

Study Guide

Rhythm Kings !Jump UP! Steel Pan & Caribbean Music



42 **Making a steel pan**

Sinking the pan

Many steel pan players make their own instruments so that they can be sure that the pan they play has exactly the sound they want. Making a steel pan is a complicated job, with nine main stages.

First, a drum is chosen. If you look back to pages 40 and 41, you will see that there are three types of steel pan. Here, a drum with the right thickness of metal to make a tenor pan is selected.

Now the end of the oil drum is pounded with a heavy leather mallet. It must be pounded into a smooth curve about 20 centimetres deep. This process is called sinking the pan.

Punching in the notes

Patterns of the notes are traced onto the sunken shape with chalk. The tenor pan has 28 notes, and these have to be marked in a precise way.

Now the shape of each note must be punched into the metal. You can see how this is done using a punch and a hammer to make lots of indentations.

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Cutting the pan

The main part of the barrel is now cut to the right size, using a metal cutter. The shorter the pan, the higher the range of notes it will produce. The tenor pan is cut to about 20 centimetres deep.

Heating the metal

Now the surface metal of the pan has to be heated up quickly. Sometimes the whole pan is plunged into a bonfire, but here a blowtorch is being used. Once the metal cools down again, it is much softer and easier to mould.

Tuning the pan

Now comes the most important stage – tuning. The drum maker taps the standard note with a rubber-tipped beater. Then he taps the soft metal over and over again on the same spot, using gentle strokes until the sound of the note begins to change. He tunes the pan by ear, checking each note with a mechanical tuner to make sure it is accurate.

Chrome finish

He does the same on the marked-out places of each of the 28 notes positioned around the pan. Now the pan is sent away to a factory where it is dipped in a liquid metal called chrome. This gives the finished pan its bright, shiny look.

Playing the steel pans

Finally, the pan is fixed to its stand. At last it is ready to play.

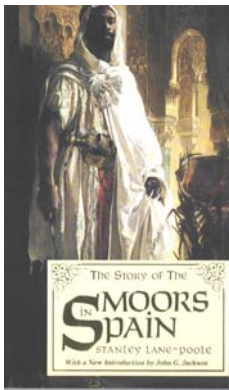
Steel Pans: A Brief History

Intro Napoleon Revels-Bey

LEARNING STANDARDS:

1. **Creating, Performing, and Participation in the Arts:**
Students will actively engage in the processes that constitute creation and performance in the arts, dance, music, theatre and visual arts, and participate in various roles in the arts.
2. **Knowing and Using Arts Materials and Resources:**
Students will be knowledgeable about and make use of the materials and resources available for participation in the arts in various roles.
3. **Responding to and Analyzing Various Works of Art:**
Students will respond critically to a variety of works in the arts, connecting the individual work to other works and to other aspects of human endeavor and thought.
4. **Understanding the Cultural Contributions of the Arts:**
Students will develop an understanding of the personal and cultural forces that shape artistic communication and how the arts in turn shape the diverse cultures of past and present society.

Moorish Empire prior to Spain



The history of the Moorish empire prior to Spain extends from the ancient Moabites, across the great Atlantic into North, South and Central American, thus the Moorish domination of the seas. It is important to point out that as time goes on what is now known as Latin America is highly influenced by European colonization and the slave trade with Africa. Currently, Latin America, the countries of the Western Hemisphere south of the United States, include the Caribbean Islands, Mexico, Central and South America and contain an amalgamation of cultural influences, European, Moorish, Mexican, and other African tribes. Europe conquest forced the religion and languages, Spanish and Portuguese. Much of the native Moorish culture, which was in place before the arrival of the Spaniards and Christopher Columbus, was suppressed due to forced assimilation; the rest was combined with the arrival of slaves and other cultures in the 16th century. Through this rich cultural mix, a distinct Moorish or commonly referred to as Afro-Caribbean culture has emerged.



The element in Moorish, African & Caribbean music that many find most distinctive, is its rhythms derived from the Moorish, and other Africans via the slave trade (1550-1880), believed to have brought an estimated two million people of Moorish descent, while in fact the Moors had domination and inhabitation for over 2000 years in what is now know as the west into the Caribbean Islands. Unlike the Moors of North American and some that were enslaved, who in 1776 were forbidden from playing drums (except for areas such as New Orleans Congo Square), Caribbean slaves were liberally allowed to play their drums, which of course were not only for recreation and entertainment, but used as a means of communicating. These were considered talking drums, carrying current, as well as timeless messages; message of history, struggle, and unspeakable joy. All this was accomplished through the replaying of these traditional Moorish and African rhythms, sung on a drum.



During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries these rhythms spread, developed, and canonized throughout the Caribbean, around the same time that another American art form was beginning its conception. This North American art form was also going to contain a

rich cultural mix. It would incorporate blues intonation, African drums and rhythms, Indian cymbals, European instruments, harmony, and musical forms with a syncopated beat namely jazz.

Every country and every island in the Caribbean developed its own unique musical culture, be it folk idioms or a national conservatory styles. Four countries, namely Cuba, Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico have had the most significant influences on music in the United States (Cuba having the most enduring). These influences included Latin rhythms and/or dances that infatuated the United States, like the Habanera, Bolero (Cuba), Samba, Bossa-Nova (Brazil), Tango (Argentina), and Mariachi (Mexico).

The island of Trinidad, claimed by Spain in 1498

by Maxens Berre

Culturally and economically neglected until the late eighteenth century. Toward the end of the 1780's, French planters arriving at Trinidad brought a substantial slave population which provided an initial impetus of economic development. However, in their quest to obtain new colonies in the New World, the British defeated the French in Trinidad in 1797.



The island was conquered by the British. When slavery was abolished in Trinidad in 1837, the British government invited Asians and Indians to work on the land. While people of African descent remained the largest group, this new group also helped to shape the cultural panorama.



The population in Trinidad used hand drums for their dances and ceremonies and to communicate with each other. Hand drums were also used for celebrations and for fighting. However, the central event for which drums were used was *Carnival*. In its early stages, Carnival was a procession in which groups of torch-bearing People of Moorish and African descents would reenact plantation fire drills accompanied by drums. The use of drums in street parades was outlawed in 1883, since the British feared that the passing of secret messages by means of Drumming might become the impetus for social unity and revolt among the People of Moorish and African descents. Riots and conflict between the natives and the authorities led to

the banning of drum processions during Carnival time as well. Many drum players, deprived of their drums, abandoned drumming altogether, favoring what the more European melodic forms of music.

However, rhythm being the most important element of African-based music, many drummers simply replaced their drums with sticks, especially with *bamboo sticks* which could be tuned. These sticks were called *Tambo Bamboo*. In this form, the British repression helped develop the use of drumming sticks in the islands of the Caribbean. *Tambo Bamboo* was used as an instrument that when pounded against the ground produced a distinctive rhythm. Each group developed its own distinctive rhythmic pattern, which served as group identification. Free People of Moorish and African descents and slaves had been developing neo-African forms of music since the early 1800s. These included stick-fighting dances, especially the one known as *calinda*. Eventually these fighting dances and

other musical manifestations were considered violent by the British colonial rule, and Tamboo Bamboo was declared illegal. Drumming is, however, ingrained in African cultures, and the people of Trinidad continued to develop instruments to replace the banned ones, including tin cans and woodbarrels. It was not until the beginning of this century that drums and tamboo bamboos were again allowed, with restrictions, during Carnival time.

1938 Street instruments in street bands

The elaborate processions of Carnival required elaborate rhythms, and drummers started perfecting their instruments to produce a more varied tonal range. During the 1930's biscuit tins were included as rhythm instruments in the Tamboo Bamboo bands. In 1934 Tamboo Bamboo bands were again forbidden due to street clashes among rival groups. At the same time a gradual change to street instruments in street bands began to take place.

The year of 1938 is considered as the birth of the steel drum when Tamboo Bamboo bands were finally switching over to steel. The first true steel pan used by musicians was an empty biscuit container. The next development was the discovery that when you hammered a paint pan out from the inside, different notes could be played on the pan.

Soon the bent piece of steel gave way to the steel drum that could produce simple melodies. The early steel pans made of paint tins or biscuit tins had only a handful of notes. They were one foot in diameter and two feet long. They were tuned to the highest upper pitch note the steel pan could produce. Soon drummers discovered that bulges of different sizes in the bottom of a tin could produce sounds of various pitches. In 1939, a drummer named **Winston "Spree" Simon** began playing melodies on the first tuned tins. He

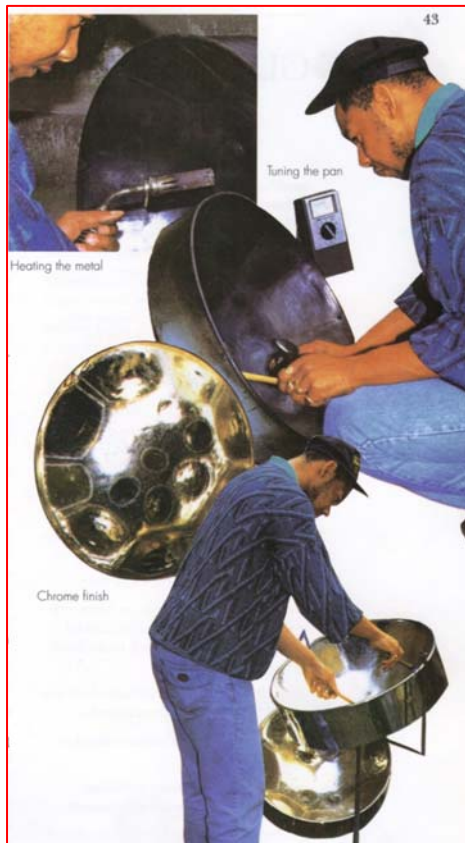
is considered to be the inventor of the tuned Tins. Spree later produced the first convex (dome- shaped) steelpan.

Steel pans

Originally, steel pans were convex; however, the pursuit of a wider range of notes produced the development of a concave instrument. In a steel band, the melodies are played on a tenor pan, which can play a complete low pitch scale. The bands also have double tenor pans, a pair of lower pitch drums in which a lower pitch scale is divided between the two drums. Treble and harmonic drums are also featured.

Pan music

Developed rapidly during the late 1930s and by 1941 many steel bands playing in Trinidad became popular among U.S. soldiers based on the naval bases on the island. Although Carnival was banned for the entire duration of the Second World War, steel bands playing in lower class neighborhoods flourished in this period. First, the banning of playing during the war years gave people more time for acoustic experimentation with the emerging steel drum. Second, the oil industry and the US naval base made oil drums abundant in the island. These oil drums were cut and used as dustbins. The dustbins eventually replaced the biscuit tins as the raw material for pan making.



Steel 55 gallon oil drum.

During this period, pan music was associated with criminals and the lower class. The constant clashes between bands and the frequent inter-band rivalry, which occasionally resulted in violence, helped to perpetuate this association. Raw materials to make steel drums were scarce, and panmen generally had to steal materials from oil refineries and naval yards, all of which helped to seal the bad reputation of these drummers. After the war, Carnival was reinstated, and with it the famous competitions between steel bands. In 1946, **Ellie Manette** created the first steel drum in its concave form, made from a steel 55 gallon oil drum. By the 1950s, steel pan music had gained enough popularity to be sent to the United Kingdom as part of the Commonwealth celebration. As a result, the steel pan was strongly identified as an important element of Trinidadian culture. This also greatly enhanced the social "respectability" of the steel drum. The music swept up the usually restrained British and helped to establish the international exposure and acceptability of the steel drum. During the 1960s, steel drums came of age. Numerous steel pan festivals and competitions were introduced during this period and Steel bands even performed for Queen Elizabeth when she visited Trinidad. Steel pans played an important role during Trinidad's independence celebrations in 1962. Steel bands started to tour both the United States and the U.K. On **February 22, 1963, the first National Panorama** competition was held in Trinidad. Through the 50 years following the Second World War the steel pan has been further developed by pan makers through sophisticated experimentation. This development, still in progress, has produced new refined crafting techniques. Modern steel bands have ten different drums, from tenor to the Nine Bass drums, which produce a vast tonal range. This tonal range of modern steel bands includes several octaves that emulate those available in a grand piano.

Today, huge steel band orchestras are common in many Caribbean islands, but the Trinitarians are credited with having been the creators of the steel pan. As Charles de Ledesma and Simon Broughton comment in their essay about Trinidad: "The Trinians put something cheap and abundant to extraordinary good use and created one of the few acoustic instruments to be invented this century." (World Music Rough Guides. London 1994). No longer the domain of the Trinitarians, steel pans symbolizes the culture of the English speaking Caribbean islands. They are played on many islands outside of Trinidad and Tobago.

Magazine Articles Reviews Interviews

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Creating a Pan

Begins as a 45-gallon oil drum. Tools needed to turn the drum into a pan are a sledgehammer, small hammer metal punch, ruler, a compass and chalk. The unopened end of the oil drum is "sunk" with the sledgehammer - deeper for the higher drums and shallower for the cello and bass pans. The position of the notes (around the perimeter and in the center) are outlined with the compass and chalk and then beaten out with a hammer and tempered with fire and water. The final tuning is carefully done with a small hammer and rubber-tipped playing stick. Types of pans are the leads, the seconds, the cello and the bass pans. Below are photos taken of Leroy Williams, owner of New World Standard Steel-Drum, Santa Cruz, CA, creating a pan. Leroy is formerly from Trinidad and is a Master Builder and Tuner.

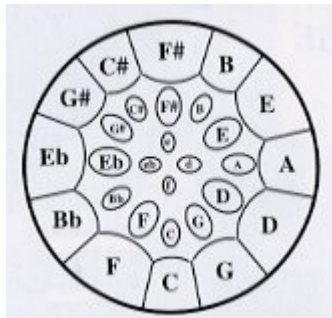
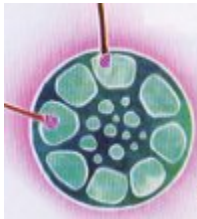


Tools of a Master Builder – mallets, sledgehammer, ruler, chalk and compass.

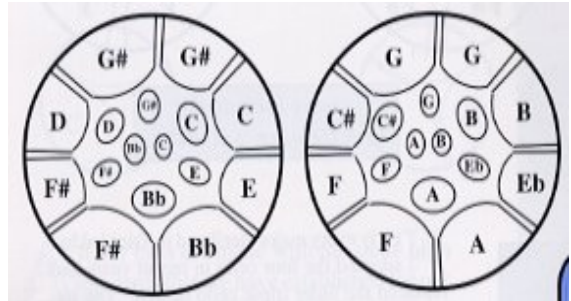


Pounding the drum with a mallet.

The position of the notes, around the perimeter and the center, is outlined with the compass and chalk and then beaten out with a hammer and tempered with fire and water. The final tuning is carefully done with a small hammer and rubber-tipped playing stick.



Notes on a Lead Pan



Notes on the Seconds

Measuring for placement of the notes.



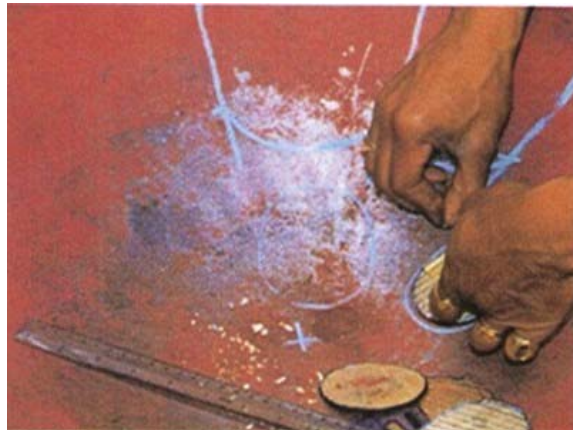
Putting in the width of the notes.



The drum marked with notes



The drum is sunk and ready for firing.



Steel Pan The Shiny Drum

Napoleon Revels-Bey,"Jump Up"Rhythm Kings Pan Ensemble will demonstrate and perform the history of Steel Pan and how it is used and influenced Jazz and Third World music



History, performance, or workshop of the 1950s steel pan music. Strongly identified as an important element of Trinidadian culture which greatly enhanced its social "respectability.

" During the 1960s, steel drums came of age with numerous steel pan festivals and competitions, even performing for Queen Elizabeth. They played an important role during Trinidad's independence celebrations in 1962. Steel bands started touring the U.S. and the U.K.; on February 22, 1963, the first National Panorama competition was held in Trinidad.