stars in calypso, exotica, and novelty acts, the Steel Bandits represent an instance of record executives taking an approach to talent scouting that leaves no stone unturned, and

polishes others, in order to find the next big star. As Andy suggests, “Everybody was looking for the next Baja Marimba Band and we were just the type of act Decca was hoping would bust the thing wide open.”<sup>366</sup> In the end, the combination of singling out Andy as the Steel Bandits’ star, the sibling tensions, and the historical tradition of Trinidadian steel band culture to locate and praise great masters, all meld to create a rich tapestry that allows a glimpse into the 1960s American steel pan scene and the marketing factors behind attempting to push this style of music into the American cultural mainstream.

### **Success on the Promotional Circuit: The Steel Bandits on Television and in Newspapers**

The excitement of the Steel Bandits’ live performances was captured on television well before the band’s work was ever committed to vinyl. By the time of the album’s recording in 1967, the Steel Bandits had appeared on several television programs including *Hullabaloo* (1967), and the pinnacle of their television appearances, the *Ed Sullivan Show* on February 26, 1967. The good fortune of the *Ed Sullivan Show* performance was an important moment in the life of the Steel Bandits and for countless other novelty acts. Like the Steel Bandits, networking and luck were essentially the only ways to secure a booking of this career-changing magnitude. The Steel Bandits’ manager Murry Narell, convinced of the fame and fortune destined for the group, sought for years to book the Steel Bandits on the *Ed Sullivan Show* to no avail. The Steel Bandits even participated in what Andy called “the ritualistic show biz slaughter” of an open unsolicited audition for the show producers and executives. Not surprisingly, despite

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<sup>366</sup>Ibid.

receiving a thick dose of high praise from the judges, the Steel Bandits never received the elusive call-back.

The Steel Bandits opportunity came at last through the agency of a friend of Ed Sullivan named Mickey Shaw who was an acquaintance of Murry Narell. Sullivan, a former aspiring boxer, was an unabashed fan of boxing and was close friends with former champions the likes of Jack Dempsey. Furthermore, Sullivan would always recognize Dempsey, and other great fighters of the day, as honored guests if the fighters were in the studio audience. Mickey Shaw was one such fighter and as Andy recalls:

There was a guy named Mickey Shaw, who was an ex-boxer and a buddy of Ed's and he was also in the booking/agency business. I remember seeing him at a few of our gigs, and he liked us and my dad and him talked and he got us in. There was a last minute cancellation and the notice that we got to go on the Ed Sullivan show was like a couple of days. I think we heard about it on Friday and we were on Sunday. It was pretty exciting, it was like "wow" our big break!<sup>367</sup>

*The Ed Sullivan Show* performance was a huge break for the Steel Bandits immediate future, and following the big performance, the group went on to perform on several other New York-based television and radio shows with national syndication. However, the long term impact was not as dramatic as the Steel Bandits anticipated and future record sales and a flood of high-paying concert performances did not materialize.

Besides their television work, the Steel Bandits were also enjoying publicity in the New York newspapers. In early 1967, a *New York Times* article previewing an upcoming Steel Bandits concert—which was also discussed earlier in this chapter—is the first print source that acknowledges Narell's family band, which would later become the Steel Bandits. The following week the *New York Times* reviewed the concert at Philharmonic Hall (which is now known as Avery Fisher Hall at the Lincoln Center for

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<sup>367</sup> Phone interview with Andy Narell, July 18, 2008.

the Performing Arts). This time, the critic was Robert Shelton and the April 16, 1967 headline read “Steel Bandits play musicianly Concert,” acknowledging the first ever mention of the Steel Bandits by that name:

Against a backdrop of simulated Caribbean Palm Trees on the stage of the Philharmonic Hall yesterday afternoon, an American septet, the Steel Bandits, played a concert on steel drums. The Steel band, an improvised creation of young Trinidadians in World War II, has rarely been played with such finesse and musicianship. The tuned oil drums or pans, as they are called, are struck with mallets, producing a resonating set of overtones that mingle pleasantly into a theatre-organ sort of sound. The set of tuned pans played by the Steel Bandits produces a rather full-ranged, fluttery, gently percussive melody and harmony structure with an amazingly accurate pitch. Several officials were on hand to give the concert some non-metallic drum-beating as part of the Pan-American Week celebration here. Dr. Patrick Solomon, delegate of Trinidad and Tobago to the United Nations, and Samuel Azadian, representing the city, hailed the work of steel-band music in cementing Pan-American relations.”<sup>368</sup>

Pan-American Week was a goodwill celebration, popular during the early part of the 1960s, which celebrated the newly independent Caribbean nations, many of which had recently jettisoned their ties to former colonial governorships (for example, Trinidad became independent in 1962). The United States meanwhile made changes to its immigration laws in 1965, allowing for a significant number of West Indians to relocate permanently to America. The cultural celebration of Pan-American Week was the United States’ attempt at cementing positive relations with the newly emerging countries.

The choice of the Steel Bandits for the 1967 celebration was a fascinating development. On the one hand, choosing a group of young white boys to perform on the instrument that best represents the Afro-Trinidadian PNM (People’s National Movement) political party of Trinidad wonderfully displays just how far the versatility and popularity of steel pan had come. On the other hand, in the 1960s New York was *the* primary

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<sup>368</sup> *New York Times*, April 16, 1967.

location for incoming Trinidadian and Caribbean immigrants and the choice of the Steel Bandits over a multitude of the many Trinidadian-American steel bands located in New York does not on the surface appear to suggest a cordial promotion of Caribbean culture. Considering the event and organizers, it seems likely that two factors governed the decision: first, the steel pan was rising in regional popularity but had failed to capture the American cultural mainstream and was still trying to shake the stigmas of being a folk instrument, calypso craze hegemony, and “sun and fun” associations. This would explain the haughty tone of Shelton’s review describing the concert as “musicianly.” Second, another explanation could suggest that the novelty of the Steel Bandits’ youth, race (a group of white Americans in contrast to black Afro-Trinidadians), and Andy Narell’s blazing skill superseded the feeling of authenticity that would have attended actual Trinidadian steel panists and succeeded in garnering the significant public attention for the organizers of the event.

### **The Steel Bandits and Caribbean Audiences of New York**

Building on the success of the 1967 Pan-American Week, the Steel Bandits played an eclectic variety of performances in and around the New York area. However, other than Andy’s exploration of Manhattan area jazz clubs, these performances mostly fell within the conservative confines subconsciously imposed by most the American audience. This meant calypso clubs, cruise ships, talent shows, limbo dances, and novelty-style pre-and post-concert entertainment at larger classical venues such as Carnegie Hall, Town Hall, or the Philharmonic Hall. Most of the aforementioned venues

drew primarily white audiences and the performances were geared toward these particular audience demographics. However, the Steel Bandits also performed, from as early as 1964, at events sponsored by, or intended for, African American or Afro-Trinidadian-American audiences (see advertisement below).

The calypso craze had been dead to the American cultural mainstream for some six years by 1964, yet to most West Indian and Trinidadians calypso remained a culturally relevant music. Concert promoters thus arranged large summer concerts in the Caribbean neighborhoods of New York complete with traditional food stands, costume mas, and the latest calypsonians flown in from various islands. The Steel Bandits were privileged enough to perform as invited guests at one of these Caribbean neighborhood concerts in 1964, in which they even made the advertising billing. The importance of steel pan at such an event is evidenced by poster itself in which the letter “o” from calypso is filled in with a steel pan.

**CALYPSO**

**NIGHT AT RANDALL'S ISLAND**  
**One Night Only**  
 Sat., Aug. 22, 8:45 P.M.  
 In case of rain, concert will be held  
 Sunday, August 23 at 8:45 P. M.

Featuring  
**THE 7 GREATEST CALYPSO**  
**STARS OF ALL TIME**  
 Direct from Trinidad  
 Starring  
**MIGHTY SPARROW**  
 The world's foremost calypsonian

LORD BLAKIE, LORD CHRISTO, LORD NELSON, THE  
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**FREE PARKING**

*New York Times*, August 16, 1964<sup>369</sup>

Several factors of the above billing indicate that this concert was targeting a primarily West Indian audience. First, the venue (Dowling Stadium on Randall's Island) was a park on the East Side of Manhattan situated in a West Indian neighborhood. The area was a far cry from the tails and furs found at the concert halls of Fifth Avenue, and would thus draw a markedly different audience than concerts held by the Steel Bandits at Philharmonic Hall. Second, the famous Trinidadian calypsonian Mighty Sparrow, the 1964 Antigua Steel Band Champions, and the other guest artists flown-in for the event had serious appeal to the West Indian population.

Despite their attraction for West Indians, however, the above artists were virtually unknown to mainstream American audiences. These artists certainly did not have the mainstream appeal of American calypsonian Harry Belafonte and other commercially

<sup>369</sup> Staff Writer, "Calypso Concert draws top Caribbean Talent," *New York Amsterdam News*, August 8, 1964.



popular American singers such as Nat “King” Cole, Stan Wilson, and Scoogie Brown and Leo Ryers (below), who launched popular calypso-themed acts in the 1950s.



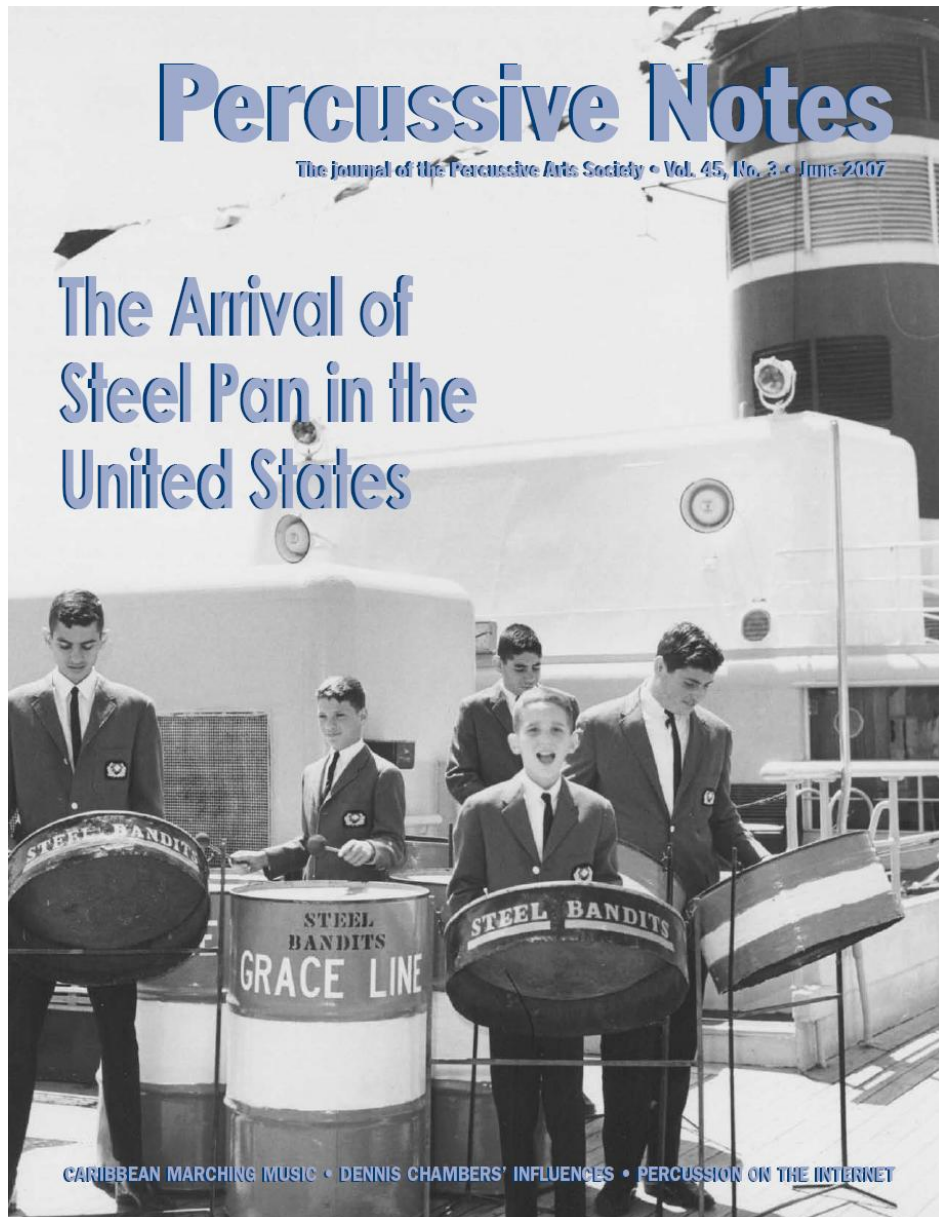
**Scoogie Brown and Leo Ryer<sup>370</sup>**

The date of the “Calypso Night at Randall’s Island” concert—August 22—was nearly the calendar opposite of the annual Caribbean Carnival which is held during the Lenten season in February, and the event organizers were able to secure the Caribbean artists during the Carnival off season. Moreover, many West Indian expatriates would often return to their native islands during the Carnival season to visit family (this practice is still common today). A similar process tends to take place—though in reverse—during late August, as New York prepares for the influx of West Indians for the Brooklyn Carnival. The late August concert would have seen the West Indian populations of New

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<sup>370</sup> <http://www.calypsoworld.org/us/brown-3.htm> <accessed May 16, 2009>

York swell to their largest numbers of the calendar year. It was thus not likely that the Steel Bandits would encounter many high society white patrons at this calypso performance, though it would have provided the group with significant exposure to a large West Indian audience and led to more professional engagements within this community.



**The Steel Bandits on a cruise ship, Manhattan, New York (1965)<sup>371</sup>**

### **Out to Sea with the Steel Bandits**

As discussed early in this chapter, performances for the West Indian audiences of New York represented only a small portion of the group's overall gig calendar. In order

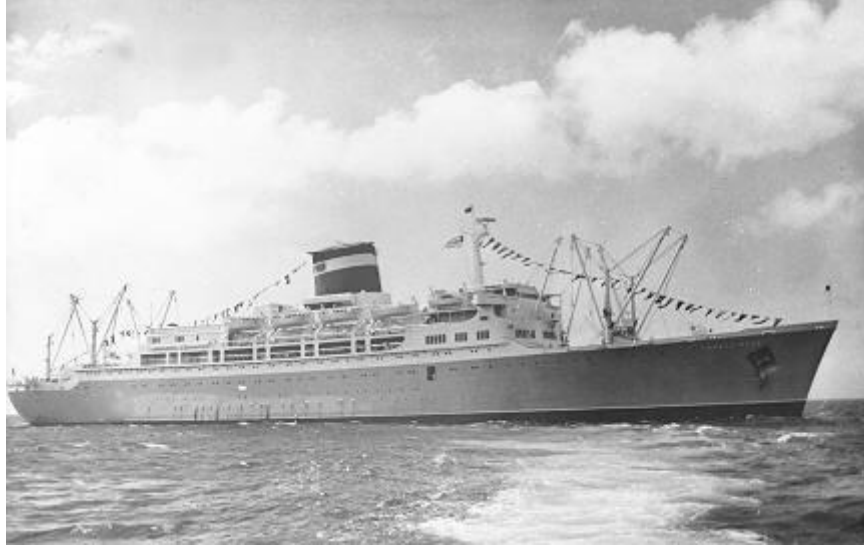
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<sup>371</sup> Cover, *Percussive Notes*, Vol. 45, No. 3, June 2007.

to fill-out their schedule the Steel Bandits, like other performing steel bands in New York during the 1960s, performed at boat parties for the white elite of the Tri-State area. In particular, the Steel Bandits played their share of new ship launches, disembarking, short privately chartered regional cruises, and longer cruises. The Steel Bandits' employer for many of these maritime concerts was the luxury cruise company Grace Lines, which operated a port of call in New York. The relationship of the Steel Bandits and Grace Lines began in 1964 when the group came to the attention of Frederic P. Sands, Vice President for Public Relations and Advertising of the company.<sup>372</sup> From 1964 until 1969, the Grace Lines steadily employed the Steel Bandits in a variety of capacities and performing situations. Moreover, the relationship loosely followed the Trinidadian tradition of steel band corporate sponsorship: besides receiving fees for gigs on the company's boats the Steel Bandits also received a small sponsorship stipend for their general representation of the Grace Lines at gigs throughout New York. The Steel Bandits were a popular attraction at the ports of luxury cruises in Manhattan and the boys charmed the passengers both on board the vessels and on the docks as they embarked and/or disembarked the docked cruise ships destined to, or returning from, the Caribbean.

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<sup>372</sup>The Steel Bandits, *The Steel bandits Play Decca*, 1968.



***Santa Rosa* of the Grace Line (1960s)<sup>373</sup>**

The Steel Bandits were a particular fixture on the *Santa Rosa* and the *Santa Paula*, two of the Grace Lines' main ships sailing the Caribbean cruise circuit.



**The Steel Bandits with the *Santa Rosa* in Background (1967)<sup>374</sup>**

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<sup>373</sup>Ensign plain backed post card of the *Santa Rosa* liner of the Grace Line Company  
<http://www.simplonpc.co.uk/GraceLinePCs.html#anchor775548> <accessed December 8, 2009>

<sup>374</sup>The Steel Bandits, *The Steel Bandits Play Decca*, 1968.

The Steel Bandits embraced the cruise ship theme in their publicity, even going so far as to include photos of the Santa Rosa as the backdrop to the cover-art of their album “Meet The Steel Bandits.”

Interestingly, Grace Lines also utilized the Steel Bandits in their publicity by sending the ensemble out to country clubs, social club events such as Shriners’ meetings, and other high-brow social gathering places in the New York area in order to facilitate the sale of cruises in large group packages. Narell recalls that:

Friday afternoon they [Murry Narell and the rest of the Steel Bandits] used to pick me [Andy Narell] up outside school and we’d just head down to the Westside piers and play for the sailings, and play out on the pier for the people heading off. They [Grace Lines] had two boats that were headed for the Caribbean all the time and one went off every Friday. But that grew into doing a lot more promotional stuff; we were far more useful to them as a promotional tool than just playing on the pier. It grew into sixty gigs a year. They would send us out to country clubs... they would offer us to country clubs, the country clubs would get us for nothing as part of the deal to get a foot in the door, and sometimes they would sell large groups [cruises], that was the thing, I mean if they could get in there and get with these people who are planning their vacation and going off together. The Shriners are another group that they [Grace Lines] did really well with us, because there were gigs I think were they sold a whole boat.<sup>375</sup>

Clean-cut youth playing Caribbean music on steel pan held a special appeal for prospective cruise participants proved an extremely effective combination. In the later years of the Steel Bandits (1967-1969) the annual number of gigs stemming from the Grace Lines was perhaps closer to one hundred.<sup>376</sup>

Their advertising work also brought fringe benefits for the group, as Grace Lines funded the Steel Bandits on a trip to Trinidad in 1967. Once in Trinidad, Andy and the

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<sup>375</sup>Phone Interview with Andy Narell July 18, 2008.

<sup>376</sup>In a phone interview on July 18, 2008, Andy Narell stated that initially the Steel Bandits played about sixty gigs per year for Grace Lines; however, he later clarified that by 1969 the number had increased to nearly one hundred.

group performed at a national steel pan festival, earning high praise from judges and the public. Regardless of their success performing in Trinidad, this was a working trip, and the Steel Bandits had to earn a return voyage home. Grace Lines flew the Steel Bandits to Port of Spain, Trinidad for the festival, then on to Caracas, Venezuela and finally British Guiana where the group caught the New York-bound Santa Rosa and performed for the guests nightly until the ship ported, approximately one week later, back in New York. This was Andy Narell's first trip to Trinidad and it was also his first extended stay away from his parents.

Caribbean-bound Grace Line ships represented a majority, but not all, of the Steel Bandit's maritime-related performances. The group also performed concerts and cocktail engagements at docked yachts and ships of the New York area high-society. One particular *New York Times* account captures the tenor and pomp of a typical local New York event with the heading "‘Gam’ for Project Hope Lures 500 Partygoers to L.I." A "gam" is a term traditionally employed by sailors to describe the meeting of two whaling ships at sea. Historically, the boats are lashed together out in the ocean and the crews of each ship socialize, often sharing food, fishing and whaling strategies, and stories of the sea. In this particular gam, however, the participants were not rugged fisherman, but pampered New York socialites. Seven yachts and one powered ship were lashed together not in the middle of the ocean, but at a private pier in Long Island. The opening paragraph of the August 17, 1967 article sets the tone for the event:

There are certain things that are almost never done on the social circuit, and one of them is holding a charity benefit in August. It is just about as unheard of as buying a set of matched furniture, eating peas with a knife or not knowing Truman Capote.

When Mrs. Barry Stewart was approached last January to act as co-chairman of a Project Hope benefit planned for this month, her first

reaction was: “Who will be around in August? It’s an absolutely dead month.”

She met the challenge by dreaming up something unusual, something that would act as a magnet in drawing partygoers to their checkbooks with little resistance. She organized a gam.<sup>377</sup>

The Steel Bandits seem like a perfect fit for such an occasion; since the mid 1950s, small steel bands had entertained audiences at similar parties throughout New York.

Traditionally, if the steel band was Trinidadian, the ensemble would have two sets of repertoire: one consisting of the latest calypsos and tunes from the West Indies, another stacked with Belafonte-style calypsos (“rum and coca cola”), and arrangements of contemporary jazz and popular standards. The dual repertoire allowed Trinidadian groups to appease both black and white audiences to the fullest extent.<sup>378</sup> For this particular gam, the Steel Bandits played a repertoire consisting mainly of the latter type; a direct result of their role as representatives of Grace Lines and the predominantly white upper-class audience.

The perils of live performance and the rigors of a working band in any situation often include extra-curricular activities. Moreover, later in the above newspaper article under the heading “Captain plays the Drums” there is a description of the Steel Bandits’ encounter with an intoxicated patron during the cocktail portion of the gam.<sup>379</sup> Mr.

Davison, the patron, purportedly attempted to play the Steel Bandits’ steel pans and was

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<sup>377</sup> Enid Nemy, “Gam’ for Project Hope Lures 500 Partygoers to L.I.,” *New York Times*, August 14, 1967.

<sup>378</sup> Ray Allen, “J’Ouvert in Brooklyn Carnival: Revitalizing Steel Pan and Ole Mas Traditions,” *Western Folklore*, Vol. 58, No. 3, Studies of Carnival in Memory of Daniel J. Crowley (Summer – Autumn, 1999) : 255-277.

<sup>379</sup> Enid Nemy, “Gam’ for Project Hope Lures 500 Partygoers to L.I.,” *New York Times*, August 14, 1967. The passage reads as follows “One boat that didn’t join the gam was the Matuta, a new yacht owned by F. Trubee Davison. “The captain thought the harbor looked crowded, so he moored at a nearby shipyard,” said Gates Davison, Mr. Davison’s son and a co-chairman of the gam. The elder Mr. Davison made a brief visit to the cocktail party held in the family’s summer pavilion and experimented with some of the instruments (all hammered out of 55-gallon oil drums) used by the Steel Bandits, a musical group sponsored by the Grace Line. Mr. Davison decided to forgo the ensuing buffet dinner dance in the mammoth blue tent set up nearby.”



undoubtedly an unwelcome intruder. His drunken serenade surely disrupted the performance of the young Steel Bandits. Yet this headline supports two of my working hypothesis on steel band: one, as discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 6 the semiotics of steel pan is so strong that it draws people of any class, race, age, etc., to the unique sound and feel of its music. The second hypothesis is perhaps more related to Andy Narell and has, I feel, affected the trajectory of his career profoundly. To this day, Narell strives for pushing the boundaries of steel pan; musically and artistically. The *New York Times* article is a fine example of one of steel pan's common misperceptions; that is, if you hit it [a steel pan note] it makes a sound and therefore it must be only a simple folk instrument rather than a vehicle for creating art. In a sense, it is perhaps overly accessible.

In concluding this discussion of the Steel Bandits and early career of Andy Narell, the variety of performances, broad influence of musical styles, and sheer frequency of performances, made for a particularly busy decade. In 1970, amid his own growing health concerns, Murry Narell decided to move his family to the San Francisco bay area. On the eve of leaving New York in 1970, tensions between the Narell brothers and their father had reached a boiling point, and the relocation of the family out of New York effectively signaled the end of the Steel Bandits. Yet, for every end there is a new beginning, and the termination of the Steel Bandits also spawned the beginning of a new chapter for the Narell brothers and steel pan.<sup>380</sup>

For Andy, the release from the Steel Bandits marked an important musical turning point in his life. Moreover, the inflated nature of the liner notes to the Steel Bandits'

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<sup>380</sup>Several other early steel bands from throughout the country have at one time or another used the name the "Steel Bandits". All did so seemingly unaware of the original "Steel Bandits" from New York. The George family of Georgia is one fine example, though many others exist to this day, on both coasts and the Midwest. Apparently the ironic pun of 'steel' for steel drum and 'bandits' representing the raucous and delinquent nature of early panists, proves irresistibly popular for naming steel bands in the United States.

album discussed earlier in this chapter notwithstanding, Andy Narell is extremely bright and because of the Narell family's intention to relocate to the West Coast Andy decided to graduate from high school early, at the age of sixteen. He then enrolled and attended the University of California at Berkeley, earning a degree in music in 1973 at the age of nineteen. This was an influential time for Narell, and while majoring in music major at the University of California at Berkeley he soaked up the rich variety of musical influences present in the atmosphere of the classical musical academy and Bay Area of California.

### **The 1970s, California, Andy Narell, and Jazz: An Integration**

The whole sensibility of what I do is rooted in jazz, in terms of the structures of the music and the improvisational quality in the way I interact with the other players. It comes from my jazz background, from growing up listening to the great jazz artists. . . .—Andy Narell (2000)<sup>381</sup>

The late 1960s and early 1970s were a time of exploration in jazz, and Miles Davis' *Bitches Brew* (1970) ushered in the age of fusion and ushered out the era of modal jazz forms. As described earlier in Chapter 6, Sonny Rollins was successful in exploring the possibilities of calypso and integrating calypso tunes into his repertoire. Yet Rollins did not explore the actual instruments of the Caribbean (steel pan) or include panists within the context of his recordings. Even among jazz artists of the 1960s and 1970s who

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<sup>381</sup> Steve Graybow, "JAZZ BLUE NOTES - Jazz, Steel Pan Mix In Narell's Hands", 2000.

utilized calypso forms or styles in their music, steel pan or panists are nearly universally absent from their recordings.<sup>382</sup>



### Max Roach and the M'Boom Percussion Ensemble (1979)<sup>383</sup>

One notable exception to this rule is the legendary drummer Max Roach, who founded the M'Boom percussion octet in 1970. The group at times would use the sounds of a steel pan as a contributor to their free jazz experimental improvisation sessions.<sup>384</sup> The panists for the M'Boom sessions was Detroit native Roy Brooks, a jazz drummer and

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<sup>382</sup> This is undoubtedly a tall accusation difficult to substantiate; however, my research yield only a small number of obscure or regional jazz artists who did in fact actually utilize steel pan and steel panists. The numbers are few and most steel panists survived predominantly by playing calypso style shows in Las Vegas or theme parks such as Disney World, Orlando, rather than jazz in jazz venues.

<sup>383</sup> [http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://bp0.blogger.com/\\_MI\\_Yj8KBM7A/R\\_X7Q2gC\\_aI/AA\\_AAAAAAiM/7hn6kyBQ9dA/s320/mboom.jpg&imgrefurl=http://strata-east.blogspot.com/2008/03/ses-19732-mboom-re-percussion-1973.html&h=319&w=320&sz=23&hl=en&start=4&um=1&tbnid=j6WUo8MQM5nqjM:&tbnh=118&tbnw=118&prev=/images%3Fq%3DMax%2BRoach%2Band%2BM%25E2%2580%2599Boom%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den%26rlz%3D1T4DKUS\\_enUS245US247%26sa%3DN](http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://bp0.blogger.com/_MI_Yj8KBM7A/R_X7Q2gC_aI/AA_AAAAAAiM/7hn6kyBQ9dA/s320/mboom.jpg&imgrefurl=http://strata-east.blogspot.com/2008/03/ses-19732-mboom-re-percussion-1973.html&h=319&w=320&sz=23&hl=en&start=4&um=1&tbnid=j6WUo8MQM5nqjM:&tbnh=118&tbnw=118&prev=/images%3Fq%3DMax%2BRoach%2Band%2BM%25E2%2580%2599Boom%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den%26rlz%3D1T4DKUS_enUS245US247%26sa%3DN)

<sup>384</sup> In 1980 M'Boom released an album that used steel pan more prominently. Max Roach was very receptive and interested in the steel pan in his later life, advocating on several occasions for the integration of steel pan into jazz on a wider level. Roach made a triumphant trip to Trinidad in 2003, receiving a hero's welcome and performing with his group in Port of Spain.

percussionist interested in experimenting with various world percussion sounds and sources. However, in the M'Boom sessions, steel pan is mostly employed as one of several colors, weaving a sonic percussive fabric that by no means takes a primary melodic role. Brooks was not a pan virtuoso on par with Narell, and his pan playing is not nearly as technically or conceptually refined as the latter.

Unlike Brooks, Narell was first and foremost a panist, and his conceptual approach to the instrument was fundamentally different. From this standpoint, Andy Narell remembers listening to jazz at home with his family from the time he was a child. By his early adolescent years, he began thinking about and exploring the possibilities of combing the forces of jazz with steel pan. In an April, 2004 *Jazz Times* article, Narell describes his early influences and motivations:

I started listening to jazz in my early teens and was studying piano as well. WLIB in New York was broadcasting jazz at that time and Billy Taylor was on the radio playing great music—and talking about it in a way that made me start thinking about doing it myself,” says Narell. “Until then, I was only playing pan in the context of steel band music. But, I started trying to improvise, anyway. When I was 15, I started going down to the village and sitting in at jam sessions. I was hooked. Nobody was hiring pan players to play in their jazz groups in those days, so 3 years later I started writing music with the idea of starting a band where I could play keyboards and pan, plus original music. It went from there.<sup>385</sup>

In 1969, when Andy was fifteen years of age, the Steel Bandits were approaching the twilight of their existence. Moreover, the boundaries of the Steel Bandits' performing repertoire—1950's and 1960s calypso and pop tunes—had already taken their toll on the young panist and Andy vowed he would “never play “Yellow Bird” again in my life.”<sup>386</sup> His hunger for the expressiveness and freedom inherent in jazz improvisation inspired the adolescent panist, and jazz increasingly became an important creative force for Narell.

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<sup>385</sup> Asha Brodie, “The Road to Sakesho,” *Jazz Times*, January 22, 2007.

<sup>386</sup> Phone interview with Andy Narell July 18, 2008.

Despite the Narell family's relocation to California and the disbandment of the Steel Bandits, it was not until 1973 that Andy Narell began to formally pursue his own path as a jazz musician. It was during this time that the jazz influences of his youth began to create a desire for "original music" that led Narell to a serious exploration of steel pan in the jazz idiom: something that in 1973 had yet to be seriously explored. Trinidadians and Trinidadian-expatriate steel panists living throughout the world, including the United States, had yet to penetrate the American jazz scene with any substantial degree of success. If panists such as Robert Greenidge and Othello Molineaux had begun to make ripples in the commercial music scene, they had yet to create a notable splash in the jazz worlds.



**Andy Narell 1978<sup>387</sup>**

In 1973, some three years after his move to the West Coast, it was clear that tough sledding lay ahead if Narell was to carve his niche as a jazz panist. With the tools and skills of a traditional college music school education and the street smarts and steel pan

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<sup>387</sup> Underwood, "Andy Narell," *Down Beat Magazine*, pg 56-57.

experience of his Steel Bandits pedigree, Narell graduated from the University of California at Berkeley and set about establishing a career as a jazz steel panist. Throughout the early 1970s, Narell was paying his dues to the American jazz scene. Without the promotional muscle of Grace Lines and the reputation of the Steel Bandits, he often struggled to find outlets for his music. Passionate about his art, but realistic about the music industry, Narell recognized the perception of his instrument and product, and set about taking control of his career.

At first I was like everybody else-thinking, ‘I wish somebody would hire me, I could really go out and show my stuff... But I realized at a certain point that to really do what I could see the steel pan doing in various musical contexts, I was gonna have to do it myself. Somebody wasn’t gonna call me and say ‘Hey man, you want a job?’ The instrument is kind of a non-essential thing.<sup>388</sup>

Nowhere in the jazz scenes of the United States did steel pan enjoy the same historical pedigree as the piano or saxophone. Like other instruments new to a musical scene—the saxophone’s introduction into opera orchestras during the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century, for instance—steel pan had to create a need for itself within the jazz scene of the 1970s. Aware of the situation, Narell often worked odd jobs, played gigs for free, and frequently set up his pan on boardwalks or busy streets to play for passing streetwalkers. With conviction he forged ahead with the hefty task of establishing a career though he never strayed from his focus of creating an individuality of style that allowed him to succeed. At this point in his career, Narell’s steel pan odyssey begins to diverge from any Trinidadian models, charting a new space to jazz and, more importantly, global steel pan stardom.

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<sup>388</sup> Eric Snider, “The stuff of sweet harmony: Clearwater Jazz Holiday hit all the right notes” *St. Petersburg Times*, Oct 19, 1987, pg 1D.

During the mid to late 1970s, Narell bounced around the American jazz scene. His path to self-sufficiency, the goal of any jazz musician, was somewhat unclear, but his convictions and dedication to the spirit and potential of steel pan to create jazz music remained strong. In a 1979 artist profile in *Down Beat Magazine*, author Lee Underwood captures the creative thoughts and tenacious drive that would help Narell carve out a career in the jazz idiom. During these first years of Narell's career, he worked countless odd jobs and house-sat for months on end in order to earn enough supplemental income and time to explore and hone his craft. This interview catches him, at age twenty-five, on the cusp of releasing his debut jazz album *Hidden Treasures* on Inner City Records.<sup>389</sup> Narell composed all of the tunes for the demo, financed the recording, assembled and rehearsed the eclectic instrumentation of the band, produced the demo, and personally pitched it to Irv Kratka of Inner City Records.

Not surprisingly, *Hidden Treasures* is a true jazz album in every sense: absent from the disc is the standard array of calypso favorites found on traditional steel pan and Manhattan-style calypso albums. Moreover, *Hidden Treasures* solidifies Narell's move away from performing what he felt was culturally insensitive music; a fate still very much a part of many performing American panists.<sup>390</sup> Narell's interest in exploring and expanding the possibilities of the steel pan is a point not lost on the critic Underwood who leads the interview with the teaser:

If the music itself were just another version of Harry Belafonte's diluted "rum and coke" brand of 50s Day-O drivel, then Narell's *Treasures* would

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<sup>389</sup> Narell had previously released an album with the Steel Bandits in 1968.

<sup>390</sup> In my interviews with Andy he mentioned that he still receives catcalls for "Yellow Bird" and "Marianne" at his concerts across the globe.

remain hidden. As it is, Andy gives new dignity and stature to the steel drum.<sup>391</sup>

The final line of this statement offers a summation of Narell's career to this point. As I have argued throughout this chapter, Narell is ultimately concerned with the legacy of pan and pan music, acting as an ambassador for the instrument and culture of Trinidad. In a way he views himself as a link in the continuation of steel pan from its humble beginnings to the present notoriety. Narell, in 1978 and today, is interested in elevating steel pan to the status of an instrument of high art indeed seeking to give "new dignity and stature" to the instrument.

Considering that Bach, Sinatra, calypso, and Alicia Keys all have some claim of 'traditional' when it comes to steel band music, the instrument clearly has the ability to adapt to any musical style. Narell realized early in his jazz career that in order to find his path in the American jazz scene he would need to integrate and embrace a wide range of jazz and popular styles and hone these styles into a focused and unique personal style. This is apparent in the smooth Latin/jazz styling of his early albums but also in his industry placement and marketing. Narell's comments about his music reflect both sensitivity to his art and keen awareness of the music industry's marketing practices. In the *Downbeat* magazine article Narell reflects on the gravitational pull so often encountered by people hearing pan for the first time:

Steel Drums are a kind of ticket... They are unusual and rarely heard in America. People stop to listen to them, if only for a minute, because they want to check them out. I take it from there, playing a blend of jazz, Caribbean, classical and folk music from around the world. I've found that people we have broad appeal, cutting across all musical barriers wherever we go. People love what we do. We don't fit very well into preconceived

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<sup>391</sup> Underwood, "Andy Narell" *Down Beat Magazine*, 1980.



marketing categories, but, because of its [steel pan] universal appeal, I hope to take the music around the world.<sup>392</sup>

Here Narell identifies two competing issues that combine to create a potential obstacle for his career; mainly, the unusual nature of the steel pan as a jazz instrument, and the American audience's apprehensiveness in accepting the steel pan as a standard jazz instrument. The fact that steel pan does not fit into the "preconceived marketing categories" as Narell describes is certainly an obstacle that he and other steel panists in the United States have struggled with for decades.

Like many other non-western instruments, outside of its native home the steel pan loses much of its cultural identity as it is incorporated into the dominant popular music. Throughout this study I argue that, in the case of steel pan, the transformation of this instrument relies heavily on preconceived notions and commercial marketing strategies. Furthermore, the struggle with public perception is one trope that the American and Trinidadian steel band movements have in common. In his study of steel bands in Trinidad, Shannon Dudley suggests a similar notion of preconceived categories for steel pan among the varying socio-economic classes in Trinidad during the 1950s. In discussing the tentative acceptance of steel pan into the Trinidadian middle-class, one panist commented that "we had to bring up to the level of art, now, it's not just religious mumbo jumbo."<sup>393</sup> The people of Trinidad had to rethink their idea of folk music because of popularity of steel pan, and the conventional wisdom that folk music should (or generally is not) commercially popular. Following the success of Narell and other early jazz panists, the American populous was placed in a similar predicament: steel pan is no

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<sup>392</sup> Ibid.

<sup>393</sup> Shannon Dudley, *Making Music for a Nation: Competing Identities and aesthetics in Trinidad and Tobago's Panorama Steelband Competition* (diss. University of California, Berkeley, 1997), 39-40.

longer the sun and fun calypso standards of vacations past, and Narell's ability to create serious jazz compositions and display stellar improvisation on steel pan by its very nature forges a new space. However, reconciling the association with Pina Colatas and serious jazz composition and improvisation within this space continues to be a challenge facing Narell and other jazz panists.

### **Further Integrations and the Diversity of Style**

Thus far in this case study, it is apparent that from the early 1970s Narell has approached jazz and steel pan very seriously, and the music he creates is an attempt at serious art music on a par with any other in the jazz idiom. Yet perhaps as a result of his days in New York as a Steel Bandit, Narell is also keenly aware of the uniqueness of his chosen instrument, its ability to assume and assimilate multiple styles, and the broad appeal that such an instrument could have on diverse audiences. As Narell's career progressed through the 1970s and 1980s, he embraced the diversity of the steel pan. He also has the restlessness (or relentlessness, depending on perspective), that drives someone in search of new musical ideas, never settling for too long in any semblance of a comfort zone. Narell is an artist continuously forging and creating and as his drive for lifelong learning is evident from the progressive quality of improvisation and composition throughout his ever increasing oeuvre and in a 2004 interview for *National Public Radio*.

The last thing I want is to get boxed in to one style, and I'm just trying to learn and grow and change all the time. Every time I do a piece of steel

band music I'm trying to break through to something else, I'm trying to improve, I'm trying to do something I've never done before.<sup>394</sup> His constant exploration of the jazz idiom and penchant for creating and then creating anew without looking back is one of the fundamental differences separating Narell from most of his Trinidadian counterparts.<sup>395</sup> Moreover, Narell, Shannon Dudley, and many other American pan enthusiasts believe that in Trinidad the Panorama competition is going in the opposing direction, towards more rules and less creative variation.<sup>396</sup>

Returning to Narell's above comments, one senses his struggle to not only create art, but to create art on his terms. That is, considering that here is a panist battling antagonism from within the ranks of steel pan aficionados (several of the Panorama judges during the 1999 competition), the stigma of the American Manhattan calypso post-war steel pan hegemony, and the barriers of the jazz establishment, Narell understandably speaks with a chip in his shoulder. Yet his vision of transcending these barriers is rooted solidly in talent, hard work, and, most importantly, a keen understanding and awareness of the competing cultures and heritages that govern the steel pan.

Narell's career is predicated on the idea of balancing the music and culture of Trinidad and America, and he was aware of the need for this balance from the earliest points in his steel pan odyssey. Despite his aspiration to transcend the radio-friendly calypsos of his Steel Bandits' youth, Narell's later work aims to reconcile his desire for artistic integrity while simultaneously appeasing commercial popularity. In a 1987

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<sup>394</sup>Morning Edition, "Andy Narell: Master of the Steel Pan" *Musicians in Their Own words* (Washington, DC: National Public Radio, August 2, 2004).

<sup>395</sup> Boogie Sharpe and Cliff Alexis are notable exceptions to this rule and represent a very miniscule minority. Most Trinidadian artists focus predominantly on the formulaic confines of Panorama tunes and style, shunning jazz exploration.

<sup>396</sup> Personal conversation with Shannon Dudley and Kristor Malm at the Society for Ethnomusicology 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference, Middleton, Connecticut, 2008.

interview for a *St. Petersburg Times* with the heading “Do Steel Drums and Jazz Mix? Ask Andy” Narell describes his awareness of the important role such material plays on his albums:

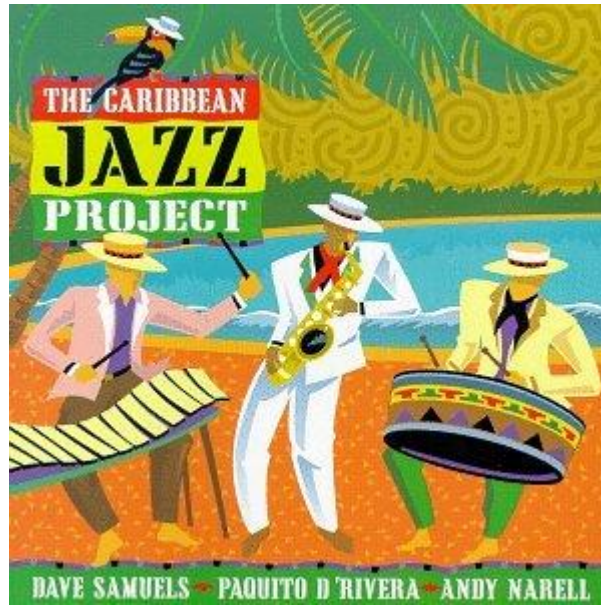
NR-*The Hammer* (1987), was released not long ago and features a stronger Trinidadian flavor- the result of Narell’s three musical sojourns to the island in the last couple of years. Still, the album has a decided commercial bent, even though the steel pans provide a refreshingly exotic sound.

AN- Anything I do is kind of a combination of things... I never set out to do a whole record of (radio) air-playable material. But I’m consciously aware that I need to put things on a record that can reach different audiences and fit into airplay formats.<sup>397</sup>

Narell’s comments are striking on several levels; first is his lack of response to the narrator describing his music as having “a stronger Trinidadian flavor” while still remaining distinctly commercial. No less interesting are Narell’s comments, which are decidedly less bent on defending his album from an unjust categorization and more focused on proclaiming his style and mission. Narell’s consistent language noting the amalgamation of styles within his brand of steel pan music reinforces his desire to infuse popular tunes with those of higher artistic integrity.

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<sup>397</sup> Eric Snider, “The stuff of sweet harmony: Clearwater Jazz Holiday hit all the right notes” *St. Petersburg Times*, Oct 19, 1987, pg 1D.



### The Caribbean Jazz Project

As far as I'm concerned, 99 percent of the possibilities (in music) haven't been explored—Andy Narell (2004)<sup>398</sup>

The 1980s were good decade for Narell, witnessing a series of successful jazz/world music albums. Yet, for Narell the best was yet to come. The 1990s saw him enter what would become one of his most commercially and artistically successful periods. Narell set about further exploring the collaborative possibilities of the steel pan, entering into engagements with several leading jazz figures as a sideman, rather than leader. Perhaps the most important of these collaborations was with the Caribbean Jazz Project. For one of the first times in his professional career, Narell was matched with other jazz instrumental misfits. The success of this ensemble brought Narell a new audience and propelled the steel pan to new heights, not only of acceptance, but of popularity in the jazz world.

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<sup>398</sup> Email from Andy Narell to Author, May 16, 2008.

The Caribbean Jazz Project was the inspiration of famed jazz vibraphonist Dave Samuels. In 1993, Samuels was engaged for a high profile gig at the Central Park Zoo in New York City. Already well known for his Latin jazz concoctions, Samuels sought out saxophonist Paquito D’Rivera and Andy Narell to complete the eclectic trio. Both Narell and Samuels saw this as an opportunity to bring each other’s respective percussion instruments out of the traditional roles into a new space. The Central Park performance was a resounding critical success and the Caribbean Jazz Project has since recorded eight albums. The group has a rotating membership; Narell himself was only part of the 1995 self-titled release *The Caribbean Jazz Project* and the 1997 release *Island Stories*. The ensemble won a Grammy in 2003, and received Grammy nominations in 2004 and 2005.

If there is a long tradition of jazz stars coming together to form super groups, what makes the Caribbean Jazz Project different is the distinctive nature of each main contributor. In describing the essence of the Caribbean Jazz Project, Samuels opines on the group’s duality: “Caribbean defines part of what we do, Jazz defines the other part.”<sup>399</sup> From the outset, this collaboration is congruent with Narell’s quest for musical hybridization and exploration of jazz and Caribbean styles. He contributed several compositions for the two Caribbean Jazz Project albums on which he performed (*Caribbean Jazz Project* and *Island Stories*). In many ways this album was a “coming out” for Narell, who had finally found a receptive audience for the pan/jazz style he had perfected over the previous decades in smaller venues and on albums for smaller labels.

In an interview for *Jazz Times* Narell discussed the initial Caribbean Jazz Project collaboration and his kinship with Samuels and D’Rivera. All three are committed to exploring the quintessence of Caribbean music, and share a desire to create something

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<sup>399</sup> [www.dSamuels.com](http://www.dSamuels.com) <accessed March 3, 2008>

new out of the confluence between jazz and Caribbean musical styles. Narell explains his approach to navigating the convergence of Caribbean musical styles, illustrating both his process and the special talents that he brought to the group.

I guess there is that aspect anytime you have people who are really committed to understanding where this music is coming from. I'm a student. I try to embrace this music and really learn how it's put together. That's why I learned how to play drums. We all bring different elements. I tend to be more up on the calypso and soca and stuff from the French Caribbean, zouk, beguine. Then I've gotten a lot into the Afro-Cuban music and studied it.<sup>400</sup>

These comments are consistent with Narell's track record, and are a testament to the informed and deliberate nature of his compositions. This is also another instance of Narell's interest in exploring the musical confluence of jazz and steel pan on a very holistic level. Many Caribbean styles of music—salsa, for example—are African-based rhythmically and Iberian-based harmonically, and for Narell to learn drumset shows his desire for a higher understanding and awareness of complex rhythmic music so ingrained in the roots of the steel pan tradition. Yet, this move also summarizes Narell's dedication to the creation of his own personal style.

Previously in this chapter, I argued that Narell functions as a missionary of sorts; one on a crusade to change the public perception of the steel pan and to educate the American public on steel pan's rich history. In this sense, the Caribbean Jazz Project offered Narell a chance to change the public's generalizations and mis-perception of Latin Music. In particular, Narell is adamant in his desire to change the public's use of the term 'Latin' to describe any and every style of Latin or Caribbean-music—the "it all sounds the same" mindset.

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<sup>400</sup> Brodie, "The Road to Sakesho", 2007.

A lot of jazz musicians treat so-called third world music as something more superficial than what they do. As a result, they gain a very superficial knowledge of it, the way classical musicians look at a lot of things. The people who really get into it try to get into it and study it, as something that's deep and complicated. They're the ones who can really get something out of it. Other people will assume, "oh yeah, Latin music is...[he sings a samba bass groove]." In fact, just using that word, saying 'well, just play it Latin' shows your level of knowledge of it. What we're looking for is a commonality of people who want to go into it a lot deeper. It doesn't just mean one thing, but the way you look at everybody's music. Everywhere you travel, you can discover new things. That really makes it fun, because you have that attitude. The possibilities are endless.<sup>401</sup>

Andy Narell is an educated musician, culturally sensitive to the musical origins of both jazz and steel pan (a notion that is articulated in the language in the above passage). Yet I argue that his public advocacy is an extension of his general exposure as a jazz musician and member of the Caribbean Jazz Project, as evidenced by the above quote for example, this advocacy and exposure in combination are responsible for his massive exposure. Steel pan advocates are seemingly always searching for respect, and in this respect Narell is no different than his Trinidadian counterparts.

In Trinidad there is a certain degree of apathy for the global advancement of steel pan. Several times in the past thirty years there are cases where Trinidadians have attempted to patent variations of the instrument (most recently the G-pan developed by Brian Copeland) and the knowledge of steel pan making and tuning represents intellectual property as closely guarded as anything in the country.<sup>402</sup> Furthermore, a brief survey of the editorial sections of Trinidad's two major newspapers, the *Trinidad Guardian* and the *Trinidad Express*, from the past twenty years provides numerous examples of frustration and outrage over the "loss" of steel pan to non-Trinidadian

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<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> <http://www.panonthenet.com/news/2010/mar/copeland-3-01-10.htm> <accessed October 11, 2010>



agents; many directed at Narell himself.<sup>403</sup> Throughout his career Narell has found himself in a unique position, as an American, to make progress in his advocacy of the steel pan. Narell cares deeply for Trinidad and its music, a point not lost on some Trinidadians, and this is evident in an interview captured in an April 22, 2000, issue of *Billboard* magazine. Under the heading “Jazz, Steel Pan Mix In Narell’s Hands: Queens N.Y., Musician Master, Extends Trinidadian Genre,” Narell, while promoting the Latin/Jazz hybrid of the Caribbean Jazz Project’s music, offered the following narrative:

An old Trinidadian woman told me that it was inevitable that someone from outside the island's culture would become a master of the pans and would make the music popular outside of the country," recalls Narell. "She said she was glad it was me, because I really love and respect the country and culture along with the music. It was one of the nicest things anyone ever said to me."<sup>404</sup>

The platform and visibility of the Caribbean Jazz Project was certainly a vehicle for Narell and kind words aside, Narell’s quest to bring Trinidad’s culture to the world is an arduous task made possible by his passion for the music and sensitivity to Trinidadian culture.

Narell made headway with his work in the Caribbean Jazz Project; yet, even in praise many fans and critics of jazz and steel pan often error on the side cultural ignorance and insensitivity. A fine example of this is a review from critic Peter Goddard of the *Toronto Star* from March 4, 1999:

Given the mind and given the time, jazz can be coaxed out of just about everything. Even so, Andy Narell’s way with the steel pan defined what was best about the Caribbean Jazz Project last night, at the Downtown Jazz Festival's Rendezvous Air Canada tent at the corner of King and John streets.

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<sup>403</sup> Andy Narell, “Andy Narell responds to Boomburg News’ Craig Copetas,” *Trinidad Express* <http://www.panonthenet.com/opinions/andy-cope.htm> <accessed November 15, 2010>

<sup>404</sup> Steve Graybow, “JAZZ BLUE NOTES - Jazz, Steel Pan Mix In Narell's Hands: Queens, N.Y., Musician Masters, Extends Trinidadian Genre,” *Billboard Magazine*, April 22, 2000.

True to its name, the Project's lineup is sort of a who's who of NAFTA-south, with Cuba's Paquito D'Rivera on reeds, Dave Samuels on vides, Argentine Dario Eskenazi on piano, Peruvian Oscar Stagnaro on bass with Cuban percussionist Luis Conte along with American drummer Mark Walker.

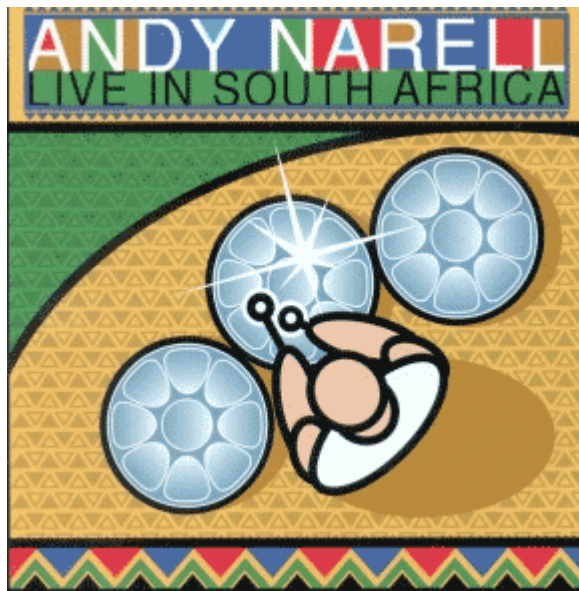
They agree on one thing, for sure, and that's to have a good time. For most of the night there was a kind of Flying Down To Rio, B-movie charm to their non-stop, yeah-yeah rhythmic drive during which every song, even one with the meditative title, "Valse Triste," became an opportunity for groove and move.<sup>405</sup>

For all intents and purposes, one can assume that Goddard probably has little vested interest in the historical and cultural plight of the steel pan movement; however, he was, on some level, enchanted by Narell's playing and attempts to reach out in the review. Unfortunately, in doing so, he tends to reduce steel drums to their humble origins, a trash bin. "Given the mind and given time, Jazz can be coaxed out of just about everything" is intended as a compliment to Narell and other marginalized jazz instrumentalist Samuels (vibraphone). But in a sense the review accomplishes the opposite, as Goddard is upholding negative stereotypical attitudes towards both peripherally situated jazz instruments. Here Goddard is championing the power of "jazz" over the "instrument itself" as the real talent, in this way downplaying the extremely refined artisanship of the steel drum while elevating Narell's abilities. This type of hero worship puts Narell in a box; on the one hand, Goddard suggests he is tremendously talented, and can create jazz from anything. On the other hand, the test-case of "anything" happens to be the very instrument to which Narell has dedicated his life. Ultimately, this review further illustrates the point that Americans, or in this case North Americans, need to rethink their perceptions of what steel pan is and what steel pan can accomplish as a legitimate medium of jazz.

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<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

### Andy, Africa, and A New Audience



**Andy Narell *Live in South Africa* (2001)<sup>406</sup>**

The Caribbean Jazz Project was one of several groups that Narell was involved with in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which also included groups lead by Narell himself such as the jazz quartet Sakésho and the Parisian steel bands Calypsociation and Andy Narell Steelband. Narell was leading his own group of jazz musicians in 1999 when he made his first trip to South Africa, performing for an outdoor concert at the Arts Alive Festival held in Johannesburg. Narell had received word in past years that his music was becoming very popular in South Africa, but what he encountered was beyond his modest expectations. Some forty-to-fifty thousand spectators attended the performance; some estimates put the attendance numbers at eighty thousand, far and away the largest crowd

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<sup>406</sup> Andy Narell, *Live In South Africa* (Cleveland, OH: Heads Up, 2001) B00005BC6D.

Narell had ever performed for live.<sup>407</sup> Narell was not the headliner of the festival; nonetheless, the audience response to his tunes was also very shocking. As he recalls in an interview for *National Public Radio*:

I'd heard that it had become somewhat popular; in my mind I pictured maybe a few hundred people in the club. We got there that day and there was something between 60 and 80 thousand people were out there, and it was the biggest crowd they'd ever had. I mean, people knew my songs, I could just play the first measure of a song and everybody knows it.<sup>408</sup>

The show was a huge success and Narell subsequently returned to South Africa for a repeat performance, and released the album *Live in South Africa* the following year.

In running the promotional story for a 2002 concert in South Africa, critic Gwen Ansil suggested that “Steel pan player Andy Narell is neither a Trinidadian nor a South African, but a look at his recent career suggests that he ought to be at least an honorary citizen of both countries.”<sup>409</sup> Throughout this chapter and analysis, this may be the most grand, yet, appropriate statement describing Andy Narell. His varying level of attachment to either country is a study in both contradiction and triumph. Yet the fact that one of Narell’s largest audiences lies outside of the traditional pan strongholds of the United States and the Caribbean displays the globalization of pan. The former colonial experience shared by South Africans and Trinidadians creates a unique brotherhood.

In stark contrast to the words of Gwen Ansil above, there is serious division in Trinidad about Narell and his role as a steel pan ambassador. In South Africa, Narell is viewed as a true pioneer and liberator, bringing the music of a former colonial people to the world. Yet as he settles into this role in Africa, Narell’s career is also increasingly looked upon by some Trinidadians as theft and fraud. In some extreme cases, there are

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<sup>407</sup> Morning Edition, “Andy Narell: Master of the Steel Pan”, 2004.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> Gwen Ansil, “Narell offers more than simplistic zouk,” *Business Day* (South Africa) October 3, 2002, pg 8.

Trinidadians—the late columnist Terry Joseph of the *Trinidad Express* for example—who consider Narell a white outsider who stole Trinidadian cultural capital and is now reaping the benefits that should belong to the afro-Trinidadians of Trinidad; or a modern day example of the historical troupe of British colonial pillaging.<sup>410</sup> However, this is the exception and most Trinidadians praise Narell for his efforts and respect his work in steel pan for the past forty years. Regardless, Narell's reception in South Africa offers another testimony to Andy Narell's influence and success as a jazz pan pioneer.

### Conclusions

For Andy Narell, the lifelong undertaking of combining Jazz and Pan represents the reconciliation of two worlds. This process juggles the perception and realities of steel pan music and culture, and struggles with the semiotic baggage of the post-war calypso craze. In an interview with the *Freedom Newspaper* of South Africa, the critic's comments bring Narell and his mission full circle from the Steel Bandits to present:

Yes, Andy Narell plays the steel drums. But, no, he does not play 'Yellow Bird.' He learned to loathe the worn Calypso standard during his early years in the music business, playing steel drums for flowery shirted tourists on cruise ships. "That was the most requested song. For a lot of people, that song is Calypso music," Narell said by phone from his home in upstate New York. "For years and years I wouldn't touch it - anything but that. But now I find it fun. I don't play it, but I can quote songs like 'Yellow Bird' in the middle of my solos, just for the fun of it."<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> Terry Joseph of the *Trinidad Express* was undoubtedly the most outspoken critic of Narell and his work. Joseph wrote in excess of fifteen editorials in which he attacked Narell on all fronts often using comments out of context. Besides his job as a journalist, Joseph was also an active member of the PNM party of Trinidad and an outspoken Afro-Trinidadian advocate.

<sup>411</sup> Warren Epstein, "Narell welds jazz to the steel drum / Performer shuns tradition," *Colorado Springs Gazette-Telegraph*, Nov. 3, 1989.

Here the critic is attempting to separate Narell from historical images of steel pan and its connection to Manhattan calypso, and Narell weaves in his existential crisis with the calypso standard. Yet Narell's above comments resonate with a similar review of the Caribbean Jazz Project discussed previously in this chapter; that is, while attempting to praise the work of the musicians the critic willfully displays a degree of ignorance. Moreover, the "Move and Groove" that Goddard highlights in the previous section is similarly well founded and indeed if one could say anything about the Caribbean Jazz Project's musical style it would be precisely this. But the formation of Narell's style throughout his career encompasses more than just a catch phrase. In an attempt to forge his new eclectic style, the amalgamation of pan and jazz, Narell often thinks very seriously about his music and its foundations. He has, over the past forty years, continually faced a tall task, considering that the semiotics and associative capabilities of steel pan were well established by 1974, when Narell set out to forge his path. Yet it would be his order to supplant the traditional associations of "rum and Coca Cola" with his brand of cool, contemporary, groove oriented jazz style.

Narell is a true renaissance figure, uniquely adept and versed in the music, tradition, and culture of the steel pan. It is his dedication to all of these aspects that make him a seminal figure in the development of steel pan in America. Yet his strong desire to continually push the present boundaries of steel pan and steel pan music make him a leading figure in the global expansion of the instrument. I leave it to Narell for the final words:

As I see it, the possibilities have just barely been touched on. First of all, there is so much more that hasn't been dreamed of in the world of steel band music. What has been accomplished to this point in time is

formidable, but it is literally the work of the founders and one generation more. The pan in contemporary music outside of the steel band is even less developed, where 99% of what's possible hasn't been thought of.<sup>412</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Tasha Morris, "When Steel Talks Catches up with Andy Narell," *When Steel Talks*, <http://www.basementrecordings.com/news/otharticles/andynar.htm> <accessed November 15, 2010>

## Chapter 8

### **American Steel Pan Scenes (Outside of New York), Past and Present: Three Case Studies**

Reflecting on the previous chapters of this study, it is apparent that New York City is the epicenter for the historical germination of steel band in America; however, it is also evident that New York was not the exclusive sanctuary of steel pan activity in the United States, and this music spread to the far reaches of the country, including the Midwest and West Coast. These geographical regions developed distinct steel band traditions independent of New York and the Brooklyn Carnival. Historically, regions such as Southern California, Florida, Chicago, Atlantic Coastal areas, and Pittsburgh harbored vibrant steel band scenes, and new scenes, such as the Norfolk/Virginia Beach area, are being formed regularly.<sup>413</sup> In Southern California for example, Andrew de la Basitide and Robert Greenidge are integral in telling the history of the early Southern California steel band scene; yet, their contributions to the American steel band narrative also provide insight into the current situation of the region's steel pan scene and the entertainment industry.

The aspiration of this chapter is to explore several of the various regional steel band scenes outside of New York in order to discuss their developments and contributions to the American steel pan narrative. In particular, this chapter will delve into an analysis of three individual case studies of steel panists, both American and Trinidadian, who have carved new traditions and created successful steel band education

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<sup>413</sup> Throughout this chapter and dissertation, I use the term “scene” in reference to the Mark Slobin concept of individual regional scenes of musical activity. This is drawn from Mark Slobin, *Subcultural Sounds: Microcosms of the West* (Middleton, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1993).



programs in the continental United States. Moreover, through an analysis of the steel pan careers of Chris Tanner, Liam Teague, and Anthony Hailey, this chapter aims to tease out successful teaching and administrative methodologies in order to further understand the energy and skill involved in juggling the many musical and cultural elements associated with pursuing steel pan as a primary occupation in the United States. All three of the above steel panists perform on the instrument; however, their primary income is earned within the bounds of educational establishments as teachers, clinicians, and ensemble directors of steel bands. Unlike internationally famous steel pan virtuosos such as Andy Narell discussed in the previous chapter, Tanner, Teague, and Hailey occupy a different space in the steel band landscape of steel pan in America and their path differs from gigging steel bands and panists.



**Chris Tanner<sup>414</sup>**

**Case Study #1: Chris Tanner**

Dr. Chris Tanner, Associate Professor of Music at Miami University of Ohio, is an important representative of steel pan in America and a shining example of the indiscriminate nature of the “Pan Jumbie” spirit discussed in previous chapters. His experiences in steel pan offer interesting insight into the construction of the American steel pan narrative. Tanner’s involvement with steel pan encompasses several roles, including ensemble leader, educator, and performer, and he has amassed an impressive collection of accolades and accomplishments throughout his twenty-year career. Under the direction of Tanner, the Miami University Steel Band has grown from a small ten-

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<sup>414</sup> <http://www.fna.muohio.edu/music/faculty/tanner/Home.html> <accessed January 2009>

member, five steel pan ensemble in 1994, to the current ensemble (2010) which boasts enough pans for twenty-four players and a membership that regularly exceeds forty-five performers. Under Tanner's guidance, the Miami University Steel Band has released four studio albums including *Burnin* (2001), *One More Soca* (2003), *Simple Pleasures* (2006), and *Three Wishes* (2009). Tanner's steel pan ensembles have shared the stage with many major steel pan soloists, including Andy Narell and Ray Holman, and twice performed as headlining guests at PASIC (Percussive Arts Society International Convention).

Moreover, Tanner is a sought-after clinician, conducting workshops and master classes throughout the United States. He has expanded his wealth of steel pan expertise into a wide array of steel pan activities that include performing on the steel pan, composing original steel pan music, directing steel pan ensembles, and arranging steel pan music. Tanner's published oeuvre includes seven full-ensemble arrangements and the instructional method book *The Steel Pan Game Plan* (2007). The later publication was undertaken at the behest of MENC (Music Educations National Conference) and has quickly become a standard text in the field of steel pan education, especially for primary and secondary schools, across the United States.<sup>415</sup>

Tanner's resume establishes him as a leading figure in American steel pan; however, despite more than two decades of service to the steel pan, multiple publications, successful ensembles, four recorded steel pan albums, and a critically acclaimed method book, Tanner has never actually set foot on the island of Trinidad. Striking indeed is this fact considering that for many steel pan faithful, the pilgrimage to Trinidad has long been considered an important step for American-born practitioners to gain the sense of steel

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<sup>415</sup> As of 2010, Tanner's book has been adopted by the College Music Society and the Percussive Arts Society as the recommended text for steel band instruction. Also, a *WorldCat* search conducted on June 20, 2010 indicated that over 150 libraries worldwide held Tanner's book.

pan skills and exposure thought necessary to fully understanding, appreciating, and performing on this instrument. Regardless, Tanner's success at Miami University of Ohio suggests that he has overcome this traditional barrier. The following is the culmination of several interviews via phone and email with Tanner in which we explore his life in steel pan and discuss some of the major contemporary issues concerning the steel pan in the United States.

Tanner first encountered steel pan as an undergraduate music major at West Virginia University in Morgantown, West Virginia. Tanner enrolled in 1988 and was a student of noted percussion pedagogue Dr. Phil Fiani. Classical music, and to a lesser extent jazz, have long remained the pillars of academic percussion programs in the United States, and Tanner, like thousands of percussionists before him, came to the university music school in order to explore these worlds. Professor Fiani was a pioneer in the implementation of world music into the university percussion curriculum. Fiani recognized both the marketability of African drumming and steel pan for his percussion program, and world percussion gradually became a staple of the West Virginia University percussion curriculum (hereafter WVU). At WVU, Tanner began his college career focusing on the western classical percussion curriculum; his first steel band experiences would come later as part of percussion ensemble. Tanner did not have any steel pan or Caribbean music training prior to his college career and the opportunities that presented themselves at WVU to study and perform this music were important for the young Tanner's future career path.

In the early 1990s, Fiani began creating the World Music Center at the WVU which included amassing a collection of musical instruments from around the globe. The

most important person in this collection, a cornerstone of sorts to the World Music Center, was legendary Trinidadian steel pan maker/tuner/performer Ellie Mannette who came to Fiani and WVU in 1992. As discussed in previous chapters of this study, Mannette was one of the original pioneers of the steel pan movement in Trinidad and many scholars and aficionados credit the octogenarian with creating the first steel pans in the late 1930s.<sup>416</sup> As discussed in Chapter 5, Trinidadian steel panists have a long history of artist-in-residency stays at American universities which began in the 1950s and continue to this day. However, unlike the typical two-week, two-month, or semester-long stays so often the reality of steel pan artists and artists-in-residence throughout the country, Mannette was brought to WVU as a permanent employee, and immediately established a steel pan workshop in which he fixed, built, and tuned steel pans.

Mannette was employed in a university staff position and his duties as a pedagogue at WVU were less defined than those of a professor. Fiani and Mannette agreed on this arrangement in an attempt to recreate the role of steel pan builder/tuner as it is known in Trinidad. In the tradition of interactive teacher-to-student communication so common in Trinidad and throughout the Afro-Caribbean diaspora, Mannette often imparted steel pan tuning and building knowledge as well as tips for cultural practices to the students of WVU on an informal basis. Tanner recalls the experience:

Having Ellie Mannette working in a room in the basement of the CAC [Creative Arts Center] was nothing short of amazing. Here was a genius, a living legend, a major innovator in pan, right in our midst! It was nothing to go down to his workroom during your lunchtime, for example, and sit

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<sup>416</sup> This is a hotly contested credit from both sides of the fence and many Trinidadians fervently believe that this honor should belong to Winston “Spree” Simons; others still suggest that Anthony Williams should garner this honor. A definitive solution or answer to this question is impossible; though most scholars and participants of the early steel pan movement appear to agree that from approximately 1937-1939 all three of these men did tune a pan to have multiple pitches, mostly diatonic, that could be played a discernable melody and the genesis of steel pan emerged from this time period.

and watch him work. While there, invariably Ellie would chat with you, or show what he was doing in tuning a pitch, or in shaping a pan. It was incredible. Not many people (at least, not many in the US) have had the luxury of sitting next to a master tuner like Ellie and just observing him...soaking it in...just being in his company.

In this way Tanner enjoyed a degree of closeness to the steel pan experience similar to that of a young Trinidadian child passing the time in the numerous neighborhood panyards of Port of Spain, Trinidad. Despite his influence on the culture and individuals of the percussion program at West Virginia University, Mannette did not personally direct any of the steel bands. Moreover, in Trinidad it is not at all uncommon for bandleaders to defer band rehearsal to section leaders and deputies, and despite being the leader of the Invaders Steel Band in Woodbrook, Port of Spain, Trinidad during 1940s to 1960s, Mannette was primarily responsible for building and tuning pans.<sup>417</sup> At WVU, Mannette's mentorship sometimes involved him listening to steel band rehearsals, and as Tanner recalls Mannette periodically "popped his head in every once in a while to see what was going on."<sup>418</sup> During Tanner's tenure as an undergraduate, the steel bands at WVU were led and directed by Fiani and doctoral percussion student Jamie Eckert.

Afternoons spent listening and observing the master craftsman had a positive influence on Tanner, and the knowledge and charisma of Mannette shaped the young musician's future career goals. The fact that Mannette is not known as steel pan virtuoso presents an interesting conundrum in that Mannette is a monumental figure in steel pan globally, but not as a performer or arranger; the two most typical avenues for steel pan stardom. Moreover, it appears that much of Tanner's future success in steel pan stems from his proximity to the extra-curricular steel pan knowledge he received from Mannette

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<sup>417</sup> Though it should be noted that Mannette is an accomplished performer on the steel pan and he did perform with the Invaders Steel Band during Carnival and Panorama competitions.

<sup>418</sup> Personal interview with Chris Tanner, August 17, 2007.

in the tuning/building workshop. Tanner also gained valuable insight from the many world-class steel panists from around the world who sought out Mannette in West Virginia for maintenance on their steel pans. In 1991 Mannette, Kaethe George, Fiani, and WVU hosted a steel pan summit that brought together many of the leading steel pan players of the day. Steel panists such as Andy Narell, Mat Britain, Ken “Professor” Philmore, and others enjoyed a short residency in Morgantown, West Virginia rehearsing with the WVU Steel Bands, offering a plethora of concerts, and hosting a series of educational clinics. For Tanner, this was a life-changing event that was particularly influential to him as a musician and firmly established his footing on the path of steel pan.

Tanner, bitten by the “pan jumbie,” shifted his career focus away from classical and jazz percussion, and began completely immersing himself in all aspects of steel pan music. He received his first training on the practical application of playing steel pans while performing in the WVU steel bands. Like other western and non-western instruments organized in families, steel pan skills tend to transfer relatively well between instruments of the family, and players often achieve facility on more than one. Although he primarily played double-seconds while at WVU, Tanner had the opportunity to hone his skills on the lead steel pan, guitar steel pans, and bass steel pans. The opportunity to experiment on all of the different pans was a luxury afforded by the steel pan program at WVU, and Tanner credits this early training for shaping his current teaching philosophy.

The steel pan summit of 1991 and Mannette’s “Trinidad meets academia” style of teaching were influential means of steel pan education for Tanner. With the end of his baccalaureate fast approaching, the young steel panist began searching for the next step in

his steel pan education. Tanner set about searching for a graduate degree programs at institutions in the United States with steel pan programs or ensembles. Unenthused by the narrow results of this research, Tanner also researched schools in which the administration and student climate would be favorable for him to start a steel pan ensemble. The result of this search yielded some interesting results as Miami University of Ohio, an unlikely candidate considering that the university had no steel pan ensemble, was the number one choice and Tanner enrolled in the Master of Music program in fall of 1992.

Tanner diligently attended his graduate studies while laying the groundwork for creating a new steel pan ensemble. Tanner and his mentor Bill Albin lobbied tirelessly for the steel band and after some negotiations with administration, the first steel pans arrived in spring of 1994. Continuing the connection with West Virginia University, the Miami University Steel Band's steel pans were built and tuned by Mannette. In the spring of 1994 Tanner led the new steel drum ensemble (with a membership of a modest ten students) to a successful premier concert as the Miami University Steel Band. Following the premier concert, the University student body in attendance at the concert and College of Liberal Arts administration was enthused by the steel band's riveting performance and the ensemble has since been a staple in the university's general education curriculum and student life ever since.

Tanner finished his masters of music degree at Miami University of Ohio in 1996. Unsure of his prospects beyond graduate school Tanner began to survey the national scene and consider his next move. Other than Liam Teague at Northern Illinois University, Tanner's current position at Miami University of Ohio is the only full-time



steel band university position in the United States. Moreover, creating a position like the one at Northern Illinois at another institution would be no small task. At Miami University of Ohio, Tanner's efforts with the Miami Steel Band both on campus and off-campus gained the respect of administration within the school of music and the broader campus. The success of steel band, and Tanner's diverse and growing expertise in world music, ultimately led Miami University to retain Tanner as a faculty member at the rank of visiting instructor. The fragility of the visiting instructor position is prone to fluctuations in the economy, and Tanner knew that such instability could signal the end of his tenure at Miami University. Therefore in order to secure his temporary faculty position and acquire long-term stability of tenure, a coveted position for any university faculty position in the United States, Tanner re-enrolled at West Virginia University seeking a terminal Doctoral of Musical Arts degree in 1996. Four years later Tanner completed his doctoral work at WVU, and the following year, 2001, Miami University of Ohio turned his position into a tenure-track position and undertook the customary national search. Tanner was selected for the position, and since 2001 has served as assistant professor of music and director of the Miami University Steel Band.



### **Miami University Steel Band (2009)<sup>419</sup>**

Currently (2011) the Miami University Steel Band is a vibrant ensemble and an integral part of the overall musical fabric of the University. Since its humble inception in 1994, the band has grown into two separate bands (a beginning and an advanced level steel band) with a total enrollment of approximately fifty students between them. The ensembles meet twice weekly and rehearse in the same space as the other large traditional musical ensembles at Miami University. Like steel bands at other academic institutions, the steel bands at Miami University are open to all students, both music majors and non-majors, and only the advanced ensemble requires an audition.

In addition to his activities in steel band, Tanner's teaching load is filled by courses in ethnomusicology. For example, during the semester in which our interviews took place, Tanner was directing his two steel bands and teaching two large lecture sections (125 students each) of a survey of world music course that is also part of the general education curriculum at the University.

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<sup>419</sup> <http://www.orgs.muohio.edu/musteel/> <accessed May 15 2010>

Interestingly, applied studio lesson teaching, a staple of most applied music faculty, is not part of Tanner's teaching load. This is in stark contrast to Tanner's counterpart at Northern Illinois, Liam Teague who does, in fact, teach applied steel pan lessons as part of his primary teaching load. Tanner does teach applied lessons on occasion however:

I have [taught applied lessons] and I do it because I am a good friend of the percussion guy, who was my mentor basically, and if he has an overload sometimes I will, or I've had a couple independent studies recently where I've taught, non percussion majors, maybe people from my band improvisation lessons, stuff like that, or composition lessons, stuff like that so I have taught applied in the past. I have a doctorate; I have a DMA in percussion so I at least have the credentials to teach it! But normally I do not teach it nor is it expected of me and I am not earning my tenure here teaching percussion. In fact, I could really have nothing to do with percussion because I am doing my own thing.<sup>420</sup>

These remarks hint at the autonomy of his position and the bifurcated nature of percussion and steel pan as two distinct traditions; though it is interesting to note that in contrast to Tanner's above statements, the Miami University official website has him dually listed as an instructor of ethnomusicology and percussion.<sup>421</sup> Regardless, Tanner sees himself as an ethnomusicologist, not a percussionist, and despite his efforts to separate the two disciplines, he often faces opposition from his home institution.

Tanner was very pragmatic in creating the necessary conditions for convincing the administration at Miami University of the importance and necessity for his position as steel band director. However, steel pan is not the only instrument in the percussion world trying to create a climate of necessity within academia. In fact, full-time college marimba

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<sup>420</sup> Personal interview with Chris Tanner, August 17, 2007.

<sup>421</sup> <http://arts.muohio.edu/music/people/faculty-listing-bios> <accessed may 15, 2010>

professorship positions, like steel pan, are exceedingly rare.<sup>422</sup> Marimbist Nancy Zeltsman has long been an advocate for the integration of marimba into academia and she theorizes that adjunct positions alone are not enough to change the current climate. She and Tanner agree, however, that tenure-track positions for marginalized instrument such as steel band or marimba will need to be created by enterprising individuals and almost certainly will not arise out of perceived need from administration.<sup>423</sup>

The marimba and the steel pan have one important thing in common: they are both very costly instruments and outfitting a university with the proper equipment is often prohibitively expensive. Despite this shared capital investment, the pedagogical traditions of each instrument are very different. Tanner argues that one major distinction between the steel band and the marimba is the student-to-teacher ratio; that is, marimba is a one-on-one instrument and necessitates a large amount of contact hours between individual student and instructor. Since a single marimba instructor can only serve a small number of students at any given time such a figure is a pricey luxury. On the other hand, steel band is a large ensemble, and one director can serve many students at the same time.

The second major distinction between the two instruments is their varying levels of involvement within the curriculum of college music programs. Tanner argues that

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<sup>422</sup> At the 2003 Zeltsman Marimba Festival held in Appleton, Wisconsin, Internationally renowned marimbist Nancy Zeltsman gave a lecture on the importance of creating a market for the solo marimba player. Zeltsman argued that if marimba was to be taken seriously in academia then marimba performers and educators would need to create the demand for marimba teaching positions. In particular, Zeltsman argued that adjunct positions were not enough to warrant proper respect for the instrument and that full-time tenure-track position should be the standard. She then gave a compelling tale of how she bagged groceries for years while establishing her solo marimba career rather than compromising her convictions and seeking “percussion” rather than “marimba” teaching and performing positions. These comments appear somewhat contradictory considering that Zeltsman has never held a full-time college or university professorship and serves currently as an adjunct at the Boston Conservatory and the Berklee School of Music in Boston.

<sup>423</sup> Personal conversation between the Author and Nancy Zeltsman at the Zeltsman International Marimba Festival, Lawrence Conservatory, Appleton, Wisconsin, July 2003.

despite the absence of any real employment prospects outside of academia, the marimba is universally accepted as part of the curriculum within college and university percussion programs nationally. This inclusion is a mark in the marimba's favor and is a rallying cry for marimbists and percussionists lobbying college and university administration for funds for equipment and full-time faculty positions.<sup>424</sup>

Interestingly, not only does the steel band offer opportunities for ensemble participation, but is significantly more likely than the marimba to draw non-music major and non-musicians from a college or university's general student body to participate.<sup>425</sup> Moreover, many steel bands in academia are filled with non-majors who simply looking for a fun activity in which to participate while at a given university. To this end, Tanner argues that the two instrumental situations, marimba and steel band, are striving towards different goals. The marimba is geared towards a particular student interested in training for solo performance and who will likely produce more marimbists as a pedagogue. While the steel band shares this goal in part, it also strives to offer students a participatory activity without the intensity of training future steel band leaders.

Ultimately, creating more full-time steel band positions in academia will require an individual with the energy and charisma of Tanner. However, hard work alone will need lead to the promise of employment and as Tanner suggests, luck and economics play a part:

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<sup>424</sup> It should also be noted that the steel band has significantly opportunities for employment outside of academia as gigging ensembles.

<sup>425</sup> I should qualify this statement in that the other than a few select college/university large marimba ensembles, Concordia College of Moorhead, Minnesota for example, large marimba orchestras similar to those in the 1920s-50s do not exist in academia. Furthermore, I am also excluding percussion ensembles as the marimba is only a part-time member in these ensembles and the players rarely play only the marimba; rather, the circumstance and repertoire instead require players to switch between multiple instruments or construct multiple percussion set-ups that include marimba and percussion instruments.

I do feel that it is important to have an excellent band, and this is getting away from the original questioning, but I would say that for the time being there is not going to be any Chris Tanners because there's just no money for that. Unless there somebody who has fire in their rear-end like I did with a drive to go out and get it done, and make it happen. That also requires a confluence of events; you know the planets were in alignment here and it just so happened that it was going to kind of be that way. If I were to try to do this again, if what I did [at Miami University] was happening right now instead of the mid 90s, then I wouldn't have this position. Because the economy is tighter and there's no money. See what I am saying...?

I got really, really lucky! People have to make their own luck too... I am hopeful that other people are able to replicate what I do, I don't want to be the only one selfishly guarding my gig like a dragon sitting on his hoard. I am not like that, but I just don't see it happening for more people to have these [steel band] positions. Economics, what colleges can afford, for instance right now at Miami, we still do not have a full-time saxophone professor and even I would argue that saxophone is more important than steel pan.<sup>426</sup>

Considering the current economic downturn in the United States, it appears as though Tanner's prophecy is accurate. This claim is based on research from the job listings of the *College Music Society* and *Chronicle of Higher Education*, in which from 2007 to 2010 no full-time steel band positions in academia surfaced with vacancies.

Tanner's rise to prominence in the world of steel pan is an interesting study in persistence, and much of his success from the past twenty years is due in part to an ability to adapt his pedagogical approach to a variety of ages and experience levels. Moreover, one of the primary goals of this chapter is to explore the process of steel pan education and its implementation throughout schools in the United States. Accordingly, one area where Tanner has a particular strength is his experience as a steel pan educator and clinician in primary, secondary, and college level steel bands. Tanner's extensive experience as a clinician further serves to identify trends in American steel pan education

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<sup>426</sup> Personal interview with Chris Tanner, August 17, 2007.

and as such a resource he provides an opportunity to test one of my contentions from earlier in this study; mainly, that steel bands are still treated as a novelty in academia and not given proper consideration in rehearsal, repertoire, and style. To this assumption, Tanner asserted that a majority of his experiences were positive, though slightly less than half offer support to allegations of neglect. Tanner comments that:

I would say that when I have had less than pleasing musical experiences working with a steel band, it is usually because of one or both of the following factors:

1. The members themselves have not had enough rehearsal or practice time to be comfortable with whatever repertoire they are working on.
2. The director has little (or no) idea how to coach the ensemble or the repertoire.

In these cases, I always hope that the situation at the particular school will improve, but sometimes it cannot, for a number of reasons. What is disappointing, however, is to see a band that is sub-par, and to know that it is being run sub-par because the director has not educated him-or-herself properly.

Tanner is quick to point out that this lack of preparation is not usually malicious or willful, or even an intentional decision, but one born out of shrinking school budgets and schedules, lack of quality training for steel band directors, and constraints on space for rehearsal.

Tanner clarifies his point with a description of what he perceives as a typical university steel band and how it functions on a yearly cycle. His point here is to illustrate the realities of typical university steel band operations and to accentuate the problematic nature of maintaining such an ensemble:

A graduate student comes in and the percussion professor who was here, and is still here, didn't really know anything about steel band. So the graduate student knew more than that guy did. He's got his own fish to fry running the percussion studio, so he's perfectly willing to let me a

graduate student basically take the reins with minimal supervision. The only supervision that would come in, in this hypothetical case, was administrative or legal ass-covering...the bands going out on a gig and maybe the faculty guy will go along so there is a faculty presence, things like that. The point is, as far as direction, it is totally up to me. I pick the rep, I run rehearsals, he's not even there during rehearsals, I am doing all the directing a direct supervision of the band. Now let's say, after two or three years when my assistantship runs out, I leave. Now, the guy who's there, the percussion professor, is the only faculty member who has only even tangential interest in the group.

Now there is a new graduate student who comes in and this graduate student doesn't know anything about pan either because percussion professor isn't recruiting the graduate student necessarily to be a pan director, just simply another percussion graduate student. He or she needs to get the best graduate students they can and that person may or may not have steel band experience. But the steel band is there, they bought the instruments, so you stick the graduate student in there to direct the band because you do not have time to do it. Now you've got a completely ignorant person running that band. I am not judging the person, I am not saying their ignorant because there stupid, I am just saying their ignorant because they are ignorant, they don't know anything about the idiom. So, if I were to go into a program and observe that, it's very likely that the person because they are ignorant has no idea what they are doing. They don't know the styles, they can't approach the instrument properly, they don't know what a soca or a calypso is, they don't know anything. They don't know how to play the instruments, they're learning to play the instruments, themselves, right there; they don't know anything. This kind of situation can easily happen in a university setting, because, unlike me and Liam, the ensembles that are in universities are being run either by adjunct faculty members, or they're being run by a grad student who may or may not what they are doing, or they could be run by the percussion professor who also may or may not know what he is doing. They also might be doing it as a side thing, as one of the many pieces of the pie that they do, so they can't devote a lot of time and energy to what they're doing, unless you're a steel band wonk like me. So, it's not malicious or anything. The program is there, the students are there, the instruments are there, the know-how is missing for one reason or another.

Although the above is a hypothetical case, Tanner's analysis is similar to the steel band experiences described by several of the participants in Chapter 5's research study.

Furthermore, the instability caused by revolving cycles of graduate student directors is an



experience shared by this author and is an operational situation present at dozens of academic institutions across the country.<sup>427</sup>

Time constraints are also a major issue plaguing college music programs across the country attempting to offer steel pan. Department chairs are under increasing pressure from larger administrative entities to expedite the completion of Bachelors degrees. In the state of Minnesota, for example, the MnSCU (Minnesota State Colleges and Universities) system has imposed a cap of 120 credits for any new four year degree program and is pressing member institutions to reduce existing programs to a similar cap. Minnesota is not alone in this regard and many other states have, or are considering, similar measures.<sup>428</sup> The 120 credit hard cap is particularly constraining for many college music programs that often rely on degree programs—music education for example—that have degree requirements often exceeding 138 credits and repeat-beyond-requirement ensemble participation expectations for music majors. The latter is particularly important in order to boost ensemble numbers to justify the day-to-day operations of the department. Time is always at a premium for students and professors, and curriculum caps—such as the 120 degree cap in Minnesota—often impact less traditional academic activities like steel band more so than others. Tanner offers his own analysis of how time constraints impact college steel band programs:

[L]et's leave high schools out for a moment, because I believe that most universities, I would say 90 percent are being run by someone who knows what they are doing. Now, at least the base knowledge is there, but that doesn't mean that the time is there. Even if someone has the knowledge, let's say that someone, me, Chris was not the steel band guy at my universities, I'm the percussion guy and I don't have the time, I have all

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<sup>427</sup> The University of Minnesota has a graduate teaching assistantship called the "Steel Band TA" which is used by the percussion department to recruit incoming graduate percussion students.

<sup>428</sup> States that already have this cap in place include Nevada and Texas, and as suggested in the text many more states across the nation are considering the measure to adopt the 120 credit degree cap.

the know-how in the world but I have to train these percussion guys on the timpani, the bass drum, and the cymbals, and I don't have time and can't put six hours of rehearsal on steel band a week, which isn't doing justice to what my real job actually is, there just isn't time.

I've gone into programs where they rehearse once a week, for an hour or an hour and a half; show me any ensemble that has at least moderate expectations for performance who rehearses one hour a week. Especially considering in the case of steel band, which this is one thing that people do not always think about off the top of their head, in steel band usually it is the case that the members who are playing the instruments that stay at the facility. This is not like a band or an orchestra who after rehearsal pack up their instruments and take them home and practice at home, that's not what steel band is. If you play the bass pan or guitar pan and you rehearse once a week, guess what, you play once a week, I mean, how good could it be? And if you're not in a place, have the facilities to leave the instruments set up, for instance, our group we have to set up every time we play them. Take them out of the case, we'll that's a pain in the ass, so there is no practice a lot of time because there is no way for access to the instruments, they don't live near so they have to come all the way across campus in the winter, and it's fifteen degrees, and trudge across campus in the snow and *then* set the instrument up, you know what they say? The hell with that! So, if your band only meets once a week then it is likely that your band plays poorly, or will never play as well as other bands because you only play once a week.

It's interesting to note that Tanner offers the above synopsis in all seriousness; that is, he approaches the steel band with the same respect unthinkingly bestowed upon orchestras and wind ensembles. Tanner is more than simply a steel band director, he is a musician who upholds the highest standards of artistic and musical integrity regardless of the context.

Lack of rehearsal time and commitment can have devastating results for any ensemble and throughout the course of my interviews with Tanner he often mentioned a degree of frustration over the number of steel bands he has encountered with great enthusiasm for playing, but little artistic awareness, stylistic execution, or soundness of technique. Since audiences generally have little experience with steel bands they

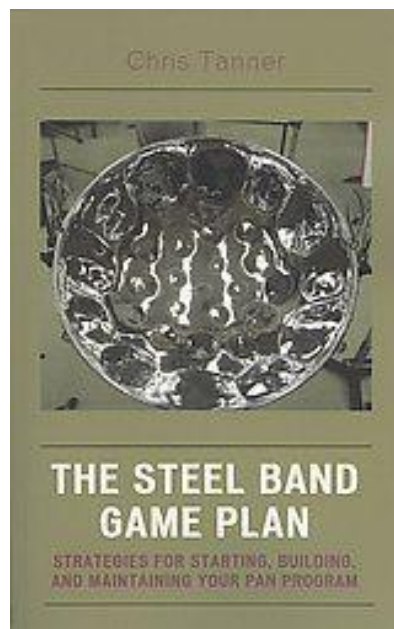
conversely have little ability to discern quality in performances. Nonetheless, fundamental musical elements such as accurate rhythms, pitches, and ensemble coordination are as basic to steel band as to most kinds of ensembles. The idea that execution of such elementary tasks is non-essential to steel band performance concerns Tanner, who takes it as a broader reflection of the often marginalized, novelty status of steel band in academia. According to Tanner, the problem has two facets but one major cause:

A director needs more than technique; they need so much information about how to direct a steel band ensemble. Of course there are some things about ensemble directing that are analogous to any ensemble directing like being able to hear errors and fix problems and things like that. But in the steel band, the people are not armed with the stylistic knowledge. So for example, if I go out and I hear a high school steel band play calypso, I would say it's pretty rare for me to find a high school band that knows how to play calypso properly; I'd say about 10% of them can do it. The other 90% are not playing it properly because of two reasons:

1. One reason is because the drum set or engine room is clueless, and why is that? It's because the directors themselves aren't drummers! They can't show the people how to play calypso. They don't even know how to do it themselves, so they surely can't teach their drum set player how to do it. And the drum set player doesn't listen to calypso, they listen to rock 'n roll or country or hip-hop. So they don't know what a calypso is, they've never heard one! That's one problem. The engine room is all screwed up and they don't have the right instruments playing the right rhythms.
2. The second problem is the strumming of the inner voices. Now anybody can play a melody; even if you teach the melody by rote, you can learn it and play the tune. But it's the inner parts, the strumming, it's very difficult, it's not easy at all. In fact, it's extraordinarily hard, I would say! It's very hard to do it *well*. So instead, what I hear when I hear most high school steel bands play, is I hear *poor* strumming. The rhythms are not correct. Or, worse, they're both not correct and they're not swinging or lined up; even the incorrect version isn't ensemble-y together! You've got four strummers, and you've got four different versions of what rhythm is happening. Even the four of them aren't picking the same *wrong* way. It's terrible.

And again, it comes back to the director because if I hear that in a band, I start to get a little angry at the director, or disappointed, because that's not the kid's fault, so to speak. Well, they're the ones playing, so ultimately it's their responsibility, but Andy, you know what I mean. If you have a wind band, and you were a band director and you let that sort of bad performance slip under your nose, then you're a bad band director! Or if you're an orchestra director and the instruments are never in tune, and you don't ever address intonation, then you're a bad orchestra director. You're just bad at what you do. So if you're a steel band director and you're letting that go by, then you're a *bad* steel band director.

Tanner's theory that it is the consumer—in this case the audience—which lacks both education and the motivation to demand such artistic integrity is provocative. But it may, as we have seen in Chapters 2 and 5, be an accurate description. One thing that remains clear is that steel bands in academia, Miami University Steel Band included, will have to strike a balance continually between the educational mission of the institution and the artistic demands, or lack thereof, of the audience.



**The Steel Band Game Plan (2007)<sup>429</sup>**

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<sup>429</sup> Chris Tanner, *Steel Band Gamer Plan: Strategies for Starting, Building, and Maintain Your Pan Program* (New York: College Music Society Press, 2007).

At the Miami University of Ohio, Tanner has created an atmosphere in which the general campus body respects and, more importantly, supports the work he does and the work of the Miami University steel bands. To this end, Tanner sees his role as a steel band educator on both a local and global scale. For instance, as noted above Tanner has published steel band charts and arrangements that are performed widely across the United States; however, it is his pedagogical activities that have garnered more recent attention. Tanner's instructional method book (Above) called *The Steel Pan Game Plan* (2007)—which was commissioned by MENC (Music Educations National Conference)—has become an indispensable tool for educators in primary and secondary schools in higher education interested in starting steel bands or fostering existing ones. In the book, Tanner penned a text rich with informative, yet accessible, information that is both musically instructive and culturally sensitive. Tanner is also in the process of creating a set of instructional steel band performance videos to release in video form either on DVD or online. He envisions these tutorials as serving a role similar to the countless number of how-to drum set videos available on the market.

Throughout his book, and my interviews, Tanner stressed that audience education is an integral part of steel band education. Moreover, he sees the education and cultivation of an audience as one of the major duties required of any American steel band director in academia.

ARM: Do you think it is our responsibility to go out and try to educate the audience or to try to change the perception of steel pan as novelty? Obviously, this will take years but do you think this is something that is even worth attempting?

CT: I *do* feel like it's our responsibility, yeah! In other words, if somebody comes to my steel band concert, I want them to be entertained. That's the main goal, actually. The main goal for me is that they have a good time at

the concert. But I also hope that they have learned what a good steel band looks like and sounds like, by watching my concert. So when they see a steel band in the future... It's just like if you take somebody to see the Chicago Symphony...

We just did a concert [2008] where we played at a venue for the first time, a new venue for us in a little suburb of Cincinnati, a little town called Blue Ash. The crowd was all old people, which was unusual for us, because we get a decent mix at these park things. This crowd was *all* elderly, like 90% 65 and older. We played like fifteen, sixteen numbers, and three of them are tunes that they would know. The other thirteen or fourteen are tunes by me, Tom Miller and Ray, you know. And people enjoyed the show, but I had a couple people come up to me after and say, "You know, if you come back here next year, I think you should play some dance music, because we really like to dance." And I said, "What do you mean? What's dance music to you? Do you mean big band music, like swing?" and they were like, "Yeah, you should play some of that!" And I was nice to them, but in my mind, I'm thinking like, "You know what? *No*, I'm not going to do that. I know you want to be happy, but my music isn't like ballroom dancing for dancing. It's music you're supposed to listen to and appreciate." And I even said that before these cats came up to me after the show. During the show, I said like, "Hey, look, you're hearing a lot of music tonight that you've never heard before. Let me explain why that is: It's because our ensemble is an ensemble that focuses on original music for this art form. That's because I feel that by performing original music, its advancing the idiom."

Interestingly, Tanner was also quick to qualify his statement about “enjoying the concert” during our interview. In particular, Tanner stressed that by no means was his desire to perform an “enjoyable” concert a placation with compromised artistic standards, and he stood firmly by his claims of “advancing the idiom.” Moreover, his actions at the summer concert confirm this attitude and as Tanner later explained:

Getting back to this idea of entertaining and appreciating, I want to make that really clear, I think that what I'm trying to do with my ensemble is that I am trying to perform original music, and I'm trying to play it as well as I can with my group, and I also want it to be entertaining. So I don't see entertainment and appreciation as mutually exclusive things.

Tanner brings this same artistic integrity to his performance of traditional calypsos and Caribbean folk music. Ultimately, Tanner sees the steel band as his medium for art, and

like any determined musician he attempts to uphold his artistic convictions in respecting the history of the steel band at every step.

It is apparent that although Tanner and his success are unique, his situation has the possibility of being recreated in other academic institutions. Moreover, Tanner's quest to spread the steel pan to other parts of the United States is admirable, and his willingness to share educational writings and materials is further separates him from Trinidadian predecessors. In this way, Tanner is unlike many Trinidadians who fiercely guard their steel pan knowledge. The development of steel pan in America is more than simply purchasing and playing the instruments; it is a change in attitude and Tanner's final words capture the moment and spirit of American steel band:

I want people to understand that things like my book and things like Andy Narell's music are necessary for steel band because steel band has gone beyond Trinidad. I feel like just now, just at this moment, in the 2000s and beyond, steel band is just beginning to get out of Trinidad. I mean look at all these bands in Europe. They're not composing their own music, they're playing Trinidadian panoramic tunes! It's almost like they're treating it like a novelty, "We're going to play Pan in A minor because it's such a great composition," and it is! It is the type of arrangement of this sort of canonic compositions that's going to remain with us forevermore. People are going to want to play it even fifty years from now. Just now, with Andy [Narell] writing his music and bands popping up all over the country and schools, I think we're only on the cusp of steel bands becoming its own entity, taking on its own life in the United States. There's a separation occurring and I think it's only just now occurring, and I think it's a generational thing. People who are of my generation were the first generation of people who learned from non-Trini's. People who learned from me are only two generations away. So just now, when I talk to people at this Mannette workshop that I go to; when I look at some people, there are some people who are playing Trinidadian music all the time. But when I look at some people and I look at what they're doing and I see what they're playing at their concerts and their repertoire, they're not playing *any* Trinidadian music. I think out of a concert of ten tunes, there's one or two. On the other ones, they're either doing their own arranging or they're playing Chris Tanner tunes or Andy Narell tunes. They're doing that, they're not playing Trinidadian music. And that's terribly exciting to me. These people are doing steel band in a new way, they're not tethered to this

island mentality and playing panoramic tunes and transcriptions of Beethoven. They're playing what I'm interested in, which is original music for pan. So we're kind of at an exciting moment.





**Anthony Hailey<sup>430</sup>**

### **Case Study #2: Anthony Hailey and the Virginia Rhythm Project**

Dr. Anthony Hailey is a percussionist, steel panists, educator, and all-around steel pan pedagogue. Unlike Chris Tanner and Liam Teague, who teach and direct university-level steel pan ensembles, Hailey deals almost exclusively with primary-and secondary-school level students. Hailey is the artistic director of the Virginia Rhythm Project, an after-school world percussion and dance program based in the Greater Norfolk/Virginia Beach area of Virginia. The project was founded in 1996 with the mission of bringing multicultural artistic excellence and education to the youth and educators of northeastern Virginia, but the influence of the project has far exceeded these geographic boundaries, now effectively encompassing the Atlantic Coast and beyond. The Virginia Rhythm Project includes both Caribbean and West African music; however, the steel pan element

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<sup>430</sup> <http://www.multi-cultural.net/instructorbios.html> <accessed March 14 2009>

of the project, which is comprised of five steel pan ensembles, dominates the curriculum, and it is here that I focus in the following discussion.

Like Chris Tanner, Anthony Hailey's early musical education followed the standard American model; that is, his initial training in music—percussion specifically—was rooted in the western European classical tradition. Hailey began his post-secondary music education at Eastern Carolina University (ECU) in Greenville, North Carolina, in 1987. A Music Education major, Hailey initiated studies with percussion instructor Mark Ford (now head of percussion studies at the University of North Texas). Ford had previously established a small steel pan component in the percussion curriculum in ECU in the mid 1980s and this element was well entrenched among the culture of percussion students by the time of Hailey's arrival. Although steel band was only a small component of the percussion program at ECU, several students, most notably Hailey, have since established viable steel band programs at other institutions throughout the United States. As director of percussion studies at ECU, Ford regularly brought in Ellie Mannette to tune and fix the group's steel pans. Moreover, Mannette and the United States Navy Steel Band made regular visits to the college for performances, clinics, and master classes. As a student at ECU, Anthony Hailey soaked-in the fertile musical atmosphere and began to expand his appreciation for world percussion music.

During Hailey's third year of study at ECU, Ford began to groom him for a position in his private steel pan ensemble, Panama Steel. The group was Ford's private working steel band and was well known throughout the region. For Hailey, or any other percussion student at ECU, performing in the group was a lucrative endeavor, and the position was coveted. As Hailey recalls, Ford began the audition for the group with a

series of subtle questions, testing Hailey’s aptitude for the ensemble’s sizable workload and necessary professionalism:

Once I became a junior, Mark [Ford] began asking me questions “so Anthony I hear you sing a little bit?” And I said “you know I do ok,” and he just kept asking these kind of off the wall kind of questions. Then one day, he asked me if I wanted to be in Panama Steel and I was like “yeah man,” because everybody, all the percussion majors, want to be in Panama Steel. I started and he gave me this book of charts—about fifty charts—and was like “here, learn these we got a gig in two weeks!” I hit the woodshed. My first pan was double seconds, and ever since then I realized that this is a voice that I could actually go out and make money with, you know? I can’t lug around a marimba, or, you could, but it would be a pretty painful undertaking every time you load it up. We [ensemble members] made money in that band, and as a college student—I was 18-19 years old—I was making around 300 to 350 dollars a weekend just playing some pans.<sup>431</sup>

Similar to so many other American-born steel panists, Hailey was abruptly inserted into the role of steel panist with the expectation of learning a large amount of repertoire by traditional western classical methods. That is, unlike his Trinidadian counterparts he was not limited to rote learning and had the ability to learn the extensive repertoire by reading the music.

Despite the stress of his instant immersion into the role, Hailey flourished as a double-second player in Panama Steel and performed in the group for two years. As Hailey approached graduation and his undergraduate career was nearing completion, his mentor Professor Ford, recognizing the young panists’s aptitude for world music and steel pan, encouraged Hailey to explore the graduate music program at West Virginia University suggesting that perhaps he could work with Ellie Mannette and study steel pan more seriously. As mentioned above, the steel pan manufacturing company, steel pan tuning center, and World Music Center at West Virginia University was a great fit for

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<sup>431</sup> Interview with Anthony Hailey, April 4, 2009.

Hailey who would later complete both a Master of Music (1993) and Doctor of Musical Arts degree (1996) at the institution. Furthermore, while beginning his graduate career at West Virginia University, a fortuitous set of circumstances resulted in Hailey being roommates with Pascal Younge, a Ghanaian master drummer who would later become West Virginia University's first tenured professor in world music and who now serves as Director of the African Music Department at Ohio University, Athens. Hailey and Younge were roommates for several years in Morgantown, West Virginia while completing their studies, and Hailey recalls playing African drums every day with Younge. It was part of life and deeply ingrained into the daily grind. Younge taught Hailey about West African drum and dance music, adding another dimension to Hailey's quickly expanding world music knowledge. The job of artistic director of the Virginia Rhythm Project is a tall order, and the comprehensiveness of Hailey's training as both a percussionist and steel panist is an excellent fit. Yet the cultural sensitivity Hailey brings to his work is also a result of his education and life experiences.



### **The Virginia Rhythm Project**

The Virginia Rhythm Project was founded in 1996 by the Portsmouth General Hospital Foundation as an outgrowth of the Virginia Arts Festival. The not-for-profit

organization sponsors arts programs in the Northeast Virginia area encompassing the cities of Norfolk, Hampton, Portsmouth, and Virginia Beach. Haley was hired as artistic director by the Virginia Rhythm Project in 1996 and held the position until 2008. The Virginia Rhythm Project is a multi-ethnic world music program comprised of steel band, African drum and dance, and other Caribbean musical genres. The project was housed in several locations in the Northeast Virginia area, and Hailey and company often traveled to schools within the area. The Virginia Rhythm Project is structured as five individual steel bands with a sixth group called All-Star (an audition only ensemble comprised of the top players from each of the five feeder steel bands). The All-Stars have performed extensively throughout the United States and Canada, with internationally known recording artists such as Gladys Night, and at high profile academic events, including the 2005 Percussive Arts Society International Convention. The ensembles have also been feature on several regional radio broadcasts.

The steel pan ensembles were initially added to the Virginia Rhythm Project as an afterschool activity designed to keep at-risk youths and juveniles occupied and out of trouble during the afterschool hours.

We started with the school year and get the kids going after school. Each one of them is an after school rehearsal and we felt that was very crucial for the middle school groups, and because their reaching puberty, a lot of them go home and their parents don't get home until five or six o'clock, so we wanted to make sure to occupy that time in-between school and parental supervision at home.<sup>432</sup>

The reality of this method of occupying students during at-risk times of day is very similar to the "Operation Street Corner" program discussed in Chapter 7 established by

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<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

Murry Narell in Manhattan during the 1960s. Both Narell and Hailey used steel bands in order to, in Narell's words "Make beaters out of beats."

Except for the elite All-Stars ensemble, the Virginia Rhythm Project is open to all socio-economic levels and requires only a brief audition process with a primary focus on rhythmic capabilities. Because the Virginia Rhythm Project is not affiliated with local school districts in Norfolk, Virginia Beach, or Hamilton, Virginia, recruiting new members is often one of the biggest challenges. Hailey describes the audition process:

We [Virginia Rhythm Project] were going to the band and string classes, and, doing a little spiel about the program, you know, give them [students] some information, and take some drums to demonstrate exactly what steel pan is. Then we would hold real brief auditions to basically check student's rhythmic capabilities; we would play a pattern and have them play the rhythmic pattern back to us. A lot of times we just use djembes because it was easier to transport and we had so many kids to audition. Each fall we [Virginia Rhythm Project] continue to do that, we go to each of the schools in the districts that we're in and hold auditions. It's a real simple audition, and we try and get the best student that we can as far as rhythmic capabilities, but sometimes you have to look into the personality. You have a brief moment to like judge their personality, their whole demeanor, how they're going to respond to the group [Virginia Rhythm Project] setting.<sup>433</sup>

Of note here is the emphasis on integrity, both rhythmic and personal. The Virginia Rhythm Project is a community-building organization, and Hailey is interested in positively shaping the lives of his ensemble members in the long term. This is nowhere more apparent than on the website of the Virginia Rhythm Project ([www.virginiaartsfest.com](http://www.virginiaartsfest.com)), which lists the names and institutions of college-bound students alongside the regular ensemble roster. Inviting in the at-risk student population and redirecting their energies is paramount to the mission of the Virginia Rhythm Project,

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<sup>433</sup>Ibid.

and reflects the mission of the sponsoring hospital foundation. Hailey spoke directly to this fact when discussing the core duties of his daily schedule.

[W]e started with the beginning of the school year and get the kids going after school. Each one of them [individual steel bands] is an after school rehearsal and we felt that was very crucial for the middle school groups because their reaching puberty. . . .<sup>434</sup>

Hailey and the administrators of the Virginia Rhythm Project intimately understand the student demographics of their recruitment area—the greater Virginia Beach, Virginia—and the steel band component of the of Virginia Rhythm Project’s afterschool curriculum counterbalances the realities of the region’s under-served and minority populations.

Interestingly, inclusion of the steel band as part of afterschool curricula, either before school or after, is less common in Trinidad than one might think. Moreover, when primary schools do have affiliated steel bands the actual amount of steel pan teaching that occurs within the bounds of daily school is minimal. Hailey comments that:

There is surprisingly very little teaching with pan in primarily and secondary schools in Trinidad. There are a few schools that have steel drum programs as a part of their curriculum, but really that’s not something that is incorporated in the school systems as much we would think it is.

As mentioned in previous chapters of this study, the Trinidadian schedule for steel band activities is centered on the Carnival calendar. Here steel bands rehearse daily, late into the evenings, daily for approximately two months (mid-November through late-January) leading up to the Panorama competition. Conversely, the steel bands of the Virginia Rhythm Project ensembles rehearse daily, but each individual student ensembles usually rehearses only once a week. However, unlike their Trinidadian counterparts, the rehearsal

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<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

schedule for the Virginia Rhythm Projects continues year-round with ramped-up frequency during the summer school break.

Very few of the students who participate in the steel bands of the Virginia Rhythm Project have any prior steel pan experience. Yet it is interesting to note that many participants in the group are also current or former band students, and have western classical musical skills. These students display a propensity for rhythm but they can also read musical notation and understand the basics of music harmony. While conducting fieldwork in 2005, I attended the select All-Stars group's performance at PASIC, at which the entire group played from memory. My initial reaction was to wonder if perhaps the students lacked the skills to read musical notation, a phenomenon that is very common in Trinidad. This assumption was proven wrong, but I still posed the question of "rote learning or note reading" to Hailey. He suggested that the Virginia Rhythm Project strives for an equal balance of both methods:

We have rote and we have the music notated because most of our students are band students and several of them can read music. Ben [former assistant director Ben Miller] and myself, pretty much for the All-Stars I do all of the arranging and use Sibelius. Everything is notated. We go into rehearsals with the music there but I've found that unless they are really good readers it is so much quicker to teach by rote. We have a combination of reading and rote going on, specifically in the All-Star ensemble. In the other ensembles we pretty much keep it to rote because they are just now learning a new instrument and so to have the music and then their hearing the drum and working on technique, which is really something we focus on early... the technique and the drum and producing sound. So, rote learning for pretty much all the middle school groups and a combination for the All-stars [high school group].<sup>435</sup>

It appears that Hailey's integrated rote/notation style of rehearsal techniques has fostered a high degree of efficiency for learning material and a solid comfort level for the students relying on either method of transmission. This approach is not unique to Hailey; Chris

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<sup>435</sup> Ibid



Tanner often employs a similar approach when working with young steel bands, and both he and Hailey suggest that this combined method has proven the most effective approach for teaching American steel bands.

One of the most striking elements of the 2005 performance of the Virginia Rhythm Project All-Stars was the variety and complexity of the group's repertoire. The repertoire selected by Hailey for the various ensembles of the Virginia Rhythm Project is a diverse selection of tunes that encompass a wide variety of genres and styles. Initially, Hailey utilized several of the steel band pieces and arrangements familiar from his days with Panama Steel and West Virginia University. He taught simplified versions of arrangements gleaned from the Panama Steel and West Virginia University steel band gig book to the Virginia Rhythm Project students with great success. For educational purposes Hailey further supplements these arrangements with other American steel pan standards such as "Rant and Rave" published by Pan Press, Akron, Ohio and traditional Manhattan calypso favorites including "Yellow Bird" and "La Bamba." According to Hailey, as the ensembles became more experienced, he began integrating larger-scale Panorama-style arrangements from contemporary Trinidad into the Rhythm Project's repertoire.

Hailey has made multiple pilgrimages to the annual Panorama steel band competition in Trinidad, and performed with several large Trinidadian steel bands, including Skiffle Bunch Steel Band (of Trinidad's sister island, Tobago) in 2005, and Port of Spain's Starlift Steel Band in 2006. Beyond the excitement of performing in a Trinidadian steel band for Panorama, Hailey perceives these trips to Trinidad as an

essential learning experiences and excellent research opportunities for his work with the Virginia Rhythm Project.

Each time I go down [to Trinidad] I really study the engine rooms, the arrangements, everything that goes into getting a band ready for Panorama finals and I bring those skills back and try to incorporate them into our [Virginia Rhythm Project] arrangements.<sup>436</sup>

In this way Hailey is able to outfit the Virginia Rhythm Project with the most current repertoire and performing techniques. He also has the opportunity to learn, through traditional methods, the subtlety of engine room performance and steel band arranging.

Research trips to Trinidad also allow Hailey the opportunity to keep his pulse on the latest musical styles and taste in Trinidad and communicate those with the students. Moreover, Hailey further opines that performing the latest Trinidadian Panorama-style is one of the most direct ways to expose his students to authentic Trinidadian culture while exploring the steel pan's entire capabilities and creating a sound that is entirely American.

I think is important for some of the steel bands in America to try and do some of the Trini-style arrangements. It's tuff to replicate that because they have such a different sense of rhythm than we do and it's always going to sound different. Their pans are different, our pans are usually more polished sounding and are not going to have that edge that the Trini bands have. I think it is import to do the Trini-band stuff, and also I think it's important to do some pop songs, some classical songs, and mix those things in as well. One of the big things that surprised me in Trinidad was how much pop music the bands played; when they go out and take a small side do a gig, like you would see a band here on a gig, they play a lot of pop music. I actually heard a band in St. Lucia at a resort and there were playing strictly pop music and it was one of the large bands, I forget the name of it. But, I think it is real important to do both, to try to get the Trini sound as much as you can, but at the same time you have to play what you know. Either way, if you play all Trini-style or all original music I think you are doing the ensemble a disservice because you're not exposing them to the variety of music that the instrument can play.<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid.

In this sense, Hailey takes a balanced approach to directing the steel band and choosing steel band repertoire. Moreover, although the Virginia Rhythm Project is a new steel band tradition, it is still a tradition that is parallel in many ways to, or at least informed by, its Trinidadian contemporaries.

The steel bands of the Virginia Rhythm Project display, in a relatively uniform fashion, excellent and consistent technique in regards to actually playing the steel pans. Hailey challenges the students to critically evaluate their individual ‘sound’ or tone on the steel pan. The differences in sound that separate an American steel band from a Trinidadian steel band was previously described by Matthew Dudak and others in Chapter 5 of this study. Generally speaking, American steel bands often have a more polished and reserved tone, where Trinidadian steel bands display a more raw and energetic tone. One of the main factors resulting in the variation in tone is differences in steel drum construction among those built domestically and in Trinidad. The other main factor is the preference for a smooth tone by Americans, which is drawn from strong cultural ties to western classical music. There are certainly cultural factors at work here, but, I am interested in focusing on Hailey’s pedagogical angle in this case. According to Hailey, from the moment they begin experimenting with steel pans, the Virginia Rhythm Project students are taught that the steel pan is not simply a folk instrument, and is indeed capable of nuanced sonic expression. In this way, Hailey communicates a respect for the music and instrument that equals the pride most Trinidadians feel for the steel pan. Yet, it should also be noted that Hailey’s approach to teaching steel pan—building a technical foundation while playing simple musical arrangements *before* progressing to more advanced repertoire—is a partial reflection of his traditional western classical musical

education. The fact that Hailey regularly integrates rote and western classical musical learning methods to facilitate his steel band program is a reflection of the comprehensive approach to steel band pedagogy that Hailey brings to the Virginia Rhythm Project.

The Virginia Rhythm Project enjoys a success that is enviable for any afterschool program; yet, its participants also share many of the same problems faced by primary and secondary school students throughout the United States. The students of the Virginia Rhythm Project, many of whom are considered “at risk,” are increasingly overbooked—involved in multiple different sports practices, work, and school work—with overstressed parent(s) struggling to find a balance. During our interview, Hailey addressed this issue in regard to the Virginia Rhythm Project steel band ensemble. His response further summarizes many of the differences, cultural and musical, found between Trinidad’s steel band tradition and the newly-made steel pan tradition in the United States:

ARM: What would you say is the biggest difference between steel pan in America versus steel pan in Trinidad?

AH: I would say in Trinidad, I think, there is more heart in it. In Trinidad they claim it as the national instrument and their passion, there is so much more passion amongst the Trini bands. But you can find that same kind of passion in the West Indian community bands up around Baltimore, D.C., and in the Brooklyn area. Even in Toronto, you have these West Indian communities where you see that same kind of passion. Our students have passion, but they’re so busy with school, with sports, and everything else—working. It’s tough to really challenge that passion and that energy to feel like we are getting 100 percent. But I think one of the biggest differences is more raw musical ability in Trinidad. Anyone from the youngest to the oldest, you play them the part and they get it, and once they get it they have it. I can only say that because they’re [Trinidadians] practicing on a very hectic schedule for about two months. It is much more intense than what we do; we meet once a week year round. So, in Trinidad they get about as much pan in those two months as we get all year. It’s tough to get our students to repeat [rhythmic patterns] and retain as well. I think the retention and the raw skills on the instruments are some of the biggest differences.

Hailey's focus on the raw talent issue is provocative. Are most Trinidadians really more musically talented than the average American? Or is Hailey's statement due more to the cultural factors at play, more specifically, the schedule of Carnival and the roots of steel pan music? Hailey's insistence on the raw musical ability of the musicians is perhaps a reflection the fact that many do not read music and necessity requires them to employ superb memory in order to learn by rote the massive and complicate Panorama steel band charts in a relatively short period of time. In this regard, the issue of time management for students in steel bands is equally as problematic for Hailey (and Chris Tanner above) and Trinidadian steel bands; however, the solution to the problem is different, as Hailey does not have to rely exclusively on rote learning.

Throughout my interviews with Hailey, the idea of steel pan and steel pan music as one component of a larger Caribbean culture surfaced many times. Like Chris Tanner, Hailey attempts to teach a cultural appreciation in the broadest sense. In his own words Hailey summarizes the process:

[E]verything is based on the culture. The music is just a byproduct. I look at it as "this is what we do." But they're learning about Trinidad, and each year we bring back [from Trinidad] all of these CDs with soca music in order to let them hear what soca music sounds like before I turn it into an arrangement for steel band. Then, they [students] have a greater appreciation for it, so for instance we are doing a tune called "for Love" with my Hampton group, and they're learning the lyrics and they've heard the original. So it only enhances the experience and gives a much more meaningful experience to them in that respect.<sup>438</sup>

Calypso and soca are among the most profound cultural outlets for Trinidadians of all ages, and comprise the foundation for melodic steel pan music. For the Virginia Rhythm Project steel bands, learning the stylistic roots of steel band music through listening and modeling is another reason for the program's success.

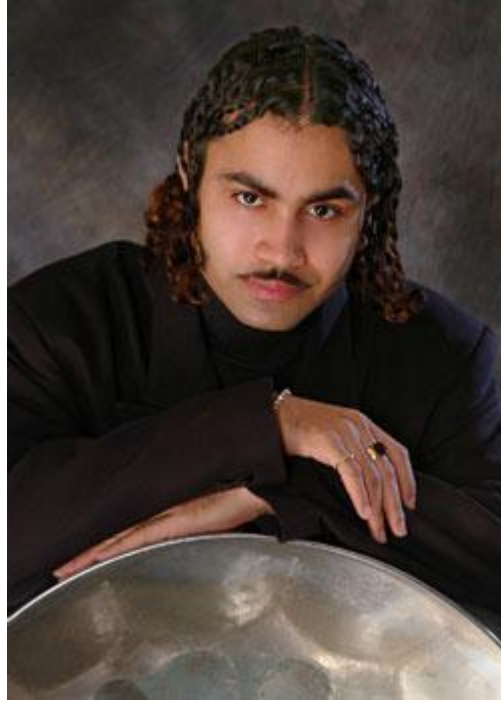
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<sup>438</sup> Ibid.

Despite their early reliance on the Portsmouth General Hospital Foundation for financial viability, the Virginia Rhythm Project is now an independent not-for-profit organization that receives funding from a variety of sources including foundations, individuals, and the Virginia Commission for the Arts.<sup>439</sup> Moreover, the Virginia Rhythm Project has created a sustainable steel band program that balances the cultural and musical factors involved with steel pan music. Yet, it is interesting to note the similarities in mission between the Virginia Rhythm Project and the Lower East Side Settlement House steel bands discussed in Chapter 7. In the 1960s, Murry Narell was “making beaters out of beats,” and it appears as though Hailey is doing the same in the 2000s. Furthermore, Hailey’s educational lineage reaches back to West Virginia and Ellie Mannette, and provides further testimony to the interconnected nature of steel pan in America. Regardless, as a newly-made tradition, the scene created by the Virginia Rhythm Project fosters and celebrates many Trinidadian cultural practices while locating, targeting, and serving the particular student demographic found in the greater Virginia Beach, Virginia, area. Moreover, Anthony Hailey’s drive and passion for the ensembles is a major factor of the Virginia Rhythm Project’s success. Yet, it is his ability to combine the pedagogical and cultural approaches of Trinidad and America that make Hailey one of the most interesting steel panists working in America today.

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<sup>439</sup> [http://www.virginiaartsfest.com/2011/rp\\_aboutus.php?tc=5](http://www.virginiaartsfest.com/2011/rp_aboutus.php?tc=5) <accessed November 21, 2010>



**Liam Teague<sup>440</sup>**

### **Case Study #3: Liam Teague**

The third and final case study in this chapter analyzes the career of Liam Teague, steel pan virtuoso and Assistant Professor of Music at Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois. In many ways, Teague is the second most recognizable face in American steel pan, holding a close second place to Andy Narell. Teague's position as Head of Steel Pan Studies at Northern Illinois University is arguably the most prestigious of its kind in the United States. Teague's coveted position as a tenure-track professor at Northern Illinois University is a position found at only one other American university—

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<sup>440</sup> Photo courtesy of [www.liamteague.net](http://www.liamteague.net) <accessed March 19, 2009>

Miami University of Ohio.<sup>441</sup> In fact, along with the University of the West Indies, Trinidad, Northern Illinois University is one of only three Universities in the world to offer degrees in steel pan. Yet the story of Teague is different from that of Chris Tanner and Anthony Hailey due in large part to his virtuosity as a panists and Trinidadian heritage. Teague, a steel pan prodigy in his youth, is now in adulthood a world-class virtuoso on steel pan and is widely considered both domestically and internationally as one of the steel pan's leading soloists. He has recorded eight solo albums on the Rhythmic Union, Mariposa, and Engine Room Recording and Production labels—his most recent offering *Open Window* was released in 2010—and Teague is a guest artist and soloist on many more recordings with various artists. His performance credits are numerous, including work as a jazz performer, concerto soloist with the Chicago Sinfonetta, and a collaboration with legendary Indian musician Zakir Hussain in the Merchant/Ivory production of *The Mystic Masseur*.

Another major factor separating Teague from the subjects of the two previous case studies is his Trinidadian heritage. Teague is a native Trinidadian who relocated to the United States at the age of eighteen to study at Northern Illinois University. Thus Teague broke from the tradition of the traveling steel panists of Trinidad who make multi-year performance tours in the United States only to return back to Trinidad without long-term residency in the United States. Nor was he a short-term artist-in-residence at an American university or summer music camp—another relatively common practice of many Trinidadian steel panists. Despite being a Trinidadian, in an ironic twist of fate,

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<sup>441</sup> This position should be prefaced with two qualifiers: first, this conclusion is based on only full-time tenure track professorships in which directing a steel band or leading steel band activities is the primary focus of the job description. This excludes any adjuncts positions or professorships in percussion or musicology/ethnomusicology that encompass steel pan as a secondary assignment. Second, this situation exists as of April 2009 and may change.



Teague came to study the national instrument of Trinidad in the United States. The following case study attempts to analyze select portions of Teague's life journey in steel pan.

Teague began playing steel pan at the age of twelve in the industrial city of San Fernando, Trinidad, some thirty miles from the capital of Port of Spain. The instrument was first introduced to Teague by his father, Russell Teague, as a part of Liam's involvement in the local Boy Scout troop. Liam was a natural at the instrument and took to the steel pan with such ease that he joined his first steel band, the T&Tec Motown Steel Band in San Fernando, Trinidad, within a few short months. Like most Trinidadian-born panists, Teague began his pan education learning by rote. However, from an early age, Teague was also learning music "formally," and was soon able to complement his rote learning with competency in western classical music notation. Teague's father was a classical music fan and played this music constantly at home. This was an important influence for Liam who—like Chris Tanner and Anthony Hailey—started listening to classical music from early age, and discovered an early love for virtuoso violinists the caliber of Jascha Heifetz and Itzak Perlman. This early love of classical music set him on a different path from the great majority of contemporary Trinidadian panists and countless Trinidadian youths.

San Fernando, Trinidad, is an industrial city whose economic condition is closely tied to the volatility of international markets. As such, the city often experiences drastic bouts of unemployment and has historically struggled, like much of Trinidad, with deplorable living conditions for many residents. Growing up in one of the poorer neighborhoods in San Fernando, Teague sought to use music as a means of escape.

Moreover, Teague attempted to transcend the struggles of his youth by winning a number of steel pan solo competitions throughout the island. His notable victories include the prestigious National School Steel Band Music Festival and the solo competition at the Trinidad and Tobago Music Festival. Teague's love of classical music led him to eventually join the Trinidad and Tobago Youth Orchestra, where he continued his serious study of the violin, and he further embarked on the path of becoming a well rounded musician. Teague has since become a pioneer in adapting of compositions originally written for the violin to the steel pan. His fascination with violin music greatly influenced his original compositions for the solo steel pan, as well. One of the defining moments of Teague's early career in steel pan came at the age of eighteen, when he was the co-winner of the National Steel band Music Festival soloist category playing his own virtuosic composition, the violin-like "A Visit To Hell."

Teague's accolades did not translate into financial prosperity, however, and the steel panist grappled with the poor financial prospects of his future in Trinidad. The situation changed when, by chance, Teague came across the name of Allan O'Connor, of the Northern Illinois University (hereafter NIU) steel pan program. At the time (1990), NIU was the only institution in the world to offer a college degree in steel pan, and Teague wrote a letter to Professor G. Allan O'Connor begging for admission and pleading his case for a better future. As Teague recalls, the situation was dire and his plea sincere. "I said that if I stayed in Trinidad too long, I didn't know what would become of me, that I probably would be a vagrant on the streets after a while." Although the cornfields of Illinois are a far cry from the steel pan Mecca of Trinidad, it was also a long way from the poor working-class neighborhoods of Teague's youth. Despite his plea for

help, Teague had an underwhelming academic record in secondary school, and he was initially rejected from admission to NIU. O'Connor pressed Teague's case, though, and ultimately convinced the university admissions counselors of Teague's promise. The steel panist enrolled the following academic semester (1991) at NIU in the undergraduate steel pan degree program. Teague completed his undergraduate degree in four years, and went on to earn a Master of Music in pan performance at the same institution in 1997.

Following his graduation from the graduate steel pan program, Teague, like Tanner in the above case study, was retained by NIU as a staff member. From 1998 to 2001, he was a steel pan artist-in-residence at NIU, allowing Teague the opportunity to transition from his role as a student to that of a world class performer and mentor to younger steel panists. Following the retirement of Professor O'Connor in 2001, Teague was promoted to co-director of steel pan activities and Assistant Professor of Music.

### **A Conversation with Liam Teague**

The follow discussion is the result of an extensive series of email exchanges with Teague over the course of several months in 2009. My initial goal was to gain a better understanding of life as a fulltime steel pan professor in an American university. I was interested, too, in teasing out the issues of perception: both the American perception of steel band and Teague's perception, as a native Trinidadian, of working, teaching, and playing steel pan in the plains of the Midwestern United States. The duality of being a Trinidadian and steel panist greatly impacted Teague's experiences in academia and dictated the overall direction of our conversations throughout the interviews.

Our conversation began with twelve questions that touched on a variety of different aspects of steel pan in American and Teague's experience in the movement. The first question concerned Teague's biography to date, which is summarized in the above pages. The second question was directed at Teague's understanding of his role in American steel pan education. I asked "What do you feel is your specific involvement with steel pan education in America (beyond your work at NIU)?" Teague replied:

I have made it my life's mission to highlight the steel pan's uniqueness and versatility throughout the world. I feel that I am simply continuing a tradition started by the respective forefathers of the instrument and at times I am taking the pan into musical avenues that may not have been touched or very rarely so. Since getting to NIU, I feel that I have developed more holistically as a musician and person. I think that my recordings since my arrival to the US should demonstrate this. As far as education goes, I feel tremendously blessed to be in a position where I can pass on my knowledge and hopefully inspire up and coming talents from all over the world. I know without a doubt that no one person can bring the consistent and worldwide respect and visibility to the steel pan that is needed, so it needs to be a collective effort.

Though Teague is certainly a piece of a larger collective effort, the above passage is like many of Teague's responses in that it displays a tone rather different from American steel panists. That is, although Teague has crafted his own voice as a steel panist, he is out to prove the worth of steel pan to the world at every turn. Acknowledging the need for respect and highlighting the versatility of steel pan in his mission, Teague echoes the desires of many current and former Trinidadian steel panists still struggling with the historical residue of colonialism.

The steel pan program at NIU is well-known across Trinidad and Tobago and in the Caribbean for educational quality and for the world class steel bands that perform there. Teague's work at NIU further impacts his activities as a guest artists and educator

in primary and secondary schools in the Midwest and across American. According to Teague:

Usually my involvement has been basically going into certain programs as a guest artist and working on the respective pieces that the kids have had in their repertoire. Quite often I will improvise on these pieces at concerts. I generally try to give them some tips on technique and the interpretation of the particular style that they are playing. Usually these will be calypsos. One thing that has often intrigued me is the level of enthusiasm that is exuded from very young children. Many of them don't seem too inhibited with respect to dancing and having a good time. I have found that in many programs in high schools and universities, this is often a challenge to overcome. Be it for cultural reasons, or simply of a shyness factor, the older students are in many cases more reserved.

Teague's comments paint a picture of his techniques as an educator and display his approach to teaching the culture and music of steel pan ensembles. By singling out the enthusiasm levels of the various age groups of the students, Teague is perhaps speaking to the broader issue of performance etiquette which, in comparing American and Trinidadian steel bands, could not be culturally or physically more disparate. These observations are particularly interesting to this study as they parallel similar comments made by Matthew Dudak (University of Akron Steel Band) in Chapter 5.

Building on the conversation concerning his role in American steel pan education, I asked Teague about his role as one of the only full-time college professors of steel pan in the United States." What was your experience of working with university steel pan programs been like?"

It has been a mixed bag. Working at NIU has been a great blessing as the School of Music is very supportive and I am very proud of our band. Working with a legend in the steel band world like Cliff Alexis is priceless as he has not only taught me lessons about the steel band, but also about life itself. The same can be said for people like G. Allan O'Connor (former Associate Dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts and founder of the NIU Steel band) and Robert Chappell (Head of Percussion). At NIU we place tremendous emphasis not only on the development of

technique and general musicianship, but also on the understanding of the historical aspects of the instrument and where it comes from. Every semester we let our students know how lucky they are to be playing these instruments in a setting like NIU and never let them forget the sacrifices that were made by the pioneers of the steel pan.

It is clear that the NIU steel pan programs is operating as a comprehensive and respected educational program, and in many ways represents a benchmark for programs across the country. Throughout the course of our correspondence, Teague praised the supportiveness of the school of music at NIU and frequently mentioned that he felt blessed to work with O'Connor, Alexis, and Chappell. But not all of his university teaching experiences were positive:

On the other side of the coin, I have been to different colleges and high schools where I felt happy that a steel band program existed, but a bit saddened that in some cases the directors only had a cursory understanding of the instrument, its repertoire, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Teague's point is a valid one, and his disappointment at the "cursory understanding of the instrument, its repertoire, and Trinidad and Tobago" is an issue I explored extensively in Chapter 5 of this study.

Seeking clarification, I pressed Teague on the issue in an attempt to tease out the who, why, and how. My correspondence with Teague followed my interviews with Chris Tanner, and the latter's insight provided several follow-up questions that proved germane to the discussion at hand. I asked Teague that, in cases where the steel band leader had only a little understanding of the steel pan and Trinidad and Tobago, "Is this the fault of the director? Do the necessary materials, time, space, etc. exist for success in these cases where cultural and musical understanding is absent? Is this the result of an American cultural adaptation which is a bit insensitive?" Teague responded quickly to the follow-up questions and the content and language of his answers are interesting:

I have realized that in some cases, people have been successful at getting their positions as steel band directors simply because they had a bit of steel band experience at universities they may have attended. As a result, they have used the steel band as a selling tool to get the job. Once they get the position, they seemed satisfied to simply buy charts that other ensembles may have played without doing enough research to find out how current the music, arranging styles, etc, are. I have even witnessed some directors egoistically programming pieces that were obviously too difficult for their band but did so to prove a point which basically says: "look at my band, we can play Jit Samaroo, Boogsie Sharpe, Ray Holman, et al". I am not saying that this happens in every case, but I have seen it on occasion.

Throughout the interview, the above passage included, Teague confirmed many of the circumstances that plague steel bands across the country. Moreover, Teague like Tanner, suggests that despite the fact that a slight majority of steel pan ensembles in America are run by qualified instructors, a slight minority of American steel bands are run by directors/performers/academic institutions with little understanding of the instrument and music. Unfortunately, this negatively impacts the perception of the entire span of steel pan in America. Furthermore, in the same response Teague also stated:

I have felt that in some instances programs are still trying to capitalize on the steel pan as a novelty and this is definitely something which I have taken a personal oath to stay away from. I do however try my best not to get annoyed and instead pass on whatever knowledge I have with the hope that directors and students will understand the importance of the steel pan from every aspect of its being.

Teague would later qualify the above two comments, suggesting that unqualified steel band directors and steel pan programs that promote the instruments novelty are in the minority; and in his experience, a majority of steel bands in secondary schools and universities appreciate the steel pan for its capabilities and respect its history. Yet, because of his position as professor of steel pan at an academic institution Teague has a steady university job with a high degree of artistic autonomy. He thus is not forced to

accept negatively stereotyped gigs and engagements, play culturally offensive musical arrangements, or participate in activities that directly or indirectly trivialize the steel pan. This autonomy undoubtedly makes Teague a more effective advocate for the instrument.

Despite Teague's tireless efforts to pull steel pan away from the margins of acceptability in academia, the outside forces that continually marginalize the instrument, or seek only to capitalize on its novelty, are often beyond his control. This is nowhere more evident than the *Chicago Tribune* review of Teague's premier of the Jan Bach steel pan concerto, in which critic John Von Reihn praises the instrument while also subtly slighting it:

An amiable, enjoyable novelty, then, rather than a work of great musical depth; as a showcase for Teague's incredible virtuosity, however, it served the purpose. The audience exploded in cheers and whistles, refusing to let Teague leave the stage until he had given them a solo encore.<sup>442</sup>

The Bach concerto's premiere marked an important moment in recent American steel pan history, as it ushered steel pan into the serious concert hall setting. Interestingly, the critic praises Teague's ability while simultaneously questioning the steel pan's legitimacy in the classical music world. The question, then, is about perception in a broad cultural and musical sense. Was Teague bothered by Von Reihn's comments towards the steel pan and how did these comments strike him as a Trinidadian, or as representative of the greater American cultural mainstream? How does Teague reconcile the way Americans perceive steel pan?

ARM: [I]n the *Chicago Tribune* review of your debut of the Jan Bach Steel pan concerto, the critic John Von Reihn both praises you while slighting the steel pan by saying quote:

"An amiable, enjoyable novelty, then, rather than a work of great musical

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<sup>442</sup> John Von Reihn, "Steel Pan Concerto Just Exhilarating," *Chicago Tribune*, Chicago, November. 15, 1995, Pg. 12.



depth; as a showcase for Teague's incredible virtuosity, however, it served the purpose. The audience exploded in cheers and whistles, refusing to let Teague leave the stage until he had given them a solo encore.”

This concerto is often billed as one of the most important moments in recent pan history, ushering the steel pan into the serious concert hall. Yet, clearly the critic appreciates your ability but also does not support the legitimacy of the steel pan in the classical music world. My question, then, is about perception. How do the above comments make you feel about the steel pan reception in the United States? And as a non-native American, do you feel the above comments are representative of most Americans? Or, more broadly how do you perceive the way Americans perceive steel pan?

LT: I once read a quote which I believe was attributed to the great composer, Jan Sibelius, which stated: " No one ever erected a statue for a critic". Where the steel pan is concerned I have read a lot of uninformed critiques and opinions. I try not to generalize so I am not going to say that all Americans have a particular view of the instrument, however, I think that it is still safe to say that most people around the world still do not understand the steel pan's versatility and profoundness. The Jan Bach Steel pan concert is a work of great emotional and musical depth and I feel very honored that Jan Bach wrote it for me. It was designed to basically show off the versatility of the instrument from many facets and to also highlight what some people have referred to as my virtuosic ability. (BTW, I am a US resident, not a citizen as of yet. I hope to become a citizen in 2010). When people come up to me after a performance and say that they have never heard the pan played like that before, I usually state that what I am doing is trying to continue a tradition of highlighting the pan's musical potential that was started long before I came on the scene. While I believe that I do bring some unique aspects to the approach in terms of playing, composition, arranging, etc; I by no means believe that I am the be all and end all in the steel band world. Most people do not get to hear the Boogsies, Greenidges, Early Rodney's and Corbeau Jacks, Pan Am North Stars, Casablanca, etc.' on a consistent basis, so of course, many people are still surprised when they hear the pan in a jazz, classical or any context outside of the "yellow bird, straw hat and colored shirt".

I usually try to take the time to encourage people to purchase recordings so that they can realize that pan has been playing in a progressive manner almost from its embryonic stages. Also, many people in Trinidad and Tobago do not know what is happening in the world of pan outside of Panorama (sometimes not even that). There are still people that refer to pan music as "noise" and I have heard these references first hand. So, the view of the steel pan is sometimes limited, not only in terms of American's perspective, but even in the land of pan's birth.

In light of these comments, I was curious about who these “Americans” were that Teague referred to, and asked whether this was the audiences who regularly attend NIU steel band concerts or the Chicago symphony crowd. Teague concertizes throughout the United States, and based on his idea of the “American” perception of steel pan, does this perception change, I asked, from region to region (i.e. Illinois versus Alaska)? Teague responded:

I believe that it changes from individual to individual. Of course, there are states with bigger West Indian populations in the US that may be more attuned to what has been happening with the steel pan, but I still prefer not to generalize. The reality is that there are people who play this instrument that I not even aware of what has been done and what is happening with it in terms of its forward direction. It doesn't matter where they come from. As I alluded to earlier, even Trinbagonians are often unaware of what is happening. I remember a radio station playing the NIU Steel band performing Tchaikovsky's Marche Slave, and most of the callers swore that it was the WITCO Desperadoes. I am willing to bet that most people in Trinidad are not aware of the program here at NIU. So if this lack of knowledge exists in the land of the pan's birth, you can just imagine the void that exists in the US.

Teague's comments identify one of several paradoxes that characterize the progress of steel pan from a folk instrument to serious instrument of high art. Considering that even in Trinidad some Trinidadians have a narrow, Panorama-focused understanding of the steel pan, it is no wonder that the instrument struggles to overcome the American perception as a novel symbol (and sound) of the calypso craze rather than an agent of high art.

The Jan Bach Concerto is an important attempt at bridging the divide between the disparate perceptions of steel pan. As Teague suggests, the work displays a unique combination of western European compositional techniques and Trinidadian folk and traditional music. However, the final movement of the concerto presents in interesting

opportunity to press Teague on his early statements concerning the novelty perceptions of the steel pan. The movement contains a melody that is based on traditional Trinidadian calypso folk tunes, and could be mistaken by the listener as a musical invocation of, as Teague called it in an earlier response, a "yellow bird, straw hat and colored shirt" context of style steel pan/calypso music. Was this simply my perception? Would Teague agree with my categorizing this movement in this way?

ARM: In the final movement of the Jan Bach Concerto, there clearly is a musical invocation of, as you called it in an earlier response, a "yellow bird, straw hat and colored shirt" style of steel pan music. Do you, first agree with my categorizing this as such? Second, do you think this lends itself towards a general/overall American perception of steel pan? That is, did Jan Bach consult you or anyone about traditional Trinidadian music?

LT: I don't think that Jan Bach tried in any form or fashion to invoke the stereotypical "yellow bird" type music that is sometimes associated with the steel pan. There is a section where he tries to pay tribute to the calypso rhythm (with varying degrees of success some may say), but in general he tried to highlight the pan in a progressive context and be totally respectful. Jan Bach was a professor of music at NIU for many years and had several opportunities to hear our steel band play. As a result, I am sure that he was exposed to traditional steel pan music. He consulted with me on several occasions on a myriad number of topics in regard to the writing of the piece; however, I don't think that he was too concerned about replicating traditional Trinidadian music too much. As a matter of fact, I am glad that he didn't because he simply would have been reinventing the wheel. I think his paying homage to the style (calypso) was enough. This remains one of my very favorite pieces to play and I think that the composer brought an honest and respectful attitude to bringing it to life.

Bach created something entirely new with his concerto—something which is neither American nor Trinidadian, but with connections to both—and Teague has performed the work with orchestras throughout the United States and the globe to universally rave reviews.

The Bach concerto represents an attempt at infusing the classical world with steel pan, and its hybridity is unique; however, Teague is also in a situation at NIU to create

new steel band arrangements that, like the Bach concerto, are combination of Trinidadian and American styles. This new set of repertoire is free from the restraints of the Panorama system found in Trinidad. As a leading figure in the development of steel pan in America and Trinidadian Teague's insights on the matter are vitally important, and I was interested in Teague's opinion on contemporary American steel pan repertoire. I asked Teague, "Do you think there is a difference between steel pan music in America versus Trinidad?"

There are certainly a lot of similarities. Some of the differences that exist with many American arrangements can often be found in the use of various time signatures and styles. Since many steel band directors in the US are also percussionists, I feel that they incorporate their knowledge of rhythm and musical styles into their arrangements (at least the more adventurous ones do). I have really been into the music of Gary Gibson who has a strong jazz and percussion background. His music is some of the most innovative that I have heard in the entire steel band world.

Gary Gibson is one of a small number of individuals who make a living in the United States solely by playing steel pan. Gibson, who currently performs regularly in the Seattle area, has a graduate degree in music and has worked at several universities across the country. Gibson is also known for his innovative arrangements of steel pan music that combine jazz and traditional Trinidadian music.

Precisely what Teague's notion of "innovative" is as it pertains to the steel pan music of Gary Gibson, is unclear from his comments, so I asked him to clarify the elements that make a contemporary steel band arrangement adventurous or innovative in his view:

I think that one's concept of what is adventurous and/ or innovative is subjective. I have found that the more my understanding of music grows, the more difficult it is for me to consider certain compositions and arrangements as innovative, simply because I understand the vocabulary better and it doesn't "shock" me as much. For example, if an arranger in

Trinidad and Tobago were to implement a number of mixed meters in a Panorama arrangement, I think that in a sense, that could be considered innovative. However, mixed meters are found all the time in percussion music and its presence would probably not be considered too unusual within that context. As a matter of fact, some of the arrangements and arranging styles that I have heard people praise as being so innovative rarely moves me. It is not that I don't appreciate these pieces of music, but I don't often hear them as being too much out of the norm.

The musically conservative nature of Trinidadian steel band judges, and the impact this conservatism has on the Panorama steel band arrangements, was evident during my fieldwork in Trinidad. It appears as though for Teague, this musical conservatism is cast a shadow over the global steel pan movement. Yet, it is also clear from his comments that he too, is not entirely sure what the next important innovation in the American steel pan.

The issue of musical progress—stylistically, harmonically, structurally—governed much of my conversation with Teague, and it appears that, despite a history of progress both musically and culturally, current Trinidadians tend to put more emphasis than Americans on the importance of incorporating steel pan into classical music in order to elevate steel pan into the realm of high art. This, perhaps, is analogous to the importance of Bomb tunes (western classical tunes by composers such as Chopin performed on steel pan) and TASPO (Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra) for Trinidadians in the early years of steel band in the 1950s and 60s.

Yes, I agree. Even today the playing of classical music seems to be sort of a yard stick in terms of steel bands and players proving just how good they are. Many players will tell you that this is what really tests their mettle, so to speak.

Teague is no stranger to arranging for Panorama in Trinidad, and enjoyed successes with Panorama arrangements for Skiffle Bunch at the Trinidad Carnivals of 2004, 2005, 2006,

and with Starlift in 2011. Moreover, Teague is keenly aware of Trinidad's fondness of classical music and its integration into steel pan arrangements.

His use of classical music elements in his Panorama work is subtle, but present; however, this use of American popular music is stylistic and harmonic elements are much more apparent. Considering that the effects of western classical music *and* American popular music are evident in contemporary Panorama tunes, how would American popular music styles such as rap and hip hop, I asked, affect current and future Panorama arranging? For example, the steel bands at the University of Minnesota and Inver Hills College often play contemporary arrangements of Alicia Keys and other pop artists. Will we hear 50-Cent's "In my Hood" floating across the Queen's Park Savannah at Panorama finals in Port of Spain in the near future? How will current trends in American popular music impact steel pan arranging styles for American-based university and professional ensembles? According to Teague:

I don't know if hip hop and rap will profoundly affect the arranging styles for Panorama in a profound sense. Other than arrangers using quotes from some of these pieces I am not quite sure how much influence they could derive from it. Panorama has become increasingly formulaic and for me personally, I haven't heard too many arrangements that are trying to push the envelope. I think if styles like hip hop or any other genre for that matter is going to have any long lasting and meaningful influence on steel pan arranging, it will happen in arrangements that are not necessarily constructed with a competition in mind, but are created for its own sake. I feel that arrangers are often forced to adopt certain accepted conventions at Panorama and are becoming less and less inclined to use new musical vocabulary. This I think is the case because they really want to win the competition and are very hesitant to do too many things that the adjudicators may not understand.

If Teague's prediction that hip hop will have little impact on Trinidadian steel pan music is true, this may mark another instance of difference in comparison to steel pan in American. Although American steel bands may never fully embrace hip hop in their

working repertoire either, the musical elements of the style are making waves in an increasing amount of new American steel band arrangements. Few American steel bands, least of all those within academia, are involved within a competition circuit and are therefore not governed stylistically by such rigid guidelines of musical taste.

As a composer and performer, Teague is in a position to shed light on a perplexing issue in the percussion world. One of the problems that plagues solo percussion instruments—the classical marimba for example—is that these instruments tend to become popular in schools and colleges long before great composers gamble on writing new compositions for them. For example, newer instruments such as the saxophone, which was invented by Adolphe Sax in approximately 1840, enjoyed popularity among opera composers and military bands of the late eighteenth and early twentieth-century several decades before classical composers in Paris and elsewhere began to utilize the instrument. Similarly, the classical marimba has enjoyed exponential growth in popularity in the past thirty years throughout academia; yet, the instrument suffers on a larger scale from a lack of great works. Moreover, the marimba is plagued by a flood of great players who compose pieces for the instrument that display flashes of technical brilliance but often lack depth and compositional integrity. Rarely do individuals such as Nebosja Zivkovic—both virtuoso and serious composer—create high quality pieces of music for the marimba. Steel pan is similar to the marimba in that there are many great performers of the steel pan and few great composers of steel pan music. In this sense, is Teague destined to be the steel pan version of Franz Liszt or Nebosja Zivkovic? And, in his opinion, does one need to play the steel pan at all in order to fully

utilize the instrument, to make meaningful, innovative, and serious compositions/arrangements?

I don't think that one needs to know how to play the instrument at all to compose meaningful material. However, it certainly would not hurt. Some of the greatest concerti were probably written by composers who either had no experience playing the respective instrument they were written for, or were not considered virtuosos. Jan Bach, in my opinion, has composed one of the most interesting pieces for the steel pan and he doesn't play a note. Again, people's perspective on a piece of music is often so subjective that it is hard to say what is, and is not a good piece. The way that I hear the Jan Bach concerto is probably very different from how someone else might hear it, regardless of if that person is a trained musician or not. I do think that it is important for musical performers to study composition in order to create pieces that would be meaningful, however, I have heard pieces by composers of note that didn't move me that much. In his day, J.S. Bach was not revered as much as Telemann, but today, he and his music are certainly more famous. So, perspective and one's mind set are very important.

Teague may not be the first legitimate dual threat in the American steel pan scene, and he is likely to be remembered for his championing and performance of steel pan works by other composers rather than his own compositions for the instrument.

Throughout his adult life, Teague has been located at the epicenter of steel pan either in Trinidad or at Northern Illinois University. Who better, then, to comment on the American steel band scene in its current and historical state? First, a question of opportunities; that is, are there more or less opportunities for steel pan (performers, builders, educators) today than in the past?

This is a difficult question to answer because I am only 36 so I can't speak too much about opportunities that existed in the past. If anything, I think that the opportunities are better because more people are playing the instrument, they are in more institutions of learning and it seems that conventional ensembles such as symphonies are willing to take risks by actually including the pan on their programs. From a personal standpoint, as a performer and educator, I have been like a chameleon. Since I am musically literate, can improvise, arrange and compose, I have been able to have a relatively decent career. I am very encouraged by many up and



coming players; not only in the US, but also in Trinidad and Tobago and elsewhere in the Caribbean. Specifically where Trinbagonians are concerned, more and more of the up-coming generation is being educated musically and generally. This bodes well for the future of the instrument as we need people to continue the work of the pioneers, and if possible, surpass it.

In 1995 Teague was asked in an interview for the *Percussive Notes* to comment on the state of steel pan. In closing my conversation with Teague, I asked him to offer further thoughts on the “state of pan in America,” for an update of the discussion. In March of 2009, what does Teague think the state of steel pan is in America?

I think that the state of pan is healthy but it can go much further. Just like it took an Andres Segovia and many after him to really bring the guitar into prominence as a classical instrument, I think that we need more players, composers and arrangers who are really serious about taking the instrument into musical avenues such as with symphonies, jazz bands, etc, on a consistent basis. More composers of note need to write for pan, we need more people that are serious about projecting the steel pan as an art rather than simply as an easy way to make a quick buck.

## **Conclusions**

The goal of this chapter has been to explore three individual case studies of steel panists who have carved new traditions and created successful steel band education programs in the United States. Moreover, throughout the discussions of Chris Tanner, Liam Teague, and Anthony Hailey, this chapter aimed to tease out successful teaching and administrative methodologies in order to further understand the energy and skill involved in juggling the many musical and cultural elements associated with pursuing steel pan as a primary occupation in the United States. However, what emerged from my exploration of these case studies was something more akin to a discussion of the current state of steel pan in the United States by agents within the various scenes. Furthermore, it

was very interesting to note some of the similarities among the case studies of Tanner, Hailey, and Teague despite the differences in academic positions and heritage.

Regardless of each individual's back story, two major pedagogical strategies emerged from these case studies that stand to have a far reaching implications for steel band in American. The first of these is the utilization of an approach for teaching new arrangements to American steel bands that balances a combination of rote learning and music reading. All three of my subjects cite this approach as the most efficient and effective use of ensemble rehearsal time. Moreover, in American students an inability to learn by rote will adversely affect the overall success of stylistic comprehension, as the three subjects point to the importance of rote learning as a tool for teaching the complex rhythms of steel band music.

The second pedagogical tool suggested by the subjects is the continued development and modernization of steel band repertoire. All three case studies suggest that a well balanced repertoire of traditional Trinidadian calypso and steel band tunes paired with more recent Caribbean arrangements is important for teaching the cultural and musical elements of the steel band. Yet, Tanner and Teague in particular lobby for the creation of new steel band music, and both stress the need for steel bands to constantly push for progress in the art. For Teague personally, this means performing western classic concertos featuring the steel pan as the solo instrument. Yet, on a larger scale these three steel panists advocate for the adoption of regional musical tastes to become regularly performed steel band arrangements in America steel bands.

Steel band repertoire is only one aspect of this picture; perhaps the larger issue that arose from the forgoing analysis was struggles all three subjects encounter with

issues of audience perception and cultivation. It is interesting to see that even in situations as unique as NIU and Miami University of Ohio, where there are full-time professorships in steel pan, struggles with audience perception is still prevalent. The American public's historical association of steel pan with its calypso-craze, fun-in-the-sun baggage may never fully subside; yet, it is fascinating to see that, in the case studies of Tanner and Hailey, the role of steel band as an enjoyable community-building tool is fully embraced. Tanner's steel bands are stocked with non-music majors at Miami University looking for a fun musical experience, while Hailey's Virginia Rhythm Project steel bands are filled with youths looking to stay out of trouble after school. Neither is focused entirely on training the next generation of steel band instructors and virtuosos. Rather, it appears as though successful steel band programs in the United States—including those of NIU, Miami University of Ohio, and the Virginia Rhythm Project—are focused on creating an environment for enjoying the steel pan experience. To this end, one of the goals set at the outset of this chapter was to explore space occupied by Tanner, Hailey, and Teague which I suggested was different from that of professional gigging pan entertainers such as Andy Narell and Robert Greenidge. Considering the above case studies, it is apparent that the space created by these men is one of steel pan advocate more than entertainer. Tanner, Hailey, and Teague are not just playing steel pan to American audiences, they are teaching American audiences to play and appreciate steel pan. Steel pan in America is more than simply purchasing and playing the instruments; it is a change in attitude. This change has begun in the work of Tanner, Hailey, and Teague.

## Chapter 9

### Final Thoughts and Conclusions

For Immediate release:

Office of the Press Secretary

May 29, 2008

A Proclamation by the President of the United States:

*Caribbean-American Heritage Month is an opportunity to show our appreciation for the many ways Caribbean Americans have contributed to our country.*

*Caribbean Americans have helped to shape our national fabric with their vibrant traditions and their unique history. They have brightened our lives with the spirit and vitality of their culture. Through strong leadership and pride in their heritage, they have enriched America. In all walks of life, they have contributed their many talents and added to our Nation's development and prosperity.*

*We especially show our gratitude for the men and women of Caribbean descent who have served bravely in our Armed Forces and those still serving today. These heroes have answered a call greater than self, and we keep them in our thoughts and prayers.*

*During June, we celebrate and recognize the Caribbean Americans whose determination and hard work have helped make our country a better place.*

*NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE W. BUSH, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim June 2008 as Caribbean-American Heritage Month. I encourage all Americans to learn more about the history and culture of Caribbean Americans and their contributions to our Nation.*

*IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-ninth day of May, in the year of our Lord two thousand eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-second.*

*GEORGE H. W. BUSH*<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>443</sup> <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/05/20080529-6.html> <accessed December 18, 2008>

The former president of the United States, George W. Bush, officially proclaimed June of 2008 Caribbean-American Month in celebration of the wealth of contributions supplied by Caribbean immigrants to the United States over the course of the past century. The recognition, though a well-deserved gesture, is long overdue, as Caribbean-Americans have been an integral part of American society for nearly a century. Whether by an individual or the President of the United States, the celebration of one's culture is something that, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett suggests, is experienced in the present that has recourse to the past. Throughout the course of this study it has become increasingly clear that since the 1950s, the celebration of Caribbean culture in the United States—whether in the form of the calypso craze or the Brooklyn Carnival—is rooted in a Caribbean past but celebrated in present day America. In tracing the development of steel pan in America, one of the interesting results is the desire of steel pan players to celebrate the steel pan in its many forms, including academic steel bands, the re-made Carnival of New York, and the spread of steel pan music in jazz and American popular music. Yet, the celebration of steel pan culture is also a manifestation of a Caribbean-American identity, and throughout this study, I have made several attempts to tackle the issue of identity in terms of the roles, places, and spaces that heritage and culture play in the everyday life of steel panists forging a new tradition in the United States.

### **The American Influence on the Trinidadian Steel Band Movement**

Steel pan has made great strides in America over the past sixty years, and signs of the American steel pan narrative's influence have now become visible within the

Trinidadian steel band movement. This is seen most directly in the assimilation of jazz and American popular music into the repertoire of large Trinidadian steel bands and individual panists. As discussed earlier in this study, large Panorama steel drum bands have historically dominated the landscape of steel band activity in Trinidad and Tobago. Many of the current steel band trends in the United States, the steel pan scene in Brooklyn in particular, are no different and display a clear preference towards the large bands. However, these large steel bands are not year-round ventures and following the conclusion of the Panorama and Carnival celebration on Ash Wednesday, Trinidad settles back into the rhythm of regular life for the next eight months and most steel panists leave the large bands until fall of the next year.

Previously in Chapter 2 of this study, I offered a discussion of the large steel bands playing at the Brooklyn Carnival and the impact this event had on the development of an international Carnival circuit that includes Trinidad, Toronto, New York, and London. However, the influence of the American steel band scene in Trinidad and Tobago is perhaps further evident among the working steel bands scattered throughout the islands. These working Trinidadian bands, often referred to as “state-side bands” because they often represent a select portion of a given steel band that would travel abroad, are normally comprised of twenty to thirty players, and many of the panists in these groups depend on playing and teaching steel pan for a major slice of their livelihood. Interestingly, even the most elite steel panists in these Trinidadian state-side steel bands do not earn sustainable wages playing solely steel pan. This fate continues to encourage the flight of Trinidadian steel panists to other countries throughout the world (primarily other Caribbean Islands, Canada, the United States, and England). The case

study of Liam Teague's struggles as a young steel pan virtuoso in Trinidad, discussed in Chapter 8, represents a classic example of the problems and anxieties faced by many aspiring Trinidadian panists struggling to make ends meet throughout the eight down months of the Trinidadian steel band calendar.

With little work and a large number of eager steel panists, many Trinidadian steel panists seek work in the United States and the greater Caribbean area during the off-season months following Carnival. For those fortunate enough to secure employment internationally, tourist audiences dictate repertoire for these journeymen panists which includes, among other things, American-Jazz standards. Indeed this reality pervades the panyards of Trinidad and Tobago. I personally heard panists practicing American standards in countless panyards while conducting fieldwork during Carnival 2008 and 2011. Almost all of these young panists are amassing the repertoire necessary for becoming working steel panists on cruise ships, hotels, and casinos, and, like their predecessors of the 1950s discussed in Chapter 2, these steel panists are developing a dual repertoire; that is, a set of Manhattan-style music for commercial patrons and a set Panorama, Carnival, and Trinidadian calypso tunes for West Indians. Ironically, it seems as though, besides the recordings and performances of Andy Narell and Liam Teague, some of the best places to hear the creative sounds of American jazz on steel pan is in a Trinidadian panyard.

The popularity of jazz tunes among would-be panists in Trinidad and Tobago is an interestingly development; however, it is also worth noting that fluency in a broad range of musical styles is not a guaranteed ticket to prosperity for aspiring steel panists. Only a lucky few ever succeed in establishing careers in steel pan outside of their

homeland. Liam Teague is a prime example of this reality and his skill and celebrity as a panist in Trinidad was not enough to earn enough steady income to make steel pan his only vocation. With the help of Al O'Connor and Northern Illinois University, Teague was able to leave his native country in order to pursue steel pan education opportunities in United States. Yet Teague was one of the lucky few, and the success of his story is not representative of the plight of most panists in Trinidad and Tobago. For these hopeful Trinidadian panists, leaving the birthplace of steel pan is often necessary in order to devote their lives to the instrument. The opportunity to leave Trinidad and Tobago, however, rarely presents itself.

Throughout the past seventy years, the development of steel pan in America has succeeded in creating a favorable climate for steel panists in the United States. To this end, as we have seen throughout this study, there are growing numbers of opportunities for those skilled in steel pan to earn a living as performers and educators. Teague and Trinidadian steel drum maker and tuner Cliff Alexis—now co-director of the Northern Illinois University steel band—commented on the availability of steel band work in the United States and the impact this reality has on Trinidadian steel panists working internationally:

Certainly, there is much more opportunities now. It's become extremely popular for pan players to play jazz, and the recording industry and listening public are responding favorably.<sup>444</sup>

Both Teague and Alexis lament what they consider the steel pan brain rot and subsequent brain drain in Trinidad and Tobago, and suggest that because there is no work for steel panists a majority of the year, they are forced to choose between leaving their birth country to come to the United States or quitting serious study of the steel pan

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<sup>444</sup> Rich Holly, "The State of Pan," *Percussive Notes*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (June, 1997) : 41.



altogether.<sup>445</sup> Besides Teague, we also see the results of this phenomenon through the case study of panist Robert Greenidge as he immigrated to the United States in the 1970s. Greenidge's success with Jimmy Buffett and in the Southern California recording industry would never have been possible if he had stayed in Trinidad. Moreover, the skill-set developed by Greenidge, Andy Narell, and Othello Molineaux discussed in the previous chapters of this study is representative of what is necessary for thriving in the American steel pan scene. The success of select individual Trinidadian steel panists noted in this study should not, however, downplay the long odds faced by the vast majority of Trinidadian panists adapting their skills and repertoire to include jazz and contemporary American popular tunes in an attempt to find work away from Trinidad and Tobago. Moreover, it should be noted that at the completion of this study, the lack of future opportunities for a steel pan livelihood still plagues the Trinidadian steel band movement, regardless of the panist's skill and versatility of repertoire.

### **Steel Pan and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Reaching Towards Legitimacy**

As the stream of steel pan players leaving Trinidad and Tobago in search of new opportunities in America continues, jazz steel pan music is also making its way back to Trinidad over the airwaves. During my interview with Walter Shields, a Trinidadian living in Minneapolis, he recalled hearing American Latin-jazz steel band music on the radio in Trinidad for the past decade (2000s). In 2004, the popular Trinidad and Tobago Steel Pan and Jazz Festival was founded by the Queen's Royal College and is held

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<sup>445</sup> Interview with Cliff Alexis January 25, 2008, Port of Spain, Trinidad.

annually.<sup>446</sup> More recently, Caribbean scholar Ray Funk recalls hearing American steel panist Andy Narell on the radio in Trinidad during Carnival annually since 2006. The popularity of jazz was fully in evidence during my own visit to Trinidad for the 2008 Carnival. Yet, the adoption of jazz and other styles of American music by steel panists can also be seen as a reach for legitimacy for the art form in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The steel band movements in Trinidad and America alike are still competing for legitimacy and acceptance, and often share many of the same roadblocks. Despite the struggles and educational campaigns initiated by individual practitioners of American steel band such as Pete Seeger and Chris Tanner, the preference of American audiences to shun regional musical styles (Panorama steel band tunes and Trinidad-style calypso) in favor of North American-influenced styles (Manhattan-style calypso and steel band tunes) is very real and will continue for better or worse into the foreseeable future.

### **Steel Band Scenes: Regional versus National**

The drive to see the steel pan transcend its folk roots and achieve acceptance as a legitimate musical instrument is a historical struggle that has been fought by Trinidadian steel panists for nearly a century. Trinidad's musical heritage is further complicated by a historical mixture of colonialism and hybridity. As a result, constructing a solid foundation for Trinidadian music and identity is a dynamic issue enhanced by clashes between advocates and practitioners of traditional musical styles (Trinidadian calypso and Panorama-style steel bands) and their encroaching global hegemonic counterparts (Manhattan calypso and American steel band). This clash of cultural interpretations

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<sup>446</sup> <http://www.steelpanjazzfestival.com/about-us.html#top> <accessed April 2, 2011>

between steel pan in American and Trinidadian is on display in many of the case studies presented in this study. For example, the Brooklyn Carnival is largely a regional celebration and the influence of the New York steel band scene on a national scale is largely missed by outstate and less-urban facets of American steel band. Video sharing websites such as *YouTube* and social networking websites such as *Facebook* are helpful in organizing the New York steel bands and their faithful fans, but since the groups do not regularly produce CDs and are not featured in nationally syndicated commercial advertising, their reach tends to be limited to the greater New York City area. Moreover, many influential American panists, such as Andy Narell and Chris Tanner, do not consistently participate in the New York Carnival which in turn further dissuades the spread of the large-band style of steel band on a national level.

Despite the regional popularity of the Brooklyn Carnival, Trinidadians located throughout the United States consider this New York celebration an extension of their cultural tradition. Moreover, given the significant history of the Brooklyn Carnival, the importance and influence of this American tradition to Trinidadians living in Trinidad and the greater Caribbean region is an area of important intersection of old and new cultural traditions. Despite the fact that a majority of Caribbean-Americans live in the New York area, one should not underestimate the steady impact the Brooklyn Carnival exudes beyond the region.

## Connecting the Threads

As discussed earlier in this study, geographically distinct scenes—New York, Dekalb, Southern California and others—often develop independently from one another; and have in this case. As I argued in the introduction and various chapters of this study, the development of steel pan in America is not, in the truest sense, a unified “movement” and it does not reflect the social mobilization efforts of its Trinidadian predecessor. Yet, the developments of steel pan in America are connected in subtle and not so subtle ways, suggesting a certain degree of interconnection. Moreover, throughout the course of this study I have stressed that beyond calypso, exotica, politics, and social movements, the development of steel pan in America, and indeed this study, can be reduced into two primary elements: steel pans and steel panists. The spread and growth of the instrument throughout America is primarily driven by skilled individuals—steel pan performers and steel pan builder/tuners alike—rather than a unified social movement.

The individualized nature of steel pan in America is on full display in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 in which the stories of Pete Seeger, Ellie Mannette, and the United States Navy Steel Band unfold into a compelling narrative for the early development of several regional American steel pan scenes. Scholar Kim Johnson refers to the ambitiousness of steel pan pioneers in Trinidad creating steel pan and the steel band movement “the audacity of the Creole imagination.”<sup>447</sup> Similarly, the ambitiousness of Seeger, Mannette, and Admiral Gallery, and the audaciousness of their belief that steel pan could sweep America, is perhaps the central issue in understanding this narrative. These men shared a love of steel pan—bitten by the pan jumbie as Trinidadians would say—but their

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<sup>447</sup> Personal conversation, San Juan, Trinidad, February 23, 2011.

attempts to spread steel pan across the nation, and make it accessible to the masses, elevate steel pan from a passive hobby for a select few into a viable musical ensemble popular at schools and universities through the United States.

The fact, however, that nearly every thread of steel pan growth in America for the past fifty years is an offshoot of these three men is testament to their influence. The development of steel pan in America is not exclusively independent, and Chapter 5 and Chapter 7 are fine examples of just how important the connections among steel pan participants are in the development of steel pan in America. For example, in Chapter 5, we see that Al O'Connor is directly responsible for starting five steel bands in Illinois and Canada as of 1981. Currently, some thirty years later, the number has increased into dozens of ensembles founded by former O'Connor and Northern Illinois University students. Lest we forget, too, that O'Connor was first introduced to steel pan via the United States Navy Steel Band in the early 1970s, further establishing the connection from present day steel pan scenes to their pioneering American steel band roots.

Chapter 7 is an example of how Ellie Mannette influenced Murry Narell, Andy Narell, the Steel Bandits, and steel pan in New York. The subsequent impact of Andy Narell's steel pan activities over the course of the past forty years transcend America and are global in scope and impact. Despite his personal drive and considerable talent, Narell is quick to praise Mannette and cites his continued influence as a steel pan sage.

Mannette, in turn, connects the second major element of steel pan in America which is acquisition of the steel pans. As we have seen in several of the case studies examined in this study, the Virginia Rhythm Project and Inver Hills Steel Band for example, as some steel bands die others begin using the same steel pans. Many of the

steel bands discussed over the course of this study have benefited or have begun due to the death of another steel band elsewhere. Considering the scarcity of tuners and cost of new steel pans, the fact that many ensembles recycle used steel pans rather than buy new ones signifies the importance of steel pan builders and tuners living in America. One of the leading American-born steel pan tuners and Mannette protégé Darren Dyke was frank as to why he chose to study the art of steel pan tuning “I was just looking at my pan [made by Mannette]. There was not another person on this planet I would allow to touch this pan with a hammer. I asked myself, what happens when Ellie stops tuning?”<sup>448</sup> Until several other steel panists like Dyke are inspired to commit to nearly a decade of study in order to learn the art of steel pan building and tuning, the development of steel pan in America will be linked to foreign born-tuners like Mannette and the scarcity of such trained tuners will continue to be a burden on future steel bands.

### **The Ethics of Steel Band in America**

Despite their concentration in New York, Caribbean-Americans have grown in number throughout the United States and are actively celebrating their heritage and culture. A classic example of the confluence between American and Trinidadian cultural traditions is the socio-musical identity forged by Trinidad’s steel band movement through the past eighty years. One early steel panist recounts that “we [Trinidadian panists] had to bring up [steel band] to the level of art, now, it’s not just religious mumbo jumbo.”<sup>449</sup>

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<sup>448</sup> Personal Conversation with Darren Dyke, November 6, 2010, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>449</sup> Shannon Dudley, *Making Music for a Nation: Competing Identities and esthetics in Trinidad and Tobago’s Panorama Steelband Competition*, diss (Berkeley, California: University of California, Berkeley, 1997), p 39-40.

Moreover, the elevated social status enjoyed domestically by Trinidadian steel bands during the 1950s benefited directly from the practice of incorporating calypsos *and* western classical tunes (bomb tunes) into the main repertoire of major steel bands, effectively forcing the Trinidadian public to rethink tightly-held concepts and ideologies of folk and/or indigenous music. Conversely, upon the large-scale introduction of steel pan in America during the 1950s it is clear that American audiences adopted the Manhattan-style as representative of all Trinidadian music and culture. However, following Pete Seeger's efforts in the 1950s and 60s, it became evident that as the Trinidadian panist quoted by Dudley above suggests, steel pan in America would have to "bring itself up" in order to elevate its artistic worth beyond the calypso fad status created by Harry Belafonte. Moreover, because of the cultural differences among Americans, the development of steel pan in America would have to be markedly different from its Trinidadian counterpart. Now, some sixty years later, these variables have presented themselves as the current embodiment of American steel pan discussed in the pages of this study. With the explosion of steel bands in universities and schools across the United States, more American audiences are coming in contact with steel pan in new ways and are being forced to re-think their concepts and ideologies of folk and/or indigenous music in their own conceptualization of a new American steel pan heritage.

Considering the political, musical, and geographical complexities at work here, I argue that the historical course of steel pan in America is by and large not very ethical. That is, the Manhattan calypso and appropriation of steel pan music and image for advertising is driven by economic factors rather than cultural preservation or celebration, and little if any consideration is given to stripping away unwanted cultural baggage.

Furthermore, although we see time and again that the steel pan is used very positively as a tool for education, these successful examples are often overshadowed by other unsuccessful examples which demonstrate a low degree of accompanying cultural education. Accordingly, in discussing the case of the Miami University Steel Band in Chapter 8, we see that the American audience does not necessarily demand nor care about the cultural education and transmission of traditional steel band music or Trinidadian culture, choosing instead to enjoy the fictitious creation of the happy islander and his musical sun and fun. As the American steel band moves forward into the future, it is clear that audience cultivation and education will be a primary concern.

### **Forging an Identity for Steel Band in America**

Sociologist Simon Frith argues that self identity *is* cultural identity.<sup>450</sup> As the development of steel pan in America marches forward into the future, a historical view identifies many individuals—Rudy King, Pete Seeger, Daniel Gallery, Sonny Rollins, Andy Narell, Chris Tanner—who all contributed a bit of themselves towards constructing the larger identity of steel pan in America.<sup>451</sup> As I have discussed at times in the study, the development of steel pan in America is an independent growth with various ties to its Trinidadian predecessor. But steel pan in America does not have the ties to national pride so closely linked to its forerunner and unlike Trinidad and Tobago, the development of steel pan in America—with few exceptions—does not enjoy the benefits of local preservation societies, corporate sponsorships, or government sponsored national

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<sup>450</sup> Simon Frith, *The Sociology of Rock* (Constable: London, 1978).

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*



endowment program sustaining the development. Therefore, the passion and energy of devoted individuals is paramount in the formation and future survival of steel pan in America. For instance, American steel band music never reached the masses in quite the lofty way that Pete Seeger or Admiral Daniel Gallery envisioned. However, both men succeeded in cultivating steel band music in the United States by providing a usable legacy of steel band information and education accessible by the American public; an effort that sowed the seeds for future generations. Seeger in particular, was but one agent in the development of steel pan in America, yet his involvement with the steel band scene in New York and influential “how-to” steel drum manual are integral to the success currently enjoyed by steel bands in American universities and primary schools. Seeger is a fine example of how outsiders embraced the music and culture of Trinidad and remade an entirely new steel band tradition in the United States.

Perhaps the best example of a self identity that is constructed entirely from the cultural identity of steel pan in America is that of Andy Narell. More than any other American panist, Narell is responsible for establishing and fostering a legitimate American Steel pan scene and promulgating steel pan to its current global recognition. As discussed in Chapter 7, Narell’s path to steel pan greatness has firmly embraced and integrated jazz and American popular music as the mediums by which his steel pan voice is heard. The narrative of Narell’s life in steel pan is important for isolating the key factors behind the global success of steel pan and steel pan music in the past fifty years and his career displays a concerted effort towards elevating the stature and giving sought after dignity to the steel pan. We see in Narell a wonderful example of an artist striking a delicate balance between tradition and creative growth while establishing a personal

identity. Chapter 7 demonstrates that Narell was able to strike this balance while attempting to establish a new American steel pan tradition and simultaneously find a unique voice as a musician.

Since the early 2000s, Narell has watched over the American steel band tradition from his home base in Paris, but the efforts of other individual steel panists discussed in Chapter 5 and Chapter 8 have produced a bountiful harvest in the academic music scene. The activities of Chris Tanner at Miami University displays the effect that steel pan ensembles can have on a region and a university population. The steel band program founded by Ellie Mannette and Phil Fiani at West Virginia University has countless offshoots, including the Virginia Rhythm Project. The many steel pan disciples produced at the University of Illinois during the 1970s populated the Midwest with college steel bands in an unprecedented fashion. The actions of Liam Teague at Northern Illinois University have further carried on the steel pan tradition begun by Al O'Connor and established a clear link between America and Trinidad for steel band talent. The spread of steel pan in academia has been a slow, but deliberate, process and the actions of these educators and panist is born of passion for the music, art, and culture of steel pan combined with a desire to share this culture with others.

### **Open versus Closed: Sharing Knowledge and the American Steel Band**

Trinidadian panists have long suffered with a metaphoric chip on the shoulder as they continue to deal with the residual effects of colonialism. This attitude manifests itself in the struggle to halt the spread of their cultural capital throughout the globe.

Proponents of the Trinidadian steel band movement, viciously protecting their knowledge of steel pan, are constantly grappling with several issues—how to protect the steel pan, how to embrace steel pan culture, how to promote the steel pan, and how to profit from the global spread and adoption of steel pan—and these issues often challenge firmly held beliefs and spark contentious debate within Trinidadian society. Conversely, this study argues that the development of steel pan in America is built on partnerships, openness, and a willingness to share arrangements, knowledge, and steel pan playing techniques that far exceeds and separates it from the Trinidadian forefather. Ultimately, American steel band scene is characterized by the confluence of American cultures and like Irish dancing or politicians espousing their message to hip hop rhymes, steel band is yet another strand of the diverse American cultural fabric.

### **Final Thoughts**

I return in closing to Kim Johnson’s quote from the introduction of this study “[Steel Band] fell to the social scientist by default, as if beating pan was some quaint folk practice, an aspect of ethnicity or national identity or pluralism—anything but a serious, modern art form.”<sup>452</sup> It appears that the implied relegation of steel panists and steel pan music no longer applies either to the Trinidadian nor the American steel band movement. The many practitioners and case studies explored in this study suggest that the development of steel pan in America is a serious art movement in both the level of a socio-cultural appreciation and artistic development. Moreover, in recent times perhaps the most notable difference between American and Trinidadian steel bands is the lack of

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<sup>452</sup> Kim Johnson, *Pan Lime* Vol. 3, No. 4 (April 1996).

balance between the components of socio-cultural history and artistic development. This is perhaps no more evident than a comparison of the current Panorama guidelines and the work of the United States Navy Steel Band. Still out to prove their worth to the world, the inferiority complex that subtly guides much of Trinidadian society has resulted in increasing strict performance guidelines for Panorama arranging. This has, in effect, suffocated the artistic development and progression of steel pan music. Conversely, the United States Navy Steel Band is an example of an American steel band that upheld the highest degree of artistic achievement while attempting to promote the socio-cultural heritage of their American audiences at the expense of a general inattention to Trinidadian cultural foundations of which steel pan is rooted.

This study began with a quote from Ralph Ellison in which he suggests that Louis Armstrong fails to realize that he is “invisible.” The protagonist in the novel comments that “Perhaps I like Louis Armstrong because he’s made poetry out of being invisible. I think it must be because he’s unaware that he is invisible. And my own grasp of invisibility aids me to understand his music.”<sup>453</sup> Throughout this study, the invisibility of steel pan in America has come into a much clearer focus. Yet, perhaps the final conclusion of this study is that steel pan in America is not invisible at all. In actuality, despite being born of the Trinidadian steel band movement and sharing many characteristics, the American steel band tradition is something uniquely American and as such exists independently and out in the open. Moreover, neither Trinidadians nor Americans have thus far exhausted the infinite potential of the instrument and the future of steel pan in America is very positive.

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<sup>453</sup> Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: The Modern Library Edition, 1992), 7-8.

The streams of influence, as Starr and Waterman would suggest, are tributaries of the same headwaters but roam in concurrent but separate paths of development, and each ultimately has independent end goals. One constant, however, in the study of steel pan in America and Trinidad is the euphoria and joy the instrument brings listeners and performers, regardless of “class, creed, or color.”<sup>454</sup> The “pan jumbie” as described earlier in this study can bite anyone and infect them with the unexplainable spirit of the steel pan. On this note, I turn to Admiral Daniel Gallery for the final words of the study:

I've got something down hear [Puerto Rico] that is really terrific! The thing has such tremendous possibilities that my mind boggles when I start thinking about it. It's musical business, which might knock Rock'n' roll, and Elvis Presley into the ash can (where they belong). It's a steel band. . . . Last February [1956] I was in Trinidad at Carnival time. I had never even heard of a steel band up to that time. I heard several hundred of them play then and I'll never be the same again. They [steel pans] do things to you that are immoral, illegal, and unconstitutional.<sup>455</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> This was a phrase commonly used by Pete Seeger when discussing the pros of steel band to newspapers and schools.

<sup>455</sup> Letter from Gallery to James Street, May 12, 1957. This document is part of the *Papers of Admiral Daniel V. Gallery*, Special Collections Division, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

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## Appendix A

The following information was taken from G. Allen O'Connor "A Survey of Steel Bands In North American Schools," *Notes: The Journal of the Percussive Arts Society*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Spring-Summer, 1981) : 58-59. The below information is quoted and analyzed in-depth within Chapter 5 of this study.



University of Akron Steel Band, Akron,  
Ohio



American Conservatory of Music Steel  
Band, Chicago, Illinois



Eastern Illinois University Steel Band,  
Charleston, Illinois



Icemen Steel Band, Regina,  
Saskatchewan, Canada



Northern Illinois University Steel Band,  
Dekalb, Illinois



University of Illinois Steel Band,  
Urbana, Illinois





**The University of Akron Steel Band, Akron, Ohio**

**Larry Snider, Director**

This group was organized in 1980 for the sole purpose of providing a public relations group but, as interest developed, the ensemble developed into its own ethnic learning experience and opened up many more musical outlets than were originally anticipated. The audience response has been incredibly good--to the point that it is impossible to perform at all functions to which the group is invited.

**Eastern Illinois University Steel Band, Charleston, Illinois**

**Johnny L. Lane, Director**

Eastern Illinois University Steel Band was formed in June 1980, by Professor Johnny L. Lane. The group consists of 10 members and three percussion players. Two rehearsal hours are given each week for this group. The group plays calypso, pop, and original arrangements. There are concerts inside and outside, and Junior College performances, shopping malls, and many other performances. This group is a non-profit organization on campus.

**The American Conservatory of Music Steel Band, Chicago, Illinois**

**Jeffrey Thomas, Director**

Now in its second year, the Steel Band at the American Conservatory of Music is one of the school's most popular ensembles. Membership in the band is open to percussion majors and non-majors alike. The band presents a series of concerts each year. The most recent concert was held April 6.

**The Icemen Steel Band, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada**

**Jeff Bush, Director**

This group is comprised of students from the University of Regina and several professional performers from the community. They rehearse on a regular basis and perform throughout the province. The group has received high critical acclaim wherever they have played, and the band provides an excellent performance alternative for students and professional players alike.

**The University of Illinois Steel Band, Urbana, Illinois**

**Tom Siwe, Director**

Formed in the spring of 1977 as an adjunct to the University of Illinois percussion ensemble course, the Steel Band provides its players with an excellent educational as well as aesthetic experience. It also provides pleasurable listening for the university students, faculty, and staff. Performing for local community organizations and schools throughout Illinois, the band members donate their time so that any fees collected are donated to a music scholarship fund. Membership in the group consists of students in the School of Music, both graduates and undergraduates, whose major emphasis is percussion. The band plays traditional calypso music as well as special arrangements written by the band members themselves.

**Northern Illinois University Steel Band, DeKalb, Illinois**  
**AI O'Connor, Director**

Organized in 1973 as an adjunct to the percussion and world music programs, there are now three separate ensembles open to interested players. The All University Steel Band is for anyone on the campus. No previous musical training is required. There is one hour of rehearsal per week for which one hour of academic credit is received. Steel Band II is for any student majoring in music education or performance. There is also one hour of rehearsal per week, and one hour of credit is received. Steel Band I is for music students whose major area of emphasis is percussion. A one-hour rehearsal per week is required and one hour of credit is received. Elements of all these groups are combined in one simultaneous two-hour weekly rehearsal to form a large Carnival-style steel band. Revenue generated from performances is used to engage a resource instructor to teach drum set and jazz vibes to all interested percussion majors and also to augment the scholarship program. In addition to these fine college-level programs, it should also be noted that there are some excellent steel band programs existing or under development in the public schools.

## Appendix B

The following survey was administered via phone, email, and face-to-face from September of 2004 through February of 2005. The specifics of the survey and pertinent portions of the results are discussed in Chapter 5 of this study.

Dear (insert steel pan director name),

My name is Andrew Martin and I am a Graduate student at the University of Minnesota. I am currently working on an Ethnomusicological project in which I feel your input would be extremely valuable. My project is a study that focuses on the concept of the “Engine-Room” of American Steeldrum ensembles. In this nation-wide study, I am chiefly concerned with the following areas: your typical instrumentation for the engine-room, the differing “ideas” or concepts of the Engine-Room, the rehearsal techniques used concerning the Engine-Room. Ideally, the best way for me to gather your insights would be a phone interview. However, due to the size of this study, I would be greatly appreciative if you could respond to any or all of the following questions. If you are interested in participating in an interview, please provide your contact information.

Thank you for your time,  
Andrew Martin

1. Are you connected to a university as a: Full-time Faculty, Adjunct Faculty, Graduate Student, Other?
2. When and where did you first start playing in a steeldrum ensemble?
3. What is the typical instrumentation of the engine-room for your steeldrum ensembles?
4. Are there any instruments that are essential to the engine-room, i.e. without which the steeldrum ensemble could not function?
5. In your opinion, what is the role of the engine-room in the steelband?
6. How would you describe the difference in sound and esthetic between your ensemble and an ensemble from Trinidad?
7. What type of students or players play in your engine-room?
8. Do they rotate between engine-room instruments?
9. Do these engine-room players play steeldrums as well?
10. How do you rehearse your engine-room?
11. What is the range of your ensembles repertoire, i.e. Calypso, Bossa Nova, Samba, Pop Arrangements, Christmas Arrangements, Western Classical Arrangements, Rock...?
12. Is there any other general or specific information you would like to offer about your steeldrum ensemble?