

The University of Texas at Austin Performing Arts Center

LESSON ONE: HISTORY OF THE STEEL PAN

OBJECTIVES

Students will become familiar with the story of the steel pan's evolution

MATERIALS

Steel Pan History document
Trinidad and Tobago
Geography
Cultural background
Steel Pan evolution

Timeline of the Evolution of the Steel Pan
Test Your Knowledge Quiz

Chapter 117. Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Fine Arts Subchapter C. High School

§117.51. Implementation of Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Fine Arts, High School.

§117.60. Music, Level I.

(c) Knowledge and skills.

- (5) Historical/cultural heritage. The student relates music to history, to society, and to culture. The student is expected to:
- (A) listen to and classify music by style and/or by historical period;
 - (B) identify and describe the uses of music in society and culture;
 - (C) identify music-related vocations and avocations within the community; and
 - (D) define the relationships between the content, the concepts, and the processes of the other fine arts, other subjects, and those of music.

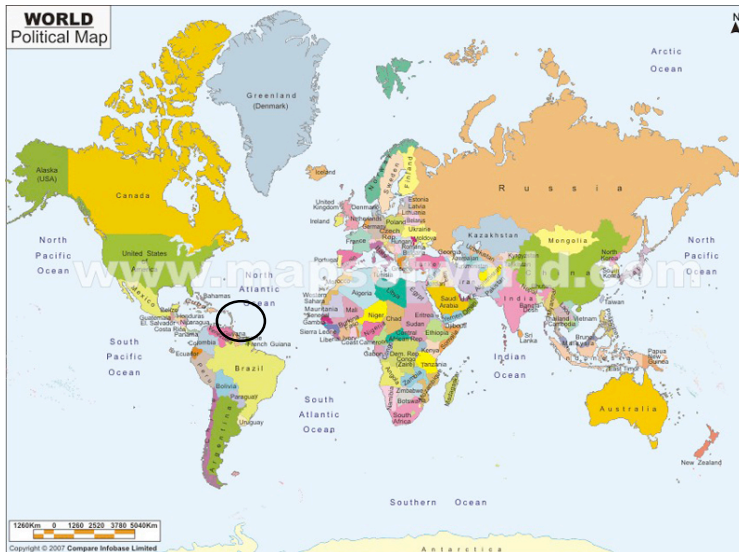
Prepared by
Brenda Simms
Education Coordinator
University of Texas at Austin Performing Arts Center

©2008

STEEL PAN HISTORY

Trinidad and Tobago Geography

The invention of the steel drum was a specific cultural response to the conditions present on the islands of Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad is the southernmost island in the **Caribbean** and lies just 7 miles off the northeastern coast of **Venezuela**. **Tobago** is a smaller island northeast of Trinidad.



www.mapsofworld.com



www.geology.com



www.wikipedia.com

Trinidad and Tobago Cultural Background

At different times over the years, Spain, The Netherlands, France, and Britain have each occupied and controlled the islands Trinidad and Tobago.

In 1777, a declining Spanish territory moved to Trinidad because it was unable to defend itself against the attacks of the British in the Caribbean. Trinidad had just a few hundred inhabitants living on the edge of the island and had neither economic nor strategic value. Later that year, planters and slaves began to arrive in Trinidad. By 1779, 523 free settlers and 973 slaves had settled there.

In 1783, the Spanish government invited French planters to move to **Trinidad**. Large numbers of French immigrants came to with all their possessions, slaves and way of life. In the beginning they planted cotton, cocoa and coffee.

Slaves, who were brought to Trinidad with their French masters, met labor needs. These slaves were Creole (born in the Caribbean). Later, other slaves were brought in from Africa, until the majority of the slaves were African born. In 1797, when the British conquered Trinidad, sugar had become the most important crop. The slave population had risen to over 10,000.

Meanwhile, the British conquered **Tobago** in 1793. Plantations were set up and sugar was their main crop. Tobago became a slave colony and the majority was from Africa. The British white population was small. Very few French people had ever settled on the island.

The slaves in Trinidad and Tobago lived in horrible conditions. Hard labor, poor food, disease and cruel masters were the order of the day. Through it all, the slaves still managed to create some sort of family life and maintain their culture. Drumming had been a form of communication among the enslaved Africans. They also performed in groups during Mardi Gras, a traditional celebration the French brought to the island.

In 1838, the British ruler banned slavery. Full freedom was granted to the slaves. The British feared the freed slaves (even in their freedom) would use drums to send secret messages of revolt. As a result, in 1883, Carnival was celebrated but **the British colonial government outlawed drumming.**

The Evolution of the Early Steel Drum

The freed slaves did not want to give up their drums. They had lost many things - their families, their own languages, and their religion. Music was one connection to the past.

Since drums were banned, they found another way to make music at the Mardi Gras (Carnival) celebrations: beating on biscuit tins, bottles, scrap iron, garbage can lids, automobile parts, pots and pans, paint containers, or waste containers, and bamboo tubes.

Tunable sticks made of **bamboo** wood called **Tambo-Bamboos** were hit on the ground or hit with other sticks to produce different pitches. ("Tambour" pronounced "tamboo", is the French word for drum.) Tamboo-Bamboo bands included musicians hitting bottles with spoons.

Tambo-Bamboo band



www.panyard.com

Tambo-Bamboo groups became popular. Some made their bamboo instruments into sharp pointed weapons and used them to fight over whose group was the best.

In the 1930s, *some* metal percussion was being used in the Tambo-Bamboo bands. In 1934, because many people were harvesting bamboo illegally, the British government banned Tambo-Bamboo instruments. By 1940, all-steel rhythm bands had become common at Carnival.

The Evolution of the Modern Steel Drum

Around 1940, a youth named Winston Simon (1930-1976) loaned his metal barrel drum to a friend. When it was returned, it was dented. He started pounding the under surface of the drum back to its original shape and discovered that the pounding created different pitches or notes. He produced a four-note drum and, by this accident, started the transformation of the steel "drum" from a rhythm instrument into a melodic one. This drum had a concave shape (top arched upward).

Carnival was banned in 1942. Between 1942 and the end of World War II in 1945 many things happened to further stifle the progress of the steel band. One of these things was the musicians' tendency to riot and to cause uproar because of the intense rivalry among the groups.

Many of these young men were in and out of jail. The widespread complaints about the noise of steel bands practicing led to them being banned in 1944. During the war, steel bands were not allowed to be on the streets.

In 1946, Simon, developed a 14-note pan. The steel pan was now able to play the melody of whole songs! Trinidad's rhythm drum bands soon evolved into melodic music bands.

Ellie Mannette (1927-) further developed the steel drum. He began using discarded 55-gallon oil drums, which he hammered concave (metal arched downward), trimmed, heated to make the metal stronger and more able to retain notes in tune, and then hammered from the underside to create more accurate pitches with convex notes on the concave surface. By 1947, he had perfected a drum with two octaves of a diatonic scale. He also introduced the rubber-tipped stick, to reduce the harsh impact of wood on metal.

The Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra formed in 1951, was the first steel band whose instruments were all made from oil drums. Retained from the bamboo-bamboo bands in the steel band evolution is the 'engine room' or the percussive element which allows the band to keep its timing. The "bottle and spoon," maracas (shac-shac) and various assortments of iron, make up the elements of the "engine room."

STEELBAND SECTIONS

FRONTLINE PANS or TENOR PANS

1. high tenor (soprano)
-shortest skirt length, lightweight can be strung around the neck
2. low tenor
3. double tenor

These instruments usually carry the melody and have the highest pitch.

MIDRANGE PANS

1. Guitar
highest pitches in midrange section
used for "strumming"
Can be single, double and triple
2. Quadrophone (a set of four drums used for melody and chords)
3. Cellos
play chords (multiple notes played at the same time)

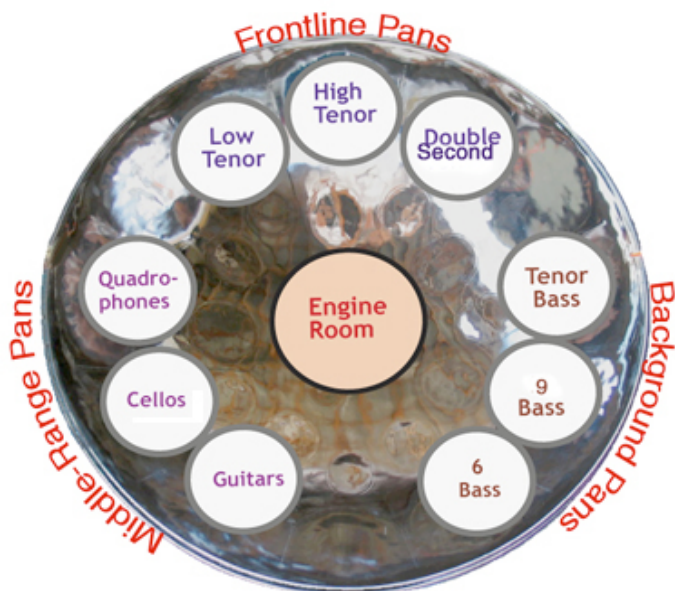
These instruments support the melody played by frontline pans

BACKGROUND PANS

- basses:
- tenor bass
 - six-bass
 - 9-bass
 - high bass

These are the lowest pitched instruments and provide harmony and melody chords.

	Instrument
Frontline Pans	High Tenor Steel Pan
	Low tenor Steel Pan
	Double Tenor Steel Pan
Mid-Range Pans	Guitar Steel Pan
	Quadrophones Steel Pan
	Cellos Steel Pan
Background Pans	6-Bass Steel Pan
	9-Bass Steel Pan
	12-Bass Steel Pan
	Tenor Bass
Engine Room	Conga Drums
	Trap set
	Guiro (scratcher)
	Iron (assorted)
	Toc-Toc



<http://library2.nalis.gov.tt>



sticks

STEEL PAN EVOLUTION TIMELINE

- 1777** Spanish move to Trinidad bringing slaves
- 1783** French move to Trinidad also bringing slaves
- 1793** British conquer Tobago; majority of the island is African slaves
- 1797** British conquer Trinidad
- 1838** British ban slavery
- 1883** Drumming outlawed at Carnival; other percussion instruments were created such as the Tamboo-Bamboo
- 1930** Some metal percussion were used in Tamboo-Bamboo bands
- 1934** Tamboo-Bamboo instruments are banned
- 1940** All-steel rhythm bands are common; Winston Simon designs concave drum that plays 4 tuned pitches
- 1942** Carnival is banned during the war
- 1944** Steel bands banned due to the noise and rowdiness of the musicians
- 1946** Simon develops an instrument that plays 14 notes
- 1947** Ellie Mannette uses 55 gallon steel drum, more than 20 notes, convex shape and use of rubber-tipped stick
- 1951** First all steel band using oil drums only

Resources:

<http://library2.nalis.gov.tt/Default.aspx?PageContentID=441&tabid=216>
www.spotlightradio.net/script.php?id=2271
http://www.nalis.gov.tt/Biography/history_PanPioneers_WinstonSimonEllieMannette.htm
www.trinbagopan.com/articles/210808.htm
www.triniview.com/articles/canboulay.html
www.iadb.org/iadbamerica/English/MAY01E/may01e2.html
www.spotlightradio.net/script.php?id=2271
<http://hotpans.se/pan/tuning/building.1.html>
<http://library2.nalis.gov.tt/Default.aspx?PageContentID=223&tabid=165>