

Orchestras of Steel: Local Phenomenon, National Movement, International Intrigue

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Abstract: In this paper, I describe the phenomenon of the Trinidadian Steelband movement as a local national style, its evolution, and the international outlook of the movement as the music is disseminated outside of Trinidad. In particular, I am interested in exploring the subject through the lens of ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin's super/sub/inter-cultural model, as described in his excellent book *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West*.

Introduction

“Ten boys, who might be scolded for making noise at home, can pound to their hearts’ content at the Bayway Community Center and call it music. The boys, ranging from 14 to 16, pound, beat and thump oil barrels which have been tuned and fashioned into steel drums. The musicians call themselves the ‘Tradewinds.’ ‘Steel drums are capable of producing anything from Brahms to rock ‘n’ roll,’ Robert M. Petracco, staff worker who directs the music, said. ‘Unbelievable—that’s the only word to describe the sounds. People can’t believe such beautiful sounds come from [oil] drums.’”¹

The Trinidadian steelband movement represents one of the most interesting and inspiring developments in grass-roots musical creation and culture. The steelband movement—hereafter referred to by its Trinidadian moniker, pan²—grew up in an environment of rich cultural diversity, in the face of intense opposition and suspicion, and despite the shackles of poverty and oppression. The extensive struggle and passion that yielded this remarkable art-form helped transform pan from a dubious gang-related activity into the proud symbol of national heritage it represents today—so much so that the steel drum is pictured on some official monetary currency in Trinidad.

In Mark Slobin’s book *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West* (Slobin 1993), he describes three terms which I use to assist in framing the discussion of pan: the *superculture*, the *subculture*, and the *interculture*. The superculture refers to the hegemonic state of the mainstream that is “internalized in the consciousness of governments, industry, subcultures, and

¹ Quoted from an unreferenced newspaper article in Bayway, NJ, 1960, in Seeger 1964, p. 30

² In Trinidad, the word *pan* refers not only to the steel drum as an instrument, but to the activities and lifestyle of the steelband movement.

individuals as ideology.” (Slobin 1993, p. 27) The subculture refers to the smaller “local” units of the individual, the committee, the family, the neighborhood, etc. The interculture represents the cross-cutting strains of society through which ideas reach across boundaries. I am grossly paraphrasing the nature of Slobin’s terminology for the purpose of introduction, and in fact it would be negligent for me not to point out that Slobin himself states “I do not mean to present a model, nor will I come up with one-sentence definitions of terms.” (Slobin 1993, p. 12) That said, I feel that his paradigm is an extremely useful one in understanding the nature and effect of a culture of music, and in particular hope that it will present a useful frame through which to investigate the phenomenon of pan.

Brief History of Trinidad & Tobago

The island nation of Trinidad and Tobago is extremely diverse, the ethnic makeup being 40% East Indian (primarily immigrants from northern India), 40% black African, 18% mixed, 1% white, and 1% Chinese/other.³

Originally occupied by the Amerindian tribes of the Arawaks and Caribs, Trinidad was not occupied by the Spanish until several years after Christopher Columbus “discovered” it in 1498. Initially the Spanish came to Trinidad looking for gold, but eventually made their fortunes growing cocoa. The first Spanish settlement was San Jose (now St. Joseph), built in 1592. For almost 300 years, Trinidad was primarily an outpost of Spain, and the Spanish plantations thrived until the end of the 18th-century, when an insect infestation crippled the cocoa industry, and the many colonists fled to neighboring islands in the Caribbean.

Meanwhile, in the French colony of Haiti, a slave revolt drove out a large portion of the French colonists, many of whom fled to Trinidad, where they re-established the cocoa plantations, and additionally founded coffee and sugar plantations. By 1797, the short-lived domination of Trinidad by the French was ended, as the British captured Trinidad. Trinidad remained a British colony until 1962, when Trinidad and Tobago officially gained their independence as a free nation.

³ Statistics from current information on the World Factbook (CIA), <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/td.html>

The slave trade had brought thousands of Africans, who were used as slave labor by the British, and the Spanish and French before them, on the sugar plantations. By 1834, however, the slaves were freed, and most of them left the plantations, causing a severe labor shortage. During this time, some Chinese and Portuguese immigrants were recruited, but many of them left the plantations to become shopkeepers. To fill the labor gap, workers from India came to Trinidad by the thousands, agreeing to work as indentured servants on the plantations, and eventually being given their own plots of land. Today the plantations are dominated by the East Indian population of Trinidad.

Through its sordid history of colonial domination, immigration, and slave trade, Trinidad has been saturated with cultural influences. The influences that gave rise to pan in Trinidad—European, African, and Indian cultural traditions—also include significant influences by the Americans—who occupied Trinidad during World War Two. Next we will investigate those cultural traditions, and how they fit into place for the development of pan.

The Emergence of Pan

In Trinidad, the old-world African cultural traditions were allowed to flourish under French and British rule, albeit with certain reservations, restrictions, and suspicions. The African slaves of Trinidad, who according to most accounts began arriving as early as the mid 16th-century, are generally thought to have come primarily from seven West African countries, in particular: the Congo, Nigeria, the Ivory Coast, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. It is difficult to know for certain the exact origins of the African slaves brought to be Caribbean, since records were not kept in earnest until the 19th century, but in general the dominant cultural group who seemed to encompass the Africans of Trinidad were the Yoruba, who themselves comprised many smaller ethnic groups who migrated to the Nigerian coast, where they were captured by slave-traders. Among the Yoruba Africans in Trinidad, the most popular religious belief system was Shango. As this belief system was practiced in Trinidad, so were its musical traditions, which included folk songs, hymns, and litanies accompanied by Shango drums, sticks, and the chac-chac (gourd rattles).

Meanwhile, during the brief period that French occupied Trinidad, in the late 18th century, the Trinidadian tradition of Carnival was born, introduced by French plantation owners. Like

Carnival in Brazil and Mardi Gras in New Orleans, Carnival is a vast celebration ending on Shrove Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. It was a high society affair in those days, consisting of masked balls, concerts, dances, and costumed promenades on the streets of Port of Spain. This aristocratic social event was mimicked by Africans, who took the opportunity to establish their own celebrations in their homes. Eventually, the celebrations merged, and became something of a pastiche of traditions, dances, music, and buffoonery. Mixed together were the musical traditions of the Shango, the many styles of European holiday and social music, marching bands, carolers, and more. The complicated history and development of Carnival in Trinidad cannot be underestimated, nor can it be adequately analyzed here.

The African drumming tradition, then, was alive and well in Trinidad, and was an integral part not only of the Africans' version of Carnival, but of many other religious observances and social functions. Shango, or Orisha drum ensembles thrived in Trinidad, particular in the East River area of Port of Spain. It was a combination of fear that the drums were inciting African violence, and the Roman Catholic hierarchy's desire to convert the Africans to Christianity, that eventually drove British rulers to ban the use of the drums. In 1883, the practice of "singing, dancing, drumming, and other music making...by rogues and vagabonds" (Blake 1995, p. 45) was outlawed in Trinidad. In particular, the skin drum was simply outlawed outright.

The African's recourse was to find a replacement for the drum; thus, the emergence of the tamboo bamboo. These are literally stalks of bamboo of varying lengths and sizes, which when beat on the ground, produced a percussive sound akin to the skin drums. Tamboo bamboo bands were assembled, to accompany various musical functions, including carnival parades. Often other percussion instruments were included, particularly the spoon and bottle, and scraps of metal. Unfortunately, the tamboo bamboo bands became associated in the minds of the public with violence, which in fact was often the case, since in the city of Port of Spain, tamboo bamboo bands were often assembled by poor youth who were essentially part of a street-gang culture. These bands were very competitive with one another, and it was not uncommon for a band member to pull a machete out of his bamboo and attack a rival band member on the street. By 1911, tamboo bamboo, while not explicitly outlawed, was banned from carnival celebrations, and became inexplicably linked with gang activity in the minds of the general public. Even older

generations of African Trinidadians became disparaging of tamboo bamboo activities, and warned their children not to get involved. By 1937, the tamboo bamboo was officially banned in Trinidad and Tobago.

The tamboo bamboo represents an important step towards not only the development of the steel pan as an instrument, but also towards the musical traditions of the steel band as a kind of virtuosic counterpart to the calypso, and to popular song forms in general. The tamboo bamboo bands often served as accompaniments to calypsonians. In addition, the tamboo bamboo tradition established the practice of neighborhood-based bands, as a kind of community project. Since many tamboo bamboo bands in Port of Spain represented specific neighborhoods, they became both sources of pride in the neighborhood, and forces of “vigilantism,” due in part to actual violence and delinquency (tamboo bamboo bands often accompanied stick fighting matches), and in part to the public perception of the noise-making youth. Bands often gathered in a specific place, such as a vacant lot or yard, to build and maintain the bamboo and other instruments, and to practice. This was the precursor to the “panyard.”

As the tamboo bamboo became increasingly forbidden, the time was ripe for a new innovation to replace them. Since it had already become common to supplement the instruments with metal scraps, brake drums, and “tin pans,” musicians began to experiment with metal trashcans and biscuit pans as replacements to the main tamboo bamboo voices. These “voices” had become standardized to a certain extent: there were four main voices of tamboo bamboo instruments, from low to high as follows: Bass Bamboo, Chandlers, Cutters, and Foulé. They were not pitched, exactly, but they were of low or high quality. Similarly, as steel drums came into being, there were different “voices” of pans in use. For example, in the mid 1930s, the Bermudez biscuit pan, or “slap bass” as it was called, was the replacement for the bass bamboo. This transition from bamboo to steel during the 1930s saw a remarkable change in focus and innovation.

The presence of US military bases in Trinidad during World War Two, as well as the booming oil business that was beginning to flourish, established the presence of 55-gallon oil drums in Trinidad, which provided a new resource for pan. Before the use of the 55-gallon drum, however, the concept of a steel drum with actual pitches was being born. There are disagreements as to who was the first person to create a steel drum with actual pitched notes, but

Winson “Spree” Simon is often cited as the first person to create such a drum (Blake 1995). As he himself remembers it:

“...I found that the face of [my] drum was beaten in very badly and the particular tone or sound that I had was gone. I also (noticed) the concave appearance. I then started pounding the inside surface of the drum to restore it to its original shape. I was using a stone. While pounding on different points with varying strengths, I was surprised and shocked. I was able to get varying sounds or pitches. I then tried a piece of wood. The sounds or pitches were a little mellower. I was fascinated, I was able to get distinctly separate musical notes. Thereupon I was able to knock four notes out. I turned my knowledge over to the other members of the band and pan was born!” (Blake 1995, p. 60)

Once this innovation was established, there was no turning back. Pan builders began incorporating pitches into their instruments, and this eventually affected the kinds of music that could be played. As bands began trying to play actual tunes, for example, calypso songs, they began to realize that more and more notes would be needed. By trial and error, pans began being standardized, and eventually the smaller cans and tins were abandoned in favor of the 55-gallon oil drum, which was larger, had more room for more pitches, and were made of good quality steel, thus holding their tuning better. Since these drums were now found in abundance in Trinidad (though often they had to be stolen from American bases), they became the standard materials for the steel band.

The Intercultural Influences on Pan

Already we have seen that the steelband developed as a transition/replacement for the bamboo bands, both in terms of form and function. Bamboo itself was a transition/replacement for more traditional Orisha drumming ensembles. Both Orisha and kalimba rhythms were reproduced by the bamboo ensembles, which also became the basis for the rhythms produced in the steelband. But there were also other intercultural influences.

In addition to the Shango/Orisha background, the European military marching traditions were also an influence. Some of the early steel drums were named after marching percussion instruments, and played in a similar fashion. For example, the “kittle”, which was often the lead instrument in early pre-pitched steelbands, was named after the kettle drum, was hung around the neck, and was often played in a similar way. The “slap bass” Bermudez biscuit pan resembled the military bass drum, and was carried and played in a similar manner. And most obviously, the

practice of marching down the street in orderly rows, typical of both tamboo bamboo and steelbands, were reminiscent of a marching band parading the streets during Carnival and military observances.

Another influence on pan was the traditional music of the Indian *Hosay* festival, which is the Muslim observance of *Muharram*, which featured the Indian *tassa* drum ensemble. These ensembles employ a particular voice structure that was a direct influence on the tamboo bamboo, and the rhythms they employ are a combination of traditional materials, and rhythms influenced by the Trinidadian-African rhythms of Orisha and tamboo bamboo! So, in fact, the *tassa* drumming ensemble and the steelband directly influenced each other, and in certain parts of Port of Spain, it was common to see Trinidadians of African origin playing in *tassa* ensembles, and vice-versa.

As steelbands began developing instruments with pitch capability, entirely new areas of musical exploration were now open to pan. The period between 1940 and 1950 saw the solidification of the intimate relationship between pan and the calypso. Calypso, itself the result of a wide variety of intercultural influences, is the celebrated folk-song form of Trinidad that developed over many centuries. Calypso originated among the African slave population, and like the blues of North America, its subject matter often dealt with everyday subject matter including scandals, complaints about the conditions of slavery, love making and ruined virtue. In addition, calypso is also satirical, often concerned with witty criticisms and commentary. It is not possible to completely trace the roots of Calypso here, but its influence on pan, and vice versa, is of great interest here.

Calypso and pan are linked in many ways, and can almost be thought of as sibling artforms. They refer to each other constantly: while the pan arranger is creating a steelband arrangement of a popular calypso tune, the calypsonian is writing a tune in which the pan player is the subject. For example, the lyrics of the calypso “Pan in Danger” by Dennis Williams:

Steel pan-well let that be more than just a slogan
Give it your utmost attention
Or as “Black Stalin” say...we might wake up one day
And hear that steel band come from
In the United Kingdom

In fact, so much of calypso song repertory involves pan as the subject, that calypsonians have been called the” custodians and historians of the steel pan, recording the progress of pan in song.” (Blake 1995, p. 272) Calypso and pan share an affinity for virtuosity and competition,

which are both important parts of the tradition. At Carnival, calypso groups “invade” each others’ tent and sing a “declaration of war,” a challenge to engage in a competition of song, which involves improvising song lyrics and trying to tangle up your opponent (very similar to the MC battle tradition in hiphop). Steelbands also engage in competition and virtuosity, culminating every year in the annual panorama competition, in which rival bands compete for not only the best arrangement of a popular calypso (or soca), but the best performance. These performances involve dazzling displays of virtuosity, and usually feature bands with over 100 members.

The tradition of playing popular Carnival songs developed during the 1940s, and by the early 1950s, as the pan was becoming a kind of institution. Gaining more and more recognition as a serious artform, the bands began expanding their repertory to include other kinds of music, including other Caribbean popular songs, American popular music, and even arrangements of Western classical music. With the heightened sense of seriousness and accomplishment that came with such complicated arrangements, better sounding instruments, and larger ensembles, came international recognition and national pride. Pan became not only a novel symbol of innovation and creativity, it became a movement: a way of life. Thus, the steelband became the steel orchestra.

The Pan Superculture

Slobin describes three components of the superculture: industry, state, and ideology. To understand how the superculture of pan has developed, we will look at each of these domains to see how pan is represented within them.

Pan as a way of life, and as an institution, is implicitly so, due not only to the ambitions of individual musicians (the subculture), but to the hegemonic properties of government, industry, and ideology. We will see that the internal state of consciousness regarding pan has evolved dramatically, and the institutions of pan, both internal and external, have created a feedback loop that has produced both positive and negative effects.

As stated above, pan was not always seen as a positive force in the community, due to a history associated with violence, oppression, and poverty. Outside of the Afro-Trinidadian community, pan was seen as both a quaint curiosity, and a public nuisance. This is perhaps best

seen in the following passage, from a letter to the *Trinidadian Guardian* in 1946 by a citizen of San Fernando:

“Beating tins and pans today seems to be contagious. Unemployment is not the cause of it, for young people prefer the steel bands to good hard work...

So we must put up with the transformation of earth into bedlam, to the utter disgust of parents, students, tired workmen, troubled people, and invalids.

Can beating is pan beating in any language and in any form. It does nobody any good, and when it is indulged in all day all night day in and day out, it is abominable. Why is there no legislation to control it?” (Stuempfle 1995)

A Colonial governmental report in 1952 by the “Canon Farquhar Committee,” which was a committee set up by the government to look into the social significance of steelbands, had this to say:

“The steelband is essentially a creation of the masses with their poor housing, overcrowding, unemployment, large families and general lack of opportunity for recreation and cultural expression. It was as if in unconscious protest of these delimiting circumstances that underprivileged youths evolved a medium of self-expression which seems destined to make a distinctive contribution to the cultural life of the West Indies.

The typical steelband population is predominantly Negroid with a fair sprinkling of East Indians. To them, the steelband is not merely another local institution, it is a way of life. Its devotees have their peculiar mode of dress, manner of speech, style of walking and dancing, and though yet in rudimentary form, group codes and norms of their own.

However, this unique form of music-making was characterised by feuds between rival bands. These clashes were invariably instigated by and centered around the young women of ill repute who followed the bands. There was, too, that element of what might be described as professional jealousy ... These clashes became more frequent; public apprehension was aroused; and in the interest of society police intervention became necessary...”(Blake 1995, p. 87)

This report goes on to describe other incidents of violence, and while it does qualify its cautious statements by including positive remarks about the artistic contributions of pan, it is clear that the focus is on the acts of violence associated with the movement. Reports of men being thrown in jail for being members of a steelband abound, and in fact, in one incident reported in the *Trinidadian Guardian* in 1960, a man named Lawrence Smith was denied bail, being told by magistrate Camacho, “I have no sympathy for any steelbandsman; you will have no bail today.” (Blake 1995, p. 89).

From within the community, the steelband was seen as a bad influence on youth, and a general disruption of society. In an interview with writer Stephan Stuempfle in 1989, pannist Make Kinsale recalls what it was like in the 1940s:

“It was very rough. Because you had everybody against you. Your mother, your father, your bigger brother and your bigger sister...then the police and the public, too. You had to fight all these...in order to have this thing moving. Because, remember as I tell you, from the time you was a steelbandman, you becomes a robustman. Your neighbor see you talking to he daughter, that’s it...Because you was an outcast. But the determination we had, we used to choo [ignore]

all that. 'Call me what you want. Do what you want. But we like we pan.' And we had to beat that pan."(Stuempfle 1995, p. 67)

There were even calypsonians who, in the tradition of writing about pan, wrote songs about the violent activities of the steelband. From Lord Blakie's *Steelband Clash* of 1950:

"It was a bacchanal ah-ha! 1950 Carnival ah-ha
Fight for so with Invaders and Tokyo
And when the two bands clash, mamayo
If you see cutlass
Never me again to jump up in a steelband in Port-of-Spain
Invaders beating sweet coming down Park Street
Tokyo coming down beating very slow
And friends, when the two bands clash, mamayo
If you see cutlass
Never me again to jump up in a steelband in Port-of-Spain
Bottle start pelting, if you see sledge passing
Husband and wife, well, they start running for they life
An Indian man selling bread shout out
Lord, today ah dead!
Never me again to jump up in a steelband in Port-of-Spain" (Blake 1995, p. 91)

So, the perception of pan in the 1940s and 50s, both internally and externally, was mostly centered around the violence and delinquency of its members, and therefore created a kind of mystique in the community. Because, while the public was wary of the pan culture, it was also fascinated by its music, as illustrated in this statement from the *Trinidadian Guardian* in 1947: "...[the] infectious quality of steel band music caught revelers in its spell to make everyone join hands and dance and sing regardless of colour, class, or creed." (Stuempfle 1995, p. 55)

Despite the public backlash and suspicion, and encouraged by the simultaneous fascination and celebration of pan, the steelbands continued to flourish, and as their instruments and musical arrangements and compositions became more sophisticated, the movement began gaining recognition beyond the island of Trinidad. Articles such as an expose in the *London Times* in September of 1960 brought the steelband onto the international stage. This article, which included historical perspective, photographs, and extensive analysis, ended with the following statement: "Pan is the core of a national culture and the first expression of a truly West Indian art-form." (Seeger 1964). Fascination of the music, particularly in Great Britain, led to bands being invited to play in prestigious concerts in other parts of the Caribbean, Europe, and the United States. The steelband TAPSO (Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra) was invited to play in the Savoy Hotel in London in the early 1950s, followed by a brief tour of Paris. Numerous recordings of steelband music began to be produced, particularly the recordings

compiled by Emory Cook of the Stamford, Connecticut-based label Sound of Our Times, the first of which was produced in 1955. Between the years of 1955 and 1962, over 37 recordings were produced featuring pan-related music by this label alone (Thomas 1992). This international exposure was to prove crucial in reorienting the national superculture of pan in Trinidad, as well as the pan subculture itself.

Among the most positive internal and institutional forces that both led to and benefited from this international exposure was the establishment of the Trinidad and Tobago Steel Band Association (TTSBA). This organization, formed in April of 1950, was an institutional attempt by the members of over 18 steelbands to change the public perception of pan, to gain legitimacy in society, and to establish internal control over their own affairs. The organization stemmed from a meeting a month earlier in which the steelbands tried to reconcile among themselves the problem of steelband rivalry, as well as protecting themselves from being taken advantage of by outside interests. It was this organization that led to the establishment of the steelband TAPSO, and to negotiating the invitation to represent Trinidad at the Festival of Britain in 1951. TTSBA, now known as Pan Trinbago, is still active today.

With a change in image came the establishment of steelbands by middle-class youths in Trinidad, as well as the bands being formed outside of Trinidad. There were steelbands established in Bermuda, Barbados, Jamaica, and in Puerto Rico there was even a Shriners Club steelband, who released their own recording in 1964. In the late 1950s, Admiral Danial V. Gallery of the US Navy, who was stationed at a Naval Base in Puerto Rico, fell in love with the sound of steel drums. He ordered his Navy band to Trinidad for a week, bought a set of drums, and established Admiral Dan's Pandemoniacs. His steelband was a hit, and they eventually traveled to New York and Chicago, and made television appearances (Seeger 1964). Throughout the 60s, steelbands were formed in England, the United States, and Canada, and by the 1970s steelbands were being used in educational environments. Today, many schools and colleges in the United States and elsewhere have steelband programs, and in 1994, Trinidad and Tabago's Ministry of Education announced a pilot program to introduce pan into primary schools (Blake 1995, p. 300).

One final industrial force of note that might be mentioned here is the practice of sponsorship. During the 1960s, some steelbands were given opportunities to increase their exposure through performances and recordings by way of corporate sponsorship. As is often the

case, corporate sponsorship had both positive and negative effects on the steelbands. This, of course, involved large corporations (usually banks, airlines, and oil companies) giving bands money in exchange for advertising their brand or name. Often this meant that a band had to change their name from, for example, the Desperadoes to the Coca Cola Desperadoes. For some bands, this allowed them more resources to make better instruments, pay small stipends to arrangers and tuners, and provide travel expenses for performances, as well as the production of recordings. This had positive effects throughout the movement, since now resources were made available for further innovation. It had negative effects too, since often bands were no longer in direct control of their affairs. Some pannists refused to be involved, as they felt that sponsors were exploiting the movement.

These are just a few of the institutional, industrial, and ideological landscapes that have shaped the development of pan. Clearly these forces have had a profound impact not only on the instruments and the music, but on mainstream perception. Pan now enjoys a sense of national pride and identity, and has spread to other pan communities outside of Trinidad as well, creating a complicated, international superculture of pan.

A Pan Subculture

There are, of course, many pan subcultures, both inside of Trinidad and outside. In Slobin's discussion of subculture, he reminds us that the unit of measure, ranging from the individual, to a small group, or family, or neighborhood, is not a measure of the whole, even though it is tempting to think of it as such. For example, he states, "we interview musicians as star cultural performers, look at bands as small groups carrying styles, and tend to jump from these microworlds to the 'group' as a whole." (Slobin 1993, p. 37). But this is a mistake, since the smaller units of any musical tradition or practice are unique. Throughout this paper I have described the development of a pan "movement;" a superculture of industry, institution, and ideology, which has been shaped through a diaspora of intercultural forces both inside and outside of the nation of Trinidad. But the individual subcultures of pan cannot be summarized. They are individual groupings of their own, consisting of members who make their own choices, have their own affinities, and cultivate their own sense of belonging.

But as a cohesive, subcultural unit, the traditional steelband in Trinidad does have commonalities that are worth discussing. Steelbands have evolved into fairly specific organization units, and have also developed into an important forces in the community. In Port of Spain, many steelbands are connected to specific neighborhoods, and recruit players from within their community. The “panyard,” discussed earlier, is usually a specific place in the neighborhood, such as a vacant lot, a community center, or perhaps a member’s backyard. It is here that the members of the steelband rehearse, where the tuner maintains the drums, and where the instruments are usually stored. It is also a place that often welcomes anyone from the community to come and “lime,” or hang out while the band is playing. It is not unusual to enter a panyard and see a group of people drinking gin, playing cards, having conversations, beating the drums.

Steelbands always have a *captain*, the leader of the group. This person is responsible for choosing arrangements, assigning players, dealing with day-to-day operations of the band, sometimes with the assistance of a public-relations person, who is usually another member of the group. Steelbands also have an *arranger*, who is often considered the most important asset to a band, since the arranger is the person who not only writes the steel band arrangements for Panorama and Carnival, but also teaches each of the players their parts, since most steelband players do not read music. The arranger teaches all of the steel drum voices their parts by rote. Some steelbands also have their own tuner/builder, who keeps existing instruments in tune, and builds new ones as needed. This person is highly skilled, and often very highly regarded, as it is well-known that it takes years to become a competent steel pan tuner. Most steelbands have a core group of players, and a larger body (100 or more) who come together for the larger performances, such as the Panorama competition or for Carnival. The core group (8 to 20 individuals), however, often play throughout the year at smaller functions, concerts, community events, rallies, etc.

The neighborhood or community that is associated with a given steelband are often extremely loyal to the group, as is clear at competitions where they may show up in droves to cheer the band on, much like a sporting event. Neighborhood community events such as cookouts or parties will often include performances by the steelband that represents that community.

Beyond Trinidad, steelband subcultures have developed in many other places, and have retained similar organization units as well as connections to their communities. There is a thriving pan community in Brooklyn, particularly in the Flatbush and Crown Heights neighborhoods; perhaps the largest concentration of neighborhood-based bands and panyards outside of Port of Spain. Brooklyn has its own annual Carnival tradition on Labor Day weekend, and has its own Panorama festival which usually consists of 10 to 15 bands, each with 80-100 members. Many of the bands have extensive rehearsals throughout the summer in panyards that can be visited by people in the community. There are also a large number of University-based steelbands in the United States, particularly in the Midwestern states of Ohio and Indiana. Some of these college-based bands maintain a relationship with the student body that is similar to that of the neighborhood steelband, securing a large, loyal fan-base. In my own experience at Miami University of Ohio, the Glee Club regularly packed the over-800-seat concert hall for their concerts, and were extremely popular on campus. The only musical group to surpass the Glee Club in popularity was the Miami University Steel Band.

Beyond these similarities in steelband organization and community positioning, it is better to save further discussions of a given steelband subculture for a dedicated study of a particular group of people in a particular place. In 1997 I had the opportunity to do just that, completing field work and research on an individual steelband in Baltimore called the Baltimore T&T Steelband.⁴ This rewarding investigation gave me a small glimpse of a particular group in a troubled Baltimore neighborhood, founded over 30 years ago by a Trinidadian man and revitalized by his eager son. In this study I was able to witness this small subculture of music in action in their neighborhood panyard, in community functions, and in concert performances, and I participated in rewarding discussions with individual group members, hearing about their perspective of pan, their dreams, aspirations, and deep affinities about the music. While there were certainly strands evident of aesthetic and ideological values that are common in the pan superculture, there were valuable individual perspectives gained here, and these are the point in any study of an individual musical subculture.

Conclusion

⁴ This work was presented at the Middle-Atlantic Chapter of the Society of Ethnomusicology Annual Meeting, SUNY Stonybrook on Feb. 22, 1997, and is summarized in the unpublished paper "Pan Life": Transformation in Trinidadian-American Steelband Culture (1997).

In closing, I suggest that pan as an international movement is an example of one of the most fascinating developments of a national art-form as a grassroots phenomenon and an intercultural diaspora. It is a music in which an oppressed group found their voice, and maintained it through remarkable invention and persistence. Through its perpetual insistence, it transformed itself from a suspicious activity of juvenilia into a positive communal force, a platform for education, and a celebrated vehicle of musical intensity, virtuosity, and passion. And while there is no doubt that a study of pan is a worthwhile endeavor, it is no match for the experience of attending a performance of a steelband Panorama tune, outside, with over 100 musicians on the stage, largely untrained by Western classical standards, performing on beautifully strange instruments made from trashcans, in unison, creating a sound unlike anything you've ever heard.

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