TRINIDADIAN STEEL DRUM (PAN) BANDS IN THREE GREAT LAKES STATES: A STUDY OF MUSICAL MIGRATION

by

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Call me what you want.

Do what you want.

But we like we pan.

And we had to beat that pan.

—Mack Kinsale
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Question

With such rich cultural, musical, and emotional ties to its homeland, it is hard to imagine steel drums, commonly referred to as pan, finding a solid home on foreign soil. However, pan has made a home in the American Midwest, a region with relatively few Trinidadian immigrants. Steel drums and steel bands are found broadly across the Midwest in public schools systems, colleges, and universities. They perform in small combo groups, joining with a variety of non-pan groups and ensembles, on movie soundtracks, television soundtracks, and commercials. Not every Midwesterner has seen or even heard a steel drum, but that does not lessen its contributions to our culture, society, and its citizens.

I seek to explore the question “What is the attraction of pan in the Midwest?” Steel drums and steel bands are synonymous with Trinidad and Tobago, a two island nation little known to the average Midwesterner. Pans were invented by Trinidadian street youths as a mode of self-expression, which created avenues for founding cultural traditions through music performance and interaction with one another. Initially, pan came to exist in the Midwest primarily through circumstances lacking considerable direct historical or cultural ties. There was a desire to replicate the pan experience in American communities as a result of individuals who had heard pan on vacation in the Caribbean, as well as Trinidadian steel bands, the U.S. Navy Steel Band, and solo pannists touring the United States.

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1 The term “pan” is more common in Trinidad, while “steel drum” is more common in the United States.

2 In this thesis I will specifically refer to the island Trinidad and not to the island of Tobago because Trinidad holds the most historical significance to pan. Trinidad and Tobago is located in the West Indies.
With the organization of steel bands in the Midwest in the early 1970s, many individuals with little or no knowledge of their history, traditions, or capabilities began directing ensembles. They had little, if any, access to written musical arrangements or recordings, and instruments were extremely difficult to obtain. What was the driving force behind these pan pioneers who had no traditional, historical, or cultural attachment to these instruments? The Midwestern United States is commonly called America’s heartland, and its citizens have been described as conservative, naïve, wholesome, and “American” in comparison to other areas of the United States. At the same time, it was a Midwestern university, Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, which offered the first course-accredited steel band program. What circumstances allowed this non-native ensemble and its music, to infiltrate the American heartland? By answering these questions I hope to stimulate further thought and discussion about Midwestern and American societies.

My study will emphasize the impact pan has had on the Midwestern United States, attempting to explain why people are drawn to these instruments and its music. I have limited my study to the Midwest due to the geographic immensity of the United States and time considerations. Therefore, the overall notion is not to make the Midwest exclusive, but rather representative, to a limited extent, of what has been occurring throughout the United States within the culture of pan. This thesis will not focus on how the steel band art form in the Midwest is similar or different in relation to other regions of the United States. Rather, it is a discussion on pan infiltrating the Midwest in various ways, why it has become established here, and what the significance of this is.

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Method

For this thesis, I focus on three case studies. I have selected Mott Community College in Flint, Michigan, Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois, and Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio. Because the pan movement in the United States is relatively young, I have been able to interview individuals who lived through the movement in the United States, and specifically the Midwest. I included interviews of different steel band directors, musicians, educators, and craftsmen to discover and comprehend their various points of view. These selections are based on my desire to find programs representative of different origins, membership, and direction but which are still similar enough to compare. The program at Mott Community College is ten years old and strongly community based, while the program at Northern Illinois University is thirty years old. This is the oldest program in the United States, and the only place in the country where one can earn a degree with a concentration in pan. The program at Oberlin College is twenty years old and run entirely by students.

For these case studies, I have traveled to each campus to interview leaders, members selected at random, and administrators affiliated with each program, as well as distributed written surveys to all steel band members. At Mott Community College this included Director James Coviak, selected students, and Chery Wagonlander, Principal of the Middle College. At Northern Illinois University this included Directors Dr. G. Allan O’Connor, Cliff Alexis, and Liam Teague, selected students, and Dr. Paul Bauer, Director of the School of Music. At Oberlin College this included Student Director Patia Maule, and selected students. I intend to use these three case studies along with personal interviews with other pan ensemble directors, musicians, and educators, to discover and comprehend their various points of view.

My research will include an examination of the admittedly limited applicable literature. In my conclusion I will take a reflexive approach as I synthesize insights on my resources, both textual and personal, to better comprehend how and why pan has put down roots in the Midwestern United States.
Personal Experience

I began playing drums at the age of ten and was first exposed to steel drums when I entered my undergraduate studies in the fall of 1995 at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. The Miami University Steel Band (MUSB) was founded in the spring of 1994 with ten members. By the time I arrived at Miami two years later, the 1995/1996 percussion department had two steel bands with a total of thirty-one enrolled personnel. They had recorded two live CDs, and the band played two concerts annually along with performing a variety of professional engagements outside the university. The 2002/2003 MUSB played two sold-out concerts in the fall and two more in the spring. The band has also released another live CD and two professionally recorded CDs produced by Pan Ramajay Productions. Over the past three years combined student enrollment of both ensembles has remained fairly consistent with approximately fifty students per year. The MUSB is now one of the most active performing ensembles in Southwest Ohio, performing nearly forty off-campus programs per year, ranging from educational school programs to feature concert appearances. The number of instruments owned by the ensemble has nearly tripled since its inception.

It became obvious to me during my time at Miami that a wide variety of people are interested in pan. The membership of the ensemble is as varied as its audience making it representative of the Miami community. Not only do the musicians have an enjoyable and enriching experience, but audience members are also receptive to the quality of the performance. The program at Miami is led by Dr. Chris Tanner, who seeks to educate both students and audience members on the history of pan and its versatile playing styles. Dr. Tanner teaches that pan music is not limited to calypsos and socas but also includes jazz, Latin, Brazilian, pop, rap, and western art music.
Review of Literature

Written resources reveal very little, and most of the articles and publications that I have found fall into one of these three categories:

1. Primarily pertaining to the history of the steel drum and steel bands, and its relationship to Trinidadian culture and individuals.


3. The articles in *Percussive Notes* published by the Percussive Arts Society, which often deals with matters relating to the performance, arrangement, educational tactics, or building of instruments.

Of these three I found the articles in *Percussive Notes* to be the most helpful because they included verbatim interviews with pan pioneers in the United States.

By way of these published interviews, along with interviews that I have conducted, I have formulated a history of pan in the Midwestern United States. However, I have found few publications directly regarding my research. A fairly large portion of the history of pan in Trinidad, the United States, and the Midwest has been captured through oral history. As a result, much of my research is based on first hand accounts, interviews, and information from individuals who are appropriately considered primary sources.
A 1981 survey of steel bands in North America revealed there were six collegiate and six high school ensembles in existence. Of these, five of the collegiate bands and four of the high school programs were in the Midwest. These numbers seem to be a fairly accurate, yet debatable, set of figures because the spring 1990 publication of Percussive Notes includes two groups that would have been founded prior to 1981, but not included in the original survey. Regardless, the 1990 publication of Percussive Notes shows thirty-eight college, twenty-one high school, and sixteen elementary steel band programs, along with sixty-six steel bands classified as “other”, twenty-six builders and tuners (instrument crafters), and three pan outfitters (suppliers of sticks, stands, mallet parts, etc.) in the United States. The incidence of steel band in the United States had grown exponentially. The 2003 estimates list about three hundred steel bands and thirty-six builders and tuners in the USA.

The presence of pan is not concentrated in one region, but widespread throughout the US. This does not infer that there are not cultural and musical “hot spots”. For example there is a large West Indian population in Brooklyn, New York, which gives rise to a carnival celebration that occurs every Labor Day weekend. This event simulates the Trinidadian carnival preceding Lent, including a Panorama competition, which features complex steel band arrangements generally based on current calypsos. For the most part, the spread of pan is fairly even throughout the United States. In contrast, most other non-American ensembles are heavily centered on a population culturally tied to that specific music. In the spring of 2003 there were a total of one hundred thirty-four Taiko groups in the USA. Eighty-three of these groups were located on the west coast and Hawaii, and only eleven in the Midwest. Another example is the Indonesian gamelan. In the spring of 2003, there were a total of ninety-five gamelan

5 Al O’Connor, 58-59.
7 Ibid.
groups in the USA, with thirty-five of those being in on the west coast and Hawaii, and eleven being in the Midwest. No other foreign ensemble has established itself more evenly as pan, especially considering the lack of West Indian immigrants in most of these areas. As young pan students enroll in universities, many desire further instruction and involvement in steel ensembles for future pan careers and recreation. Increased interest in quality pan playing in Ohio has secured a place for pan solo and ensemble pieces on the list for high school Ohio Music Educators Association competitions.

Although a greater part of the presence of pan is concentrated around some type of academic program, there are also many professional musicians in the United States, both native born and immigrants, who make their living by performing pan. The most well-known American pannist today is Andy Narell who has played pan for the soundtracks Another 48 Hours, Bird on a Wire, Miami Blues, I Love You to Death, Dad, Once Around, Moon Over Parador, Cocoon, Commando, and Trading Places. There is literature written in the United States on how to start a steel band, how to write and arrange for a steel band, on building and tuning techniques, and educational and pedagogical techniques for pan. There is also a growing demand for commercial steel band compositions and arrangements. Pan has become so deeply rooted into American society that there is a sound patch for pan most electronic keyboards sold in the USA, and the hit song “P.I.M.P” by rapper 50 Cent includes a pan sample throughout the entire song. Pan has been used in McDonald’s commercials as well as television shows like Sesame Street and Reading Rainbow and Police Academy Five: Miami Beach. A number of university percussion programs have pan as a serious part of their curriculum. For example, retiring director of NIU Allan O’Connor has been instrumental in promoting cross cultural exchange of the practice and theory of pan between the US and Trinidad. He has received seven grants from the US National Endowment for the Arts for pan, arranged Aaron Copland’s Appalachian Spring for the “Our Boys Steel Orchestra” from Tobago, and judged the international “Pan is Beautiful VI” festival in Trinidad. He established a bachelor and masters

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12 Ibid. Pg.15.
curriculum in 1987 at NIU with pan as the focus instrument, and since then brought many Trinidadian students to NIU for formal pan education.

Let us also consider that pan, like European Classical music, did not originate in the United States, but its presence serves as evidence of its musical foundation and evolution in our society. While pan originated in Trinidad, it has become established enough in American culture to become a self-sustaining entity. It thrives and functions in our country without a constant, direct connection with Trinidad.

What is the attraction of pan in the Midwest? What circumstances permitted Trinidadian steel drums to penetrate and occupy the American heartland? Since the early 1970s, steel band activity has escalated throughout the Midwest by way of academic programs, instrument crafters, performance artists, composers, and arrangers. These activities are not exclusive to the Midwest, but are widespread across the United States where steel drums are also found in television shows, commercials, and popular music. Much of the history and accomplishments of pan in the Midwest and the United States has not been formally recorded, requiring that my research rely heavily on personal interviews and observations. In the following chapters I will present both historical and present-day considerations in Midwestern pan. Chapter two focuses on the historical accounts of pan and is divided into three parts: the history of pan in Trinidad and Tobago, the arrival of pan in the United States, and the spread of pan to the Midwest. Chapters three through five concentrate on my case studies at Mott Community College, Northern Illinois University, and Oberlin College. Chapter six amalgamates all previously presented material to consider and puts forth conclusions of what has brought pan to the Midwestern United States.
CHAPTER TWO

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF PAN:
TRINIDAD, THE UNITED STATES, AND THE MIDWEST

A Brief History of Pan in Trinidad and Tobago
Columbus claimed Trinidad for Spain on his third voyage in 1498, but the island was culturally and economically neglected by its Spanish colonizers until the end of the 1780s, when French planters arrived and brought with them a substantial African slave population. French plantation owners moved to the colony for two reasons: some fled the revolution in Haiti led by Toussaint L’Ouverture, while others relocated from other islands in the Caribbean such as Guadalupe and Grenada. The British gained control of Trinidad in 1797. Slavery was abolished in the West Indies and Trinidad in the 1830s. After emancipation, the British acquired cheap labor through the indentured servitude of Asian Indians and Chinese.

Africans and their descendants continued to engage in their own musical traditions such as the use of skin drums. Music was also created by chantwells (people that sang songs of defiance accompanied by drumming), accompanied kalenda (stick fighting accompanied by drumming and singing), and was an integral part of canboulay (sugar cane harvest reenactment), a cultural practice popular during Carnival.
In 1883 the British outlawed skin drums fearing that the Africans were using them to communicate with one another, speculating that this would lead to slave insurrection.\(^7\)

After the British banned skin drums, the Africans sought a new medium through which to express their musical heritage. They ventured into the forests and returned with pieces of the island’s abundant bamboo crop. They cut bamboo to various lengths and dimensions to produce different tones when struck with sticks or pounded them on the ground. Common bamboo instruments of that time were known as the boom (bass), fuller (foul), chandler, and cutter.\(^8\) Each size typically played a different rhythmic part, accompanied by bottle and spoon to keep time. Neighborhood bands of bamboo players formed and became known as Tamboo-Bamboo bands. The term Tamboo is generally believed to be a corruption of the French word “tambour,” meaning drum.\(^9\) Unlike skin drums, Tamboo-Bamboo instruments were mobile, but this mobility proved to be dangerous. Rivalries ensued and bands became territorial. When one band encountered another in the street, they fought each other using their bamboo instruments as weapons, quarreling over territory, women, and ethnic differences between their groups.

Tamboo-Bamboo bands were prominent from the 1920s to the mid-1930s. In the mid-1930s the government became displeased with the Tamboo-Bamboo bands for two reasons: the dangerous fighting between bands, and excessive removal of bamboo from forests was leading to environmental damage. Although much remains unclear, some people claim that the government banned Tamboo-Bamboo bands.\(^10\) Others assert that the Tamboo-Bamboo groups were never officially outlawed but simply faded away.\(^11\) Either way, Tamboo-Bamboo bands lost favor. As Stephen Stuempfle shows in his book, *The


\(^9\) Jeannine Remy, “The Steel Drum in Trinidad and Tobago: An Overview.” 72.


\(^11\) Ibid.
Steelband Movement, metallic instruments probably began to infiltrate Tamboo-Bamboo around the 1910s. By the 1930s many of these bands contained metallic instruments; the more subtle timbre of the bamboo could not compete with the piercing dissonance of the metal containers. Street bands, whose membership at that time included many gang members, turned to discarded pieces of trash on which to beat their rhythms. Various pieces of metal, such as biscuit-tins, dust bins, trash cans, pots and pans, caustic soda drums, zinc buckets, garbage cans, and paint tins were used as instruments. Many Tamboo-Bamboo bands led directly into these early “steelbands.”

The Steel Band Takes Form

Elliot “Ellie” Mannette, widely considered to be “The Father of the Modern Steel Drum,” provides this account of Trinidadian bands of this time:

When Carnival came around in 1935, the boys wanted to play. An(d) they had no skin drums to parade with; they had no bamboo to parade with. So one gentleman by the name of Alexander Ford went around and started gathering garbage cans prior to the celebration. The other groups thought that he couldn’t do it and that it wasn’t going to work. They would still take the chance of being arrested and go back out into the streets with bamboo. But Ford brought out a band of entire steel: garage can tops, grease barrels, biscuit drums, paint tins—whatever he could find—they all saw Ford with his steel band, going through the streets, sounding much louder than the bamboo joints. So the next year, everybody came out with the steel.

Many consider Ford’s band, known as “Alexander’s Ragtime Band” the first “steel band.” “Steel bands” of this period were essentially rhythmic music ensembles and lacked melodic or harmonic


12 Ibid. 162.


content. The folklore surrounding “Alexander’s Ragtime Band” maintains that one of its young members named Mando first produced a melodic tone from a pan. However, because no one kept official records on pan, folkloric accounts vary and conflict as to when metallic instruments were first played melodically.

“The Gonzales Place Bamboo Band” also claims the first use of a steel container as a melodic instrument; they claim that it happened quite spontaneously. “They were playing in the Lime Grove, or, according to some versions, in the yard belonging to the aunt of their famous bass bamboo player Mussel-Rat, when the latter’s instrument burst.” He filled the resulting gap in the rhythm by striking the empty gas tank of an old motor chassis lying nearby. The pitch produced intrigued him, and he continued playing it through the session. The most widely accepted claimant as the first “panman” was Winston “Spree” Simon, a well known kettle drum (a type of pre-melodic pan) player in the John John band. The story is that around the middle of 1939 he lent his instrument to a muscular friend named Wilson “Thick Lip” Bartholomew. “When it was returned, Simon found that the surface had been so vigorously beaten out of shape that the original tone was lost. He tried pounding it back using a stone, and found that while doing so he was getting different musical pitches. This experiment was eagerly taken up and developed by the remainder of the band.” The biscuit tin has been called the first true pan, with Simon claiming to be a prominent innovator. Simon said, “I don’t know who first said let us beat pan in place of bamboo.” He produced what he referred to as an eight-note Melody Pan, forerunner to the instrument initially known as the Ping-Pong and later called the Lead or Tenor pan, early in 1940. After Simon’s apparent discovery of the ability of steel to hold pitch, word spread rapidly, and people began experimenting all over the island. During the early 1940s instruments with names

16 Ibid.
17 Ibid. pg. 32–33.
18 Ibid. 55.
19 Ibid. Simon experimented with tins produced by the Rising Sun Biscuit Company on Duncan Street.
20 Allan O’Conner, “Pan: Heartbeat of a Nation.” *Percussive Notes*, 55.
21 Shannon Dudley, *Carnival Music in Trinidad*, 56. Ping Pong is an onomatopoetic name.
like cuff boom or slap bass, tenor kittle or side kittle, and bass kittle or dud-up became the forerunners of the instruments later known as tune boom, balay (bay-lay), grumbler, and ping-pong of the late 1940s.\(^{22}\)

As the trend was towards newer, louder, and more musical sounds, instrument construction slowly progressed through various drum sizes, starting with smaller 35-gallon drums, and eventually moving to the 55-gallon drums used today. Early melodic pans could also be played while walking up and down the streets by attaching a strap and hanging the pan from the neck in a style that also came to be known as “pan-around-the-neck.”\(^{23}\) When carnival was banned during World War II, musicians had more time to experiment in creating new instruments.\(^{24}\)

The move from the early, primarily rhythmic “steel drums” and “steel bands” to the melodic pans of today resulted from the efforts of several individuals and innovators. Elliot “Ellie” Mannette set several standards for today’s modern pan. In 1941, Mannette reversed the building process of pans to sink the bowl in a concave fashion, rather than convex, and in 1946 he built a pan out of a 55-gallon barrel,\(^{25}\) which is still the standard today. He also implemented the ball peen hammer as the primary building and tuning tool of pans, wrapped the first pair of sticks with rubber, and designed of the note layout of many of today’s pans, including the Invader lead, double seconds and triple guitar/cello. Anthony Williams established the fourth/fifth lead pan design, a design laid out in the circle of fourths or fifths. Bertie Marshall designed the double tenor pans and pioneered the use of fundamentals and partials in the tuning process. In the 1970s Rudolph Charles extended the bass pans from six barrels to nine, and then twelve barrels, to extend its range. Charles also invented the quadraphonic pans, started putting chrome finish on pans, and put pans on wheels and under canopies to increase mobility and protection.\(^{26}\)

\(^{22}\) Stephen Stuempfle, _The Steelband Movement_, 38-42.


\(^{24}\) Shannon Dudley, _Carnival Music in Trinidad_, 46.

\(^{25}\) Gary Gibson, “Ellie Mannette on the Beginnings of Pan in Trinidad.” _Percussive Notes_, 36. With the arrival of World War II, the United States had a naval base on Trinidad. The heavy machinery used, especially the airplanes, needed fuel and Trinidad has a large natural resource of oil. Trinidad’s oil industry, combined with presence of the US naval base, made 55-gallon oil drums abundant on the island. As the oil steel drums became so abundant that they began to be discarded, biscuit-tin players began switching to the larger steel drums as instruments, moving from 35-gallon to 55-gallon barrels over time.
When WWII ended in 1945, Trinidadians celebrated and took to the streets with their new instruments, forming bands all over the island. Many took their names from “war time” themes and American movies: Destination Tokyo, Casablanca, Rising Sun, Invaders, Tripoli, Bar 20, Red Army, Desperadoes. The quick development of bands allowed for the invitation of steels bands to play at the Festival of Britain held in London in 1951.27 That year, the Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra (TASPO) formed. The eleven members of TASPO came from several bands around the island to create an all-star team organized and led by Lieutenant Griffith, conductor of a police brass band. Lieutenant Griffith had two concerns: that the pans were tuned to concert pitch and be fully chromatic in their tuning. Up to this time most pieces of music played on steel drums required only three to four chords in two or three keys. Adapting Western art music, known as “the classics,” to pan interested both Griffith and Mannette. This helped expand the range of steel drums. As Mannette heard pitches not on his instrument, he threw out the old one and built a new one with the missing pitch. Mannette spent enormous amounts of time listening to music and adding notes to his pan, eventually leading to a fully chromatic pan. Instruments such as the second pan were redesigned, while the tenor boom and a new bass instrument were created. Tonal quality became more uniform, and for the first time it was possible to arrange music using complete and correct chordal structure set to concert pitch. TASPO, well received throughout Europe, spent about a year in London and Paris, and returned home in 1952.28

At this time of rapid steel pan development, band members in Trinidad were still often engaged in gang violence and were regarded as social outcasts by the upper and middle class elite. The success of TASPO overseas helped improve their image. At the inception of the Carnival Development Committee (CDC) in 1956, the government and CDC members organized steel band involvement with carnival

27 Stephen Stuempfle, The Steelband Movement, 94.
28 Ibid, 95.
and established the Panorama competition.\textsuperscript{29} After Trinidad became independent of Britain in 1962, the government moved to further develop the image of pan. The government and private corporations sponsored bands.\textsuperscript{30} Over time panmen came to be viewed as cultural ambassadors, and today pan is recognized as their national instrument. War on the streets morphed into musical war on stage. Financial rewards, fame, overseas trips, and musical engagements at home enticed bands to follow new rules and regulations.

Modern Steel Bands and Standard Instrumentation
Still made from 55-gallon oil drums, crafters build and tune steel drums with ball peen hammers. The term “building” refers to the first time an oil drum or barrel gets crafted into a musical steel drum. “Tuning,” or “blending” the shaping of the metal notes into their ideal melodic state, occurs both in the building process and any time afterwards when the instrument needs a “tune up.” Layout of the notes, instrument ranges, and other details is dependent specifically upon the builder. Although every steel band does not have the same instrumentation, I will discuss the instrumentation that is common in most American steel bands.

Beginning with the highest and ending with the lowest pitched instrument most bands have a lead pan (also known as the tenor or soprano pan), double tenors, double seconds, guitars, cellos, quadrophonic, tenor bass, and bass. A steel band, also referred to as a steel orchestra, usually has an “engine room,” a group of rhythmic percussive instruments such as a drum set, congas, cowbells, shakers, scratchers, and brake drum, all functioning to keep the band together and driving forward. The automobile brake drum, known as the “iron,” is particularly special to the steel band as it harkens back to the origin of bands started by street youths, playing on various types of discarded metal objects.

Over time and with experimentation street youths created steel drums and organized steel bands, seeking ways to express themselves and interact with one another. “It was born out of deprivation; a desperate need by a people to fill the void that was left when something central to their existence

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid. 120.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid. 95.
The pinnacle performance for many of these bands in Trinidad is the Panorama competition, part of the national carnival celebration. Pan contributes immensely to the carnival celebration in Trinidad. The Panoramas, played with very intense tempo and energy, contain rich rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic complexity. Winners are highly revered and are comparable to the team that wins the Super Bowl in the United States. This title not only gives great pride to the band who earns it, but the competition itself gives pride to all Trinidadians, as it showcases the steel drum, a unique invention and national treasure.

The Arrival of Pan in the United States

The arrival and spread of pan in the United States arose from a handful of seeds. Rudolph Carter, better known as Rudy King or sometimes “Rock,” most likely introduced steel pan to the United States from Trinidad. In 1949 he came to New York City as a knowledgeable pan builder, tuner, and performer. King first performed for food and drink, and eventually for fees around twenty-five dollars. His individual contribution to the expansion of pan in the United States reached the Midwest when producer Sam Manning invited him to play at the Blue Angels club in Chicago for a four week engagement. Because of the success of the four week booking, his engagement extended to four months. During this time, King formed a group known as the Trinidad Steelband that continued entertaining throughout the country. He also achieved significant milestones by competing and performing at Harlem’s Apollo theatre, performing at Columbia University, and touring Texas, Oklahoma, the Carolinas, and Canada. By the 1960s his steel orchestra consisted of approximately twenty players who decided at that time to change their name from the Trinidad Steelband to the Tropicans. Today the band goes by Moods Pan

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32On November 21st, 2002, City Lore, a non-profit organization inducted Rudy King into their People’s Hall of Fame for his 1949 introduction of the steel pan.
33Kaethe George, “Interview with Ellie Mannette,” Percussive Notes, 28, no. 3 (1990): 34.
Groove. This group won both the first and second annual Panorama competitions held behind the Brooklyn Museum in New York, beating six to seven other steel bands.\footnote{When Steel Talks, “Rudy King - the man who brought the Steel Pan to America,” http://www.basementrecordings.com/news/cparticles/rdykg.htm.}

The United States Navy Steel Band

The United States Navy also influenced the development of pan both in Trinidad and the United States. In 1941 the United States signed a 99-year lease agreement with Britain for a large tract of land in Chaguaramas,\footnote{Franz Grissom, “Navy Steel Band: The Early Years,” \textit{U.S. Navy Music Program Publication} 14 (2000): 10.} on the north-west point of Trinidad. During World War II the United States Navy used the land for a military base. Ships brought gasoline and lubricating oil for U.S. military aircrafts on the base. They stored the gas and oil in 55-gallon oil barrels, and by the 1950s thousands of empty barrels were stored in giant stacks. Many of the barrels used to make early drums came from the Chaguaramas Navy base. Puerto Rico also had a U.S. Navy Base where members of the Navy Band were stationed. A 1956 inspection tour of military bases in the Caribbean supervised by Admiral Dan Gallery\footnote{“Admiral Dan” Gallery (Admiral D.V. Gallery) was the man who introduced Little League baseball to Puerto Rico. He also fostered a friendship with Harry Belafonte.} took place on Trinidad during Carnival. He was “shook up” by the music, and when he returned to Puerto Rico he asked his bandmaster, Chief Musician Charlie Roeper, if they could reproduce steel band music on their base. Roeper said he did not think it probable, but in spring 1956 Roeper, and his men went to Trinidad to learn pan.

The Navy Band stayed on the Chaguaramas base while on their learning trip, but spent most of the day lounging in Ellie Mannette’s backyard. Mannette built the first pans for the band, and in exchange received barrels from the U.S. Navy Base. Mannette and his band, the Esso Steel Band,\footnote{Sponsored by the Esso Oil Company. Many steel bands became sponsored by corporations by the 1960s, which provided bands with money, but sometimes organizational and behavioral restrictions as well.} gave the Navy Steel Band their first lessons. Ellie was a generous host to the Navy panmen and traveled to Puerto Rico on several occasions to build instruments and teach. After a few months, the Navy band played engagements with a repertory that included Trinidadian and American popular songs, Western art music, American “standards”, and traditional Puerto Rican, South American, and Caribbean songs. Some
patriotic favorites, such as “Stars and Stripes,” were arranged in various Caribbean styles, including meringues, calypsos, and cha-cha-chás. Within a year the band learned enough tunes to record their first album, *Pandemonia*, and had played for thousands at the 1957 World Fair in Brussels, Belgium.

“The Navy Steel Band’s major contribution in the early years was through notable television appearances (Ed Sullivan Show, Bob Hope Show, Today Show) and performances at many major military bases attended by both military and non-military public. The band started playing in the U.S. in 1956, and the first engagements were the Ed Sullivan Show, St. Albens Hospital in New York, and the White House.” Over the years the Navy Steel Band performed for presidents, heads of state, admirals, generals, senators, on television, and at World Fair’s. On U.S. tours, the performance sometimes included singers, a pennywhistle player, Limbo Dance, and comedians. During the New York World’s Fair in 1964 Roeper met Murray Narell who had brought his “kids” to hear the Navy Steel Band play. Later, members of the Navy band traveled to Queens to listen to Narells’ group.

When Roeper became ill, the Navy discharged him and he moved to Charleston, South Carolina where he and his son taught pan in local schools until he passed away a few years later. Franz Grissom succeeded Roeper in August of 1957, after interim leader Ollie Knight. Grissom, Knight, and other band members assembled a repertory book that contained fifty to sixty arrangements for performance, with a hundred more in reserve. Every year they attended Carnival to record the top calypsos and steel bands, enabling them to later transcribe the music back in Puerto Rico. They developed a ‘lead sheet’ system whereby leads and double seconds would alternate the melody, while others provided chord accompaniment and a bass line. The steel band was based in San Juan, Puerto Rico from its creation until 1972 when it moved to its permanent location in New Orleans. Reportedly, the Navy Steel Band was the first steel band to write and read and perform arrangements made specifically for steel band. The band also toured South America, used electronic tuning devices, and engaged Mannette in building instruments outside of Trinidad.

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38 “Navy Steel Band: The Early Years,” 12.

39 Both literally his sons Andy and Jeff Narell, as well as the neighborhood kids who comprised the steel band he worked with as a social worker.
Mannette Comes to America

Through his work with the Navy Steel Band, Ellie Mannette became involved with the steel band movement in the United States, but his most significant contribution to American pan began when Murray Narell brought Mannette to New York City in 1967. Narell went to Trinidad to find a steel drums builder, leading to Mannette and his outstanding reputation in the pan art form. Although the image of pannenmen began to improve with the involvement of the Mannette band in the “Little Carib” theater in Trinidad, Mannette experienced negative backlash from his government after refusing an academic scholarship to England offered by the governor of Trinidad. When Mannette arrived in the United States, there were only a few steel band programs in some of the larger cities on the East Coast. Kim Loy Wong and Pete Seeger had steel band programs involving New York City youth at this time. Mannette and Wong, along with Vincent Taylor, Ansell Joseph, Vincent Hernandez, Rudy King, and Rudolph Charles comprised an early 1970s group of Trinidadian entrepreneurs known as the University Settlement. This group consisted of roughly seven to ten panmen who worked in the same location in New York City, building instruments and teaching musicians. They utilized the basement of a community center, which consisted of a large room in the center with several different adjoining rooms that functioned as individual work stations. Although ideas flowed freely, none of the craftsmen could agree on patterns, tuning techniques, or ranges. Furthermore, most of them cared more about making money than producing quality instruments. During an interview with Percussive Notes, Mannette stated that the strong concentration of pan activity taking place in the northeast region of the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, specifically New York City, resulted because of the significant West Indian community that resided there.

40 George, “Interview with Ellie Mannette,” 34.
41 www.strumon.com/masters/Ellie.htm This theater had a ballet and tap group that Mannette’s band provided accompaniment for as well as other concerts and ballroom dances.
42 Gary Gibson, “Ellie Mannette on the Beginnings of Pan in Trinidad,” Percussive Notes 24, no. 4, (1986): 37. All those years he was in Trinidad, and regardless of all creations, they never respected him. He was a “steel band man and just a gutter boy.” So he decided to promote his art form abroad. He was regarded as a vagabond until he left in 1962.
43 Leader of the Trinidadian Desperados Steel Orchestra who invented the quadrophonics and 4-cello pans.
Mannette ended up working with inner city community groups for about five years and founded approximately twelve to fifteen bands at that time. Although none of these bands exist today, he expanded in other directions. One of his community groups, the Blandettes, performed at Queen’s College, where officials from the New York City Board of Education asked him to attain certification to work with them. He started several school bands throughout New York City, which influenced the Trinidadian government to look inward and question why they did not foster and support pan education in their own schools.\(^45\) Mannette began working with collegiate programs in 1968 at Howard University in Washington, D.C. As students graduated from all of these programs, public schools, and universities, they began programs of their own at other colleges, universities, schools, and communities. Today Mannette feels colleges have aided in the legitimization of pan in the world of conventional instruments. When asked, “Do you feel there is a particular reason or reasons for this surge of interest?” Ellie responded,

> Well, I can’t speak for every college program, but from the programs I know about and work with, I feel three things have at least significantly contributed to this growth. I believe Andy Narell has helped through his extensive touring of the colleges. He exposed them to the versatility of the pan though his unique style of music. Then the college music community began to appreciate more and more the capabilities of the instrument. Not only as a tool for promotion and revenue, but as an effective teaching tool for ear training, understanding orchestration, and the like. And finally, often times, I ask students directly why they enjoy playing pan. The overwhelming response is that the instruments excite them. They can’t always put it into words, but they feel almost compelled to express themselves musically on the instrument.

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The Narell Family Contribution

Murray Narell was a social worker with the Educational Alliance of Manhattan’s Lower East Side, and wanted to begin a program of steel drum instruction to keep area teenagers out of street gangs. Initially, Narell hired an Antiguan exchange student, to make a set of steel drums and teach one of his groups. The youths eventually performed for audiences and membership steadily increased. When Narell brought Mannette in 1967 to build pans for his program serving inner city children and teenagers, he also crafted instruments for the Narell family band. Mannette did not want to leave Trinidad at first, but Narell persisted. This eventually developed into twenty groups in other community centers.

Because of his wife's health, Narell eventually moved his family to California where he continued social work activities in the Oakland Area. His son Andy Narell has indeed made significant contributions to the United States pan movement. Today he is the best known American pannist worldwide. Both Andy and his brother Jeff wanted to play pan “just like all the other kids.” Once they got pans of their own, they started their own group called the Steelbandits and began performing at schools and hospitals. Without a regular teacher the boys experimented and developed their own ideas. When Murray moved the family to California, Jeff and Andy were in their teens. They attended the University of California Berkeley and started a band there. As an adult, Andy Narell pioneered the use of steel drums in contemporary jazz and as a solo instrument. His popularity in Trinidad and abroad exceeds his reputation in the United States. He has composed and arranged for the Trinidadian Panorama competition, record in South Africa, and works regularly with Parisian steel band Calypsociation.

Many university percussion programs have steel pan as a serious part of their curriculum in part due to Andy Narell visiting their campus. He has spent a large part of his career touring college campuses of his own accord, working with bands on playing techniques and arranging. Throughout the early 1980s pan playing, building techniques, and musical arrangements greatly improved. The Narells expressed in an interview that even without financial support from an academic institution, “College kids can be

47 Ibid.
self-sufficient and know enough about music that they can get involved with arranging and making transcriptions of music. . . Groups can go out and play some gigs and make enough money to keep the program going.”

The Narells and Mannette anticipate the day when “every school will have a steel band, as they do an orchestra, chorus or football teams.”

The Contribution of Jimmy Leyden
The Narells and Mannette have all worked with music educator Jimmy Leyden, another individual who contributed to pan development in school systems of the United States. He was in the music business in New York City after WWII, mostly involved with recordings, television, and writing of jingles. As the entire New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago music business changed, he decided to take up teaching in his hometown, Chappaqua, New York. Leyden’s first exposure to steel drums came during a 1957 vacation in Tobago by coming in contact with a band of five or six men playing a limited repertory. When he started teaching in 1971, he heard a National Geographic album of music from Trinidad. At that point he approached the principal and asked for five hundred dollars to purchase steel drums. Although Leyden did not know anything about steel drums, the principal trusted him and gave him the money. At first the students were not interested, until one of them, who normally played vibraphone, became attached to the idea.

He played pan at a band concert, and from that point the idea began to take form. At the next concert six students played in an ensemble by themselves, and it later became a free standing ensemble.

Leyden bought pans from a drum supplier in New York. When they arrived he noticed that they were nowhere near A-440. He taught music at Horace Greeley High School in Chappaqua and wanted to use the pans with the concert band. After complaining to the Carrol Drum Service, he was put in touch with a gentleman on Long Island who knew Mannette. Leyden brought his pans to a garage on

49 “Pan in the US – Looking Back and Ahead,” 43.
50 Ibid, 43.
51 Personal Interview via e-mail with James Leyden, September 24, 2002.
52 Carrol Drum Service
53 The musical tone “A” vibrating at the frequency of 440 Hertz, which is the standard Western tuning.
Long Island in 1971, and Mannette came to meet Leyden. As Mannette went to tune the instruments by ear, Leyden diplomatically informed Mannette that while the drums sounded better, they were not in concert pitch. Mannette did not understand because tuners of steel drums used the chromatic pitch pipe. Leyden then introduced Mannette to the Stroboscopic Tuner and convinced him to use the tuner to obtain concert pitch; he also taught Mannette about using harmonics to achieve a more perfect sounding note. In Trinidad, builders worried more about putting octaves on the notes than harmonic relationships, in the tuning process. Leyden invited him to his school where they worked closely for several years, and all the while Mannette continued making pans. When the University Settlement sponsorship fell apart the remainder of the funds were stolen, but Mannette and Leyden received some of the beat-up pans that were no longer in use.

After a year of teaching steel band at Horace Greeley High School, Leyden traveled to California and visited with Murray Narell. Knowing that Leyden worked with Mannette, Narell said he would pass the torch to Leyden for the purpose of promoting pan with young people. Murray Narell died a few years later. When Leyden’s steel band performed at the Music Educators National Conference New York State Convention around 1974, other educators saw the Horace Greeley High School Steel Band (Calliope’s Children). They approached their respective school boards, sending orders in from other cities in New York, Connecticut, and New Jersey. Leyden and his wife moved to Portland, Oregon in 1977, brought some pans along with them, and purchased more pans from Patrick Arnold.

The People and Region of the Midwest
The region of the United States commonly referred to as the Midwest, consists of twelve states: Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Ohio. I focused on the Midwest as I am most familiar with this region. It is interesting to examine how well pan has been woven into the fabric of the Midwest knowing the common “negative” stereotypes of Midwesterners being close minded and conservative to the point of having no interest

54 Bertie Marshall credited with developing harmonics in pan tuning.
in expanding or broadening their boundaries and horizons. These individuals supposedly dislike new experiences, yet they supported the establishment of the first university steel band. Now hundreds of steel bands exist in the Midwest.

The First Instances of Midwestern Pan
Steel drums were possibly first introduced to the Midwest when Sam Manning invited Rudy King to play a four week engagement at his Blue Angels club in Chicago. Roughly sixty five miles due west of Chicago in DeKalb, Illinois: the home of the first university supported steel band program. In 1973 at Northern Illinois University, G. Allan O’Connor founded the first actively performing steel band at an American university.\(^{56}\) The first instruments came from Aruba through a private student. After assuming the duties of Assistant Chair of the School of Music, he hired Trinidadian Clifford Alexis as an on-staff builder, tuner, arranger, and co-director for the band.\(^{57}\) In 1987 O’Connor established a curriculum at NIU in music with pan as the major instrument. In 1989 O’Connor and Alexis received an invitation from Pan Trinbago to observe and critique the School Children’s Pan Festival (National Schools Steelband Festival). O’Connor wrote several documents to compare their competition process with some of the United States public schools competitions and drum corps competitions.

The Northern Illinois University Steel Band influenced many colleges and university pan programs. Pan virtuoso Liam Teague has claimed that “Al [O’Connor] is responsible for beginning the steel band movement in American universities...”\(^{58}\) The majority of these NIU influenced bands use drums that were manufactured by Alexis. As an internationally recognized figure in the pan movement, O’Connor assisted in starting ensembles in New Zealand and Taiwan, adjudicated Trinidad’s Steel Band festival “Pan is Beautiful IV” in 1992, received seven grants from the United States National Endowment for the Arts (showing that steel drums have become established enough in the United States to receive direct government funding), and contributed many original compositions and arrangements, including Aaron


\(^{57}\) Ibid.

Copland’s “Appalachian Spring” for the Our Boys Steel Orchestra. His band received 2nd place at the World Steelband Music Festival in Trinidad in October 2000.

A few students of Jimmy Leyden started one of the first collegiate steel bands in Ohio at Oberlin College in 1980 through the Experimental College. The Experimental College, or Ex-Co, allows students to teach other students in credited courses. Students Peter Mayer, Mike Geller, and Toby Gordon brought pans from their high school band Calliope’s Children, and Leyden sent a set of charts from the Chappaqua High School group.59 With “CC” already painted on the instruments from Calliope’s Children and no money to repaint them, they named the band the Can Consortium.60 Initially the group remained unrecognized by the university as a legitimate performance group; although conservatory percussion professor Michael Rosen gave them permission to store instruments and rehearse at the conservatory until they acquired another space on campus. American ethnomusicologist Shannon Dudley became a part of the original band, which he cited as his most important college experience by opening up a whole world of music that he was missing.61 The steel band gave him a chance to arrange, improvise, play for dancing, and open up to a new repertoire of Afro-Caribbean music. After graduation Dudley moved to St. Paul in 1984 to learn to sink drums62 from Cliff Alexis whom he met at a pan tuning workshop at the University of Akron around 1981 or 1982.

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60 Recently the band changed their name to Oberlin Steel as associating the instruments with ‘cans’ was derogatory.
61 Shannon Dudley, email interview by author, September 26, 2002.
62 The first step in building a steel drum.
Gary Gibson and the effects of pan in Wichita, Kansas

Kansas native Gary Gibson, now an internationally known pan artist, was affected by the U.S. Navy Steel Band at a young age and later by Andy Narell, who came to Wichita State University around 1979 when Gibson was an undergraduate. Gibson recounted how the Navy Steel Band influenced him as a youth in Wichita.

“When I was eight years old, I went to a parade in downtown Wichita. At the time (1968), the U.S. Navy had a steel drum band that toured around the country playing for parades and school assembly concerts and so forth (recruitment tool, I guess). I saw them at the parade, and was so awed by the instrument. Back then, we had round “disk” type snow sleds made out of steel. These days, you can get them made from plastic, and they have a little strap on either side to hang onto. You can see where this is going...

“When we got home from the parade, I grabbed my steel sled, and took my dad’s hammer to it. I got four notes: C, F, A, and the octave C. With these four notes, I could play “Taps” and “Reveille” and so forth. I had a little rope tied to the straps so that I could wear it around my neck like the Navy band guys did. I distinctly remember being out on my back porch, drumsticks in hand, proudly banging out these tunes.

“I had completely blacked this event out in my memory until only about four years ago, when I was filling out a bio questionnaire for a press release. The realization that I had been interested in pan at the age of 8 was a revelation for me, and really helped complete the whole picture of my relationship with the instrument, which I had previously thought only existed since college.”

Around 1981 or 1982 Gibson attended a pan building and tuning workshop held at the University of Akron. Here he cultivated relationships with Cliff Alexis, Al O’Connor, and Shannon Dudley. Gibson later attended the Haystack Summer Workshop in 1985 in Oregon, taught by Ellie Mannette. Here,
Gibson met Tom Miller (a student at the University of Akron and now well-known American pannist). This demonstrates the significance of workshops in fostering personal relationships and professional connections between future well-known American pannists and nature of close knit pan community.

Steel drums came to Wichita State thanks to a wealthy golf associate of percussion instructor J.C. Combs who saw a steel band in the Caribbean and wanted to buy some instruments for the department. Combs contacted Al O’Connor about getting instruments and O’Connor had a visiting tuner build a four-piece set of pans (double seconds, double tenors, cello, and bass for Wichita State). While the school owned the instruments and provided a space for rehearsal, they took a “hands off” approach to guiding the ensembles. The bands received no instruction at all in care, maintenance, or musical considerations, other than when Andy Narell would visit. Narell spent weeks and months on the road traveling the Midwest, lingering in places like Wichita for a week at a time (on his own time and money), hanging out with students and preaching the pan gospel. Gibson finds it interesting that the Midwest embraced pan so willingly “Perhaps mine is a more unique story (sadly so) I suspect, and most schools were better equipped with recordings and instructors than we were at Wichita State. But I know that there [was] at least some other[s] in our same shoes.” As a graduate student at Wichita, Gibson directed the steel band. Although a few significant individuals in the American pan movement have taken over the steel band at Wichita, such as Darren Dyke, Gibson felt Wichita State's involvement in the spread of pan in the Midwest has been a rather passive and inconsequential one.

Gibson believes the Midwest embraced pan for a few reasons: the availability of instruments, arrangements, and other supplies; the geographic location of Alexis and Mannette as tuners and

63 Personal Interview via e-mail with Gary Gibson on September 26, 2002.
64 Personal Interview via e-mail with Gary Gibson on September 16, 2005.
65 See appendix for interview transcription of Gary Gibson
66 American pannist, composer, arranger, and instrument craftsman.
67 Adjacent to the Midwestern state of Ohio, Mannette has been an Artist-in-Residence at West Virginia University to expand their multicultural music offerings and substantially support their steel band.
cultural figures; the foundation of Panyard, Inc. He felt having a pan group in the Midwest attracts more attention that it does in the coastal cities, where immigration rates are much higher and cultural diversity is an everyday fact of life. The makes steel drums less unique and interesting than they are in the Midwest. Gibson claims the community embraces almost all of the music done at the university in Wichita.

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68 A steel pan instrument and supply company located in Akron, Ohio.
CHAPTER THREE

MOTT MIDDLE COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL
AND MOTT COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Background

Several steel bands in the United States, such as the three at Mott Middle College High School (abbreviated Mott Middle College, MMC, or MMCHS), have been designed to give at-risk students positive, motivational, and creative opportunities to nurture self-esteem, develop focus, and relate in constructive ways with their peers, families, and communities.¹ “The steel band curriculum was created at Mott Middle College as an instrumental music alternative for students disengaged from the traditional learning environment. Many of the band members are continuing their education as music majors at Mott Community College and the University of Michigan – Flint. The band has earned top honors in music festivals and competitions around the world.”² Dr. Chery Wagonlander, principal of the Middle College High School, founded the ensemble in 1993 after looking for “an unusual way to engage dropouts and potential dropouts.”³ The associate superintendent of the Genesee Intermediate School District (GISD),⁴ Raquel Marino, introduced Wagonlander to the idea of steel drums.

Marino, who also served on the board of trustees for Central Michigan University (CMU), which had a steel band as a part of the percussion program, suggested looking into a similar program for Mott Middle College. She put Wagonlander in touch with Mr. Robert Hohner, percussion professor at CMU who connected her with James Coviak, director of Central Michigan University steel band. Wagonlander

⁴ The GISD runs the middle college HS
contracted him to spend time with the students at MMC to introduce a steel band program and accompanying musical concepts.

Mott Middle College comprises a middle college and high school designed to serve potential dropout ninth through twelfth graders in Genesee County and districts geographically adjacent to Genesee County. Administrators hoped the uniqueness of the program would give both the students and the school a distinct identity. Coviak began as a guest artist, and the steel band started as a fine arts class with three steel drums. As student interest grew, Coviak became a part time instructor, and eventually full time instructor. Although the steel band began as a MMCHS endeavor, it spawned the establishment of a steel band at Mott Community College as well. Over time middle college students began feeding into the community college, Central Michigan University, the University of Michigan – Flint, as well as other colleges and universities. The middle college has graduated student pan players who now teach music or pursue careers in music. Currently there are three levels of bands (beginner, intermediate, and concert) at the middle college, and one community college ensemble.

The administration of Mott Middle College found the steel band program one of the best options for disengaged learners with low self esteem. Students with no formal training in music excelled rapidly. The flexibility of the instrument astonished students who had formal training as they could play any musical style that utilized the Western tuning system. Wagonlander believed some of this was due to the developmental stage of adolescence; students of that age found rhythm and visual stimuli fascinating though eye/hand/sight coordination techniques. Also each voice in the steel band is different, which aided the diverse range of the students' abilities. Student musicians “feel better about themselves, their mathematics skills improve, and they become functioning, strong members of the team.” Original instruments were purchased through the support of grants and donations, and currently paid performance engagements sustain the expansion of the program. The band released two CDs, the profits from which support the program and go toward scholarships for students intending to be music majors in college.

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The Steelheads are “a percussion ensemble and steel band consisting of students from Mott Middle College High School, Mott Community College and the University of Michigan – Flint.” This select ensemble performed and received top honors at the Heritage Music Festivals in Chicago, New York, Toronto, and London. They performed as guest artists with the Saginaw Symphony, opened for the Canadian Brass, and performed at the Percussive Arts Society International Convention (PASIC), Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland, International Jazz in Vienne, France, International Nice Jazz Festival in Nice, France, and for President Bill Clinton. The band was featured in a cover story in the November 2003 issue of School Band and Orchestra magazine. These honors, combined with daily rehearsals and progress, boosted students' self-esteem and self-confidence.

Support was requested for the Flint Community Schools Outreach Project as a focused project within the Steelheads' larger outreach efforts. The project provided students living within the federally-designated Enterprise/Renewal Zone and other low-income neighborhoods within the Flint Community Schools with a positive and motivational experience through performances by the Steelheads. Performances included historical and cultural perspectives of the instruments and music performance. Student musicians also spoke about changes that had occurred in their lives, in and out of school, because of their experiences with the Steelheads.

While the various steel bands on the community college campus and Steelheads fall under several categories (college-level, secondary school level, and community level) I viewed them as fulfilling both educational and community goals, as the program is housed entirely within an academic framework but its goals coincide with those of social work, as well as community and academic improvement.

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6 Les Journees de la Percussion, 8.
7 Teresa Peterson “News and Events: Pas.org. News and Events, 2002, http://www.pas.org/News/Press/ ZildjianOpp.cfm. In 2002 the Zildjian Family Opportunity Fund grant was awarded to the Mott Middle College Steelheads Percussion Ensemble and Steel Band for the Flint Community Schools Outreach Program in Flint, Michigan. This fund was established by the Zildjian family in 2001, and is used to provide funding for percussion-based presentations directed toward underserved youth in schools, community centers, or other publicly accessible facilities free of charge, was awarded to the Steelheads.
Interestingly, the middle college students often obtained their first experience with formal music education on pan. Because pans are fully chromatic instruments, students could play any musical style within the Western tuning system including classical, jazz, calypso, soca, and popular styles. By playing a variety of musical styles, they educated audiences by exposing them to a variety of musical genres, which demonstrated the flexibility of the steel drum. While some students initially learned through rote techniques whereby they observed and imitated the music played by the director, the use of musical notation was quickly employed. Reading music, playing techniques, music theory, and a variety of musical styles are learned by playing pan, as well as information about Trinidadian composers, culture, and history. More traditional compositions for pan provided a unique blend of both melodic and rhythmic components. The layout of note patterns of particular instruments aided in learning music theory as their arrangements were in the circle of fifths (lead pans), half steps (double second pans), diminished thirds (triple guitars and cellos pans), or root-fifth/fourth (bass pans). As an accessible instrument that allows a player to attain immediate results by touching it, pan boosted self-esteem and self-confidence of students. Students knew they could do it. One student at Mott credited her experiences with pan with keeping her in school; without it she would have dropped out. Rehearsals for the Mott Community College band allowed for some student input into rehearsals, which created a sense of importance, belonging, and control.

Written Surveys
The surveys contained only a few questions in an effort to receive the most complete information possible on particular issues. It was of interest to me to find out where the students first learned about pan. The most common response included Mott; others included festivals, movies, television, Internet downloads, from listening to reggae music, and family members. These primary encounters showed that Mott reached out and affected the school and local Flint communities. When asked why steel drums attracted them, the most common response was the sound. Additional answers included they looked fun, because of friends and family, and some students sought musical involvement either by choice or as per the curriculum.

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8 More complete responses may be found in the appendix.
When asked how pan affected them, the most common reply was the opportunity to play a new instrument and style of music. Others referred to their increased educational and musical skills or attitudes, cultural awareness, relaxation, increased reflexes, improved group skills, fun, and provided them with a unique identity. Lastly I asked how the steel bands affected their community, both school and local. The most frequent response was that they provided the communities with entertainment and exposure to new music. Other answers included keeping kids focused and off the streets, providing a good reputation for the school, bringing people together, and exposing band members and their audiences to diverse cultural experiences. Students may have felt that their responses would affect their grades or relationships with their instructor(s). Negative and blank responses, which occurred for the final two questions, may have been due to students’ lack of information. During my time at Mott I observed several rehearsal sessions including a cha-cha-cha by the college group, Ode to Joy by the beginner band, and the intermediate band rehearsing part of a piece in duple meter, which sounded stylistically classical.

Individual Interviews

The last names of those interviewed have been omitted for purposes of confidentiality.

I conducted one-on-one interviews with students and faculty to get more detailed responses and impressions of steel bands housed on the Mott Community College campus. In line with Clifford Geertz’s theory of thick description, I felt this would prove rewarding to realize the nature of pan in Flint, Michigan concerning: who participated in it and why, who it affected and how, and what that meant for pan in Flint and the Midwest. Geertz argues that researchers must focus on detail and the minutia in order to better understand the cultural core of a people; the truth is in the details. This was a new direction in the 1970s where up to that point, many had taken the stance of creating a typical, or average, to represent a culture. Geertz felt researchers should focus on ‘thickly’ describing people and cultural events in order to contribute to an ongoing dialogue of information, more so than formulating conclusive answers.  

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I first interviewed Erica, a student at Mott Community College majoring in music and who aspired to be a music teacher of high school students. When she came to Mott for high school, she had little musical experience. She enrolled in the MMC steel band in 1997. She intended to sign up for a drum set class, not pan, but Erica enjoyed her experiences with the steel drums. Very fun and easy at first, the music steadily grew more challenging. Her first impression of the director, Mr. Coviak, was uncertain. She thought, “This dude don’t know nothin’ about music.” When she observed him playing all the pans and other percussion instruments, she gained confidence in him.

Students practiced on their own time, since the room generally stayed open. Only the pan and percussion ensembles used the room. There was no set rehearsal schedule for each session, but generally when the students arrived they began with the new piece and revisited old pieces toward the end of rehearsal. When performing in public, the students either wore tuxedoes or tropical shirts with khakis or jeans. Erica felt the listeners preferred the tropical look. Venues included everything from weddings, receptions, parties, anniversaries, schools, Mott functions, dinners, banquets, Big Brothers/Big Sisters dinners, personal parties, and formal and informal performances. The atmosphere at performances was always fun. Erica disliked moving equipment. Her longest trip with the band was during their European tour in 1999 when they traveled to Switzerland, England, and France. The amount of historical information that introduced performances depended on the engagement. Younger student audiences got to try the instruments, and older students received information about the instruments during the performance. Various musical styles were played to showcase the versatility of the instruments.

Erica felt the goal of the group was to be as professional as possible. She wanted to improve herself as a percussionist and musician. She recognized the importance of pleasing audience members, whether they wanted background music or entertainment. She knew of no negative stereotype associated with band members by non-band members (other students, parents, community members). However, a few of her peers urged her not to join the ensemble because it required a major time commitment, and

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10 Erica, interviewed by author, March 26, 2003.
Erica believed audience members liked the sound of pans and the energy of performance. They actively listened to the music. Audience members consisted of old, young, various professions, composers, students, and they had built up a fan base. Steel drums held a personal meaning for her; she thought of the band members as family. In the past she had wanted to leave home and move away, but her father insisted she stay. Now he says “see, if I didn’t stop you, you wouldn’t be playing these drums.” Erica had developed a large group of close friends. Before playing, she did not expect this level of dedication from herself. The level of commitment expected from Coviak was immense, and she thrived at that level of intensity and challenge. Furthermore, her participation kept her out of trouble because she loved playing and did not want to miss a day of it.

Erica felt pan has affected her community by keeping her and many of her friends out of trouble and provided a sense of belonging. It had done a lot for the school by giving something of interest to share with the local community and schools. Without it, she probably would not have done much to give back to the community. She felt the attraction of pan in the Midwest was due to people being open to new things; in Flint people liked things that were new and different.

Next I interviewed Andrew, who attended both the University of Michigan - Flint and Mott Community College where he worked on a bachelor’s degree in music and planned to go on for a master’s in
composition. Encouraged by his friends, he has played steel drums since the eighth grade. Andrew and his friends had participated in hand drumming and drums circles when younger. When the Steelheads went to PASIC, Andrew explored the Steel Island vendor booth. The staff of Steel Island asked him to be a clinician for them, and now the company will fly Andrew to clinics, workshops, and conferences twice a year where he plays their instruments to promote the company.

Andrew first saw pan at a Mott steel band performance. He went to a performance to watch his friends play in the band and helped move equipment for the performance. Coviak did not know him but invited him to “go up there and act like you’re soloing.” Andrew played along. He found it interesting that Mott adapted to each student’s way of learning. He became involved because Coviak always had great performance opportunities for the band. Andrew started on basses (“of course”) and “worked his way up” to lead pan, where he did most of the soloing. When Coviak missed performances, Andrew acted as director. Moreover he took general leadership roles, which he enjoyed, by showing other students music theory concepts such as different chord parts to play.

Andrew favored pan because they were melodic drums and had a unique sound. As opposed to a keyboard instrument which is played back and forth to cover its range, one plays in and out of the pan as the higher notes are placed in the center of the instrument. The program had a familial atmosphere where Coviak listened to everyone’s input and integrated their musical suggestions into the group sound. Just as each instrument differs but fits in the group, so did the musicians. In rehearsals they had a repertoire of tunes, and they rehearsed depending on upcoming performances. Performance venues included parks, concert halls, beaches, and lakesides, and audience members ranged from school children to the mentally disabled to inner city people. The band exposed listeners to music that they would otherwise never see or hear. Andrew felt the band’s broad repertory enabled them to move pan

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11 Andrew, interviewed by author, March 26, 2003.
12 A pan building company in Trinidad.
13 Steel Island drums are made by Bertie Marshall, tuned by Tony Slater, and shipped to Paula Baird in Austin, Texas. She sets up engagements as the organizational head. Andrew is the clinician who plays the instruments in the booth to showcase their sound. Sometimes gets gigs when people see him, such as at a local bar.
to new places and ideas, seeking different innovative levels beyond a single musical style. Although the band used a score, some tunes were passed down from player to player.

On a more personal level, Andrew believed that anytime he played he worshiped God, and the people who hear it also received God’s spirit. Andrew did not feel that others in the school liked the band, and some teachers were jealous of Coviak. However, he had not personally received any negative pressure or resistance for playing besides jealously from his friends. Compared to other bands he had been in Andrew preferred the Steelheads. He favored their professionalism and Coviak’s choices as a director. Pan’s success in Flint varied from people taking it for granted to embracing its African roots, as Flint is predominantly black. At the same time, regardless of cultural connections and ancestries, all communities accepted it. In the future Andrew hoped the group would turn professional. He attributed pan’s popularity to its accessibility particularly with youths. Playing this music exposed people to new and exciting music. Audience members enjoyed the rhythmic, upbeat music. The trash-can appearance intrigued audiences, but the beautiful sound of the drums surprised them.

When asked if pan held any particular meaning for him Andrew responded,

...the steel drum, I think, one of the main things that it holds in it, is, the manifestation of the transformation of a person. The drum, I believe, can show the transformation of a person because like a person can be trash, like I was as piece of trash. I was a piece of trash and [the] day when I gave myself to the Lord he transformed me into a beautiful instrument. Everybody else would’ve said, “He’s just a piece of trash. Andy is just a piece of trash.” But then someone saw something beautiful in me, and they poured their lives into it. When I gave myself over it didn’t always feel good, sometimes it hurt because I had to be pounded, and put through fire, and the impurities were burnt out. And I became a beautiful instrument, just like the drum, because it was as a piece of trash. A piece of trash and a guy said, “I see something beautiful in there” but everybody was like, “It’s a piece of trash Ellie!” “No, I see something beautiful in it.” And he put forth something that I think sounds as beautiful as a violin. So what the drum does for me is it says, and I say this stuff all the time, but it says to those critics or skeptics, you guys have
Playing steel drums raised his confidence level through accomplishment and gave Andrew a sense of individuality. He used the unique instrument as a door through which to reach other people. Otherwise, he felt people would disregard him. For example, “you and I would not have met each other.” Lastly, Andrew identified himself with the pan as it was a concrete representation of what had happened to him and what can happen to other people. He and his acquaintances once viewed Andrew as a piece of trash, just as Trinidadians viewed oil barrels as such, but as Ellie Mannette saw the potential in the barrel, so did Coviak and God in Andrew. The band has brought pride to the Flint community, helping to take crime and criminals off of the streets, including him. It had given the students a sense of confidence and productivity. This had a symbiotic effect, giving the school a sense of confidence and pride because they had brought and maintained this successful program for students.

Playing in the steel band strengthened Andrew’s sense of community. The group was a family, allowing for the formation of familial bonds with band members. Youths acquire musical skills quickly and “boost their confidence levels, raising them up, and changing communities.” The same analogy of the pan starting as trash and changing form into a beautiful instrument applied to the Midwest. Andrew stated “Many people view the Midwest, or parts of it, as trash, and many pan programs in inner cities across the United States and in the Midwest have showed these places can be places of beauty as well.”

David was a computer science student at Kettering University, an engineering school in Flint.¹⁴ He signed up for pan as an elective at Mott Community College, prior to which his only experience was through a summer percussion camp at Central Michigan University. The instruments looked “cool” and

fun how the players synchronize their motions. Moreover, the technical simplicity (no embouchure, tonguing, slurring) made playing more enjoyable. David performed with the band once at the fall/winter concert, which featured several groups. During the performance the musicians wore sweaters and khakis, and the experience included much camaraderie. The moving of equipment required a “hurry and wait” attitude, and members often ate pizza backstage beforehand. Friendships fostered in the ensemble were maintained outside the band, and members of the band seemed friendlier than other groups joined. Audience members enjoyed the concerts, and the group played a few tunes for the audience to exit by, albeit most audience members stayed to listen.

To the best of his knowledge there was not a negative stigma attached to the band or its members. The only resistance he encountered in trying to join the group was the admissions office’s unawareness of the group’s existence. Most people in the college did not know it existed; however, the college created a course not too long before that. The pan art form was thriving in Flint due to its accessibility. The band had plans for several paid performances and seemed to be becoming more professional. He wanted to play more and improvise. Pans did not hold any personal meaning for David, although they helped him gain a better understanding of the circle of 5ths and music theory. He could not comment on how pan and the ensemble had affected the school, local, or greater community. Playing in the band strengthened his personal sense of community, due to group camaraderie. He claimed attraction to pan in the Midwest stemmed from its unique nature. The art form would need to expand much further before its uniqueness would reach a plateau, and become commonplace.

Chery Wagonlander was the principal of Mott Middle College High School. Although the band earned money from roughly one-third of their engagements, she considered it an extremely expensive program, requiring funds for purchasing instruments, upkeep, and travel (tonnage to airlines). Wagonlander felt that they had to constantly ensure the rebuilding of the beginning level band. Musicians of all sizes, races, religions, and socio-economic backgrounds worked together, and excelled at their own rate. Wagonlander likened it to a microcosm rather than a clique, which develop in many school music ensembles. If the school tried to establish an orchestra or symphony, the students would not have

developed fast enough. The steel band catapulted into a level of competition, musical achievement, and entertainment that normally was not achieved in high schools. Wagonlander wished more schools had steel bands.

The goal of the program was sustainability, research, and outreach. Questions that the administration asked of the program included what impact it had on dropout prevention; on identifying, preparing, and sustaining future music educators and performers in the world; and its contributions to students’ contentment in school. Wagonlander felt the school gained so much from the program, and people needed to know what they had learned. She thought the audience enthusiasm might die down over time, but it remained high. Only the steel band played at the middle college graduation, which made it unique, incorporating it into their culture and school.

The more advanced students assisted in education for outreach performances. They also assisted Coviak as student aides in the younger classes and bands. Wagonlander felt Flint, for all its history with industry, always supported culture, art, drama, and music. The community cared about having quality music and believed that kids should study the arts as an intellectual pursuit. Potential careers for students in the steel drum art form became a reality, and Wagonlander pondered ways in which she could help students achieve these goals. The program had professionally enriched Wagonlander’s life. She has talked about the group and its accomplishments at conferences across the nation, and encouraged her peers to put money toward starting their own programs. The sound of the steel drums transcended time and their Caribbean influence and rhythms. Wagonlander and I agreed that some stereotypes generate from ignorance or an initial exposure to loud, unmusical groups. She was proud their program brought respect for the culture and history of steel drums.

Although many percussion programs existed across the United States, it did not mean they hosted strong steel band programs. Wherever the Mott band traveled, people wanted to know where they got their instruments and became inspired to start a program in their own schools. Wagonlander hoped Mott students would help in the future of the expansion of the instrument across the nation and beyond, allowing them to support each other at annual concerts and conferences. When asked whether she
thought steel drums would get extremely popular and saturate the population or remain a novelty of which people would tire. Wagonlander responded, “Beautiful music, performed by anyone, for no one to listen to or everyone to listen to, I don’t think it will ever tire. I think humans have an absolute need for beauty and aesthetic stimulation.” She felt pans were increasing in popularity because good things spread, citing the example of how the Mott program had grown significantly in its ten year existence.

Steel drums caused Wagonlander to think of the students who play them, their backgrounds, what they have, and what they worked to overcome. The students’ dedication amazed her. The audience had no idea of the backgrounds of the students playing the music. The students transcended all of their problems as they performed in front of an audience. Wagonlander realized when seeing or hearing the group that their lives literally changed with their program. When young people are successful at something new, they set higher expectations and become critical of themselves. She believed that perspective spreads to all decisions in students’ lives, and they will think more critically about other decisions. It gave members a sense of community, belonging, and of being loved: some basic human needs. She did not know if the Midwest differed from other places.

Wendy, a first year student at Mott Middle College, had been playing steel drums for a few months. Her first encounter with steel drums happened when she saw them played on television and liked their sound. Wendy saw the Mott groups perform in a winter concert, which influenced her decision to join the Mott band, and she had no previous musical background. One of their biggest challenges was playing as a group, staying together, and staying on the beat.

The band learned from notated music, however Wendy memorized her music. She wanted to perform in front of an audience, showing what she had accomplished. Her long term goals included continuing her education in the group. Wendy felt pans attracted people because of the uniqueness. Since she had joined, she had learned a lot about steel drums and had a greater awareness for the instrument. Although her group had not affected the community because they were beginners, the more advanced groups had an impact on the community. She heard community members speak about the concert level

band, that they enjoyed the sound and found the performances fun. Wendy did not know if playing in the group strengthened her sense of community, and pans did not hold any personal meaning for her. She felt the can-like appearance led people to believe it would not sound pleasant.

My interview with Freddie from the concert band occurred during rehearsal time. He had been playing at Mott Middle College for three years. When he came to the middle college in ninth grade, the class intrigued him. At first he was not disciplined, but through Coviak’s guidance his behavior changed. He now acts as a team leader, having progressed through the classes quickly. The steel band exposed him to other music besides hip hop and rap.

Freddie played in the college group as well, which he enjoyed more because the ensemble progressed more quickly. He played with the college group in Tennessee for a music educator’s conference, which was well received. Afterwards, audience members came up and asked for his autograph. Freddie felt the college group could turn professional. He wanted to perform professionally, perhaps with the college group, or his own group. Although his friends said, “you’re just playing stupid drums and trash cans”, he felt this was jealousy; most people encouraged the band. He knew of one other steel band that he saw at the Tennessee conference. Their “typical” repertory did not impress him. Playing kept his mind off of his anxieties and relaxed him when upset. His sense of community had strengthened when he became a leader and helped other students learn. Freddie felt the attraction of pan in the Midwest was related to its unique, soothing sound, like a violin mixed with bells.

My final interview was with Mr. James Coviak, teacher, founder, and director of steel bands at Mott Middle College High School and Mott Community College. He had been playing pan for roughly eighteen years. First hearing pan as an undergraduate at Central Michigan University, his interest grew as a graduate student at the University of Akron. He felt steel drums represented a “true marriage of melody and a drum,” and were more similar to drumming than marimba. It took time and effort for Coviak to start his steel drum program. Now Coviak directs three well-received groups that perform

17 Freddie, interviewed by author, March 26, 2003.

18 Mr. James Coviak, interviewed by author, March 26, 2003.
regularly and participate in competitions. Over time, the playing ability and scholarship of the groups improved. Issues with attendance and drugs have occurred, but are less frequent now. Coviak also founded groups at CMU and North Farmington High School in Farmington Michigan.

The band performed a varied repertory including contemporary jazz of Pat Metheny, the Yellowjackets, and Michael Brecker, steel band standards, island tunes, percussion ensemble selections, pop songs, and originals by Coviak. Their repertory remained essentially the same throughout the years as competitions and performances narrowed their time to learn new music. Coviak felt jobs like his were rare but on the rise, and he and Wagonlander would help anyone interested in getting a program started at their school. People learn steel drums quickly compared to other instruments, but as Coviak noted, that did not make them a lesser instrument. He had expected to see more middle colleges with steel band programs by this time.

Concerning their reputation, Coviak felt the college music department did not always embrace the band. In the fall of 2001, certain faculty scrutinized him, noting only his mistakes. In the meantime, the group won international accolades. He believed some were jealous of the band’s success. Coviak felt the steel band art form succeeded in Flint because it was different, fun, upbeat, and the kids succeeded quickly. It brought people together for more than music. He felt pans were becoming more popular because they were more accessible to the consumer. Compared to other music ensembles, the steel band developed a student’s sense of time and rhythmic sensibilities, while rote learning increased memorization skills.

Coviak was proud of the fact that he helped to better people’s lives. Pan had also changed his life, giving him a definite direction. He claimed that steel drums not only had meaning for him, but, he said “they actually define me.” With all the obstacles he encountered, Coviak strove to live by his personal motto “it ain’t over yet.” The steel band provided a service to a lot of parts of the community, performing at functions, providing entertainment and culture at the same time. The Greater Flint Arts Council invited Coviak and fifty other professional artists in the area to give some input about the future of the Council. No one else from the middle or community college, or the University of Michigan
Flint was invited, but by inviting the ‘director of the Steelheads’ it showed how integral the group had become in the community. Nearly every civic organization and school in the area had heard the band play. This gave the program leverage because the administration of the school liked the fact that the Steelheads had a face in the community. Coviak feels the attraction of pan in the Midwest is its universality. “The rhythm gets in your soul and there is a magic feeling when a group works together to produce a beautiful sound.”

Themes of uniqueness, adaptability, and communal participation pervade Mott steel bands. The ease with which steel drums are adapted to their academic program and students’ needs has allowed Middle College administration to attract at-risk students to learning environments. Several individuals recognized the band as the driving force behind their academic perseverance. Pans are readily adapted and integrated into groups from high school to college, regardless of prior experience. The accessibility and adaptable nature of pan allowed for a quick boost of students’ self-esteem. Steel bands on the campus of Mott Community College have made a significant impact on their school and local communities. Over seventy-five percent of students credited Mott with their first pan experience. Nearly fifty percent of members felt their contribution to school and local communities came through providing entertainment. Mott’s contributions have reached further than Flint, with members performing at conferences and competitions through the United States, Canada, and Europe. The importance of the Steelheads and Mott steel bands within these populations was evident through the invitation of Jim Coviak by the Greater Flint Arts Council for input on future endeavors.

Roughly forty percent of students were attracted by the sound of pan, implying an attraction to its distinctive timbre. Ten percent specifically cited the uniqueness of the instruments. The attractive uniqueness of the sound supports notions of students’ and the college’s identity with pan. Because the instrument is unique, so are the students and college for participating in such a program. On a personal level, Andrew felt the instrument was a physical representation of his life. Although no response category was an overwhelming majority, around thirty percent cited new music exposure, and nearly twenty-five percent credited increased musical skills regarding the musical affect question. Slightly more than fifty percent of respondents felt pan had affected them musically, noting the musical
contributions of steel drums increased rhythmic, stylistic, and theoretical skills for students. Although musical experiences were new, they were easily incorporated into a Western/Midwestern educational environment in part because of their adaptability.
Background

G. Allan O’Connor founded the Northern Illinois University steel band in 1973. The original instruments were purchased in Aruba. In 1985 Trinidadian Clifford Alexis was hired as an on-staff builder, tuner, arranger, and co-director. The NIU band influenced the establishment of more than fifty college and university steel bands in the United States and Canada, particularly in terms of instrument and music availability. In the spring of 2003, the ensemble was preparing for their thirtieth anniversary spring concert, showcasing the band’s past as well as guest artist David Rudder.

O’Connor first encountered steel drums during his graduate work at the University of Illinois, which was a hotspot for experimental music at the time. Appointed percussion professor of Northern Illinois University in 1968, O’Connor felt he should expose his students to pan and Caribbean music styles, hoping to increase their abilities as musicians rhythmically, harmonically, and stylistically. O’Connor taught himself to play and transcribed music from recordings until he located other pannists, instrument builders, and tuners for exchanging this type of information. Around 1983, he went to a high school twenty-five miles northwest of DeKalb, Illinois to hear the U.S. Navy Steel Band in concert. The Navy Band’s director led O’Connor to Clifford Alexis. In order to give the NIU band the best possible direction, O’Connor persuaded Alexis to help with the NIU program, running rehearsals and maintaining instruments. According to O’Connor, “his addition to the program made everything take off.” They have since played in several countries and recruited members from all over the world. In

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2 Tape One – April 7, 2003 interview with G. Allan O’Connor, Clifford Alexis, and Liam Teague.
3 Famous Trinidadian calypsonian who resides in Toronto.
1987 a steel drum degree program was developed which eventually attracted Trinidadian pan virtuoso Liam Teague to attend NIU. Now on staff, Teague is a co-director of the program.

Cliff Alexis moved to the United States after initially touring the U.S. in 1964 as a member of the National Steel Band of Trinidad and Tobago. Alexis learned that St. Paul had educational centers, and “finagled” his way into a teaching position. During his twelve years in the public schools, he learned to build and tune drums because there were no individuals who possessed those skills. He described it as “one of the hardest things he has ever encountered in his life”. As his skills improved and his reputation grew, interested persons outside of the public school were contacting Alexis to make pans for them. Eventually people from across the nation were calling for pans and he established a network when the NIU Steel Band toured the east coast.

Liam Teague began playing pan at age twelve by joining a local steel band called T&TEC Motown where he learned by rote. He also began formal music training on violin, becoming musically literate, which allowed him to combine both learning methods. Teague felt compelled to leave Trinidad in order to learn more about music and “become instantly rich.” He had not been outside of Trinidad, and, Liam said, “I actually thought the streets were paved with gold” [in the U.S.]. At the time he thought he was “the greatest thing to come along since chicken soup”, and although he was performing a lot in Trinidad, he felt opportunities for professional musical growth were stagnant.

After discussing the history of the Northern Illinois University Steel Band and how each of the directors became involved, they and I discussed other themes of the American pan art form. One large difference between communities and panyards in Trinidad and those in the United States is that the panyard of the former involves the whole community, and in the latter few other than band members attend rehearsals. Alexis noted that while pan has spread throughout the United States, the pannists he grew up with were...

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4 Alexis told his job interviewer that he had another job already lined up in Minneapolis because he knew the two cities competed with each other.

5 O’Connor is originally from Long Island, which gave him connections for touring the east coast.

6 Sponsored by the electric company of Trinidad.
not given the same steel band directing opportunities as percussion professors in the United States. He wondered if pannists here considered giving back to the culture that gave them pan, through teaching and instrument crafting jobs or musical information exchanges for example, instead of isolating their groups. Furthermore, American pan may surpass Trinidadian pan in performance, education, and instrument quality. O’Connor, Alexis, and Teague worked to keep pan politics in the United States to a minimum, compared to those in Trinidad which are problematic, by insisting students refrain from ‘gossip-like’ discussions of the best tuner or best band.

Written Surveys
By distributing written surveys to all NIU steel band members, I gathered the following information. Initial encounters with steel drums generally centered on academic and community experiences, although a few students reported their first pan experience came in watching television, or a first-hand occurrence in the Caribbean. When asked how and why students became involved with pan, the most common response was it provided a new music opportunity: stylistically, rhythmically, and through performance practice. Other answers included the desire to join a well-respected program, the band looked energetic and fun, they were asked to play in the band, and for cultural, social, and environmental reasons (the re-usage of oil barrels as instruments). Steel drums primarily affected students through increased musical skills and musicianship, although additional responses included pans becoming a big part of their life, a chance to travel, increased cultural awareness, exposure to musical diversity and new styles, and a better understanding for the dedication and hard work necessary to perform music. Lastly I asked how the steel band had affected their school and local communities. Community enjoyment and an increased awareness of non-Western music and cultural diversity were the principal replies. Other answers included the spawning of other programs, greater recognition of DeKalb and the NIU School of Music, validity of world music styles, and constructive expression.
Several members of the NIU Steel Band program have continued to participate in the steel band art form after graduation. Many start their own bands or teach at schools throughout the states. Paul G. Ross is a performer, composer, and owns a pan music publishing company.

Individual Interviews

The last names of those interviewed have been omitted for purposes of confidentiality.

Jason was a twenty-six year old pan graduate student who donated his time directing the All-University Steel Band. Students may receive an undergraduate or graduate degree in music with a focus on pan, but not a pan performance degree. Jason became interested in pan after he saw a group perform at a music festival in Milwaukee, and joined the NIU band in 1997. An interest in world music and different cultures also led Jason to pan. He liked their fully chromatic range, but disliked tuning limitations such as inability to bend pitch or vary timbres.

The two major steel bands were jointly rehearsed by O’Connor, Alexis, and Teague. Usually Alexis arranged pop and calypso tunes and maintained instruments. No director was completely in charge of any one piece or tune. During rehearsal, they interjected into each other’s commentaries, but Jason had never seen any heated discussions using this technique. O’Connor provided classical arrangements and transcriptions and performed administrative duties. Teague combined the Trinidadian/calypsonian aspect together with O’Connor’s influences of classical works. Eventually, Teague will assume O’Connor’s role when O’Connor fully retires.

Jason felt having in-house arrangers advantageous because tunes were arranged for their specific instrumentation. Moreover, students often aided in transcribing for Alexis students were generally more proficient at transcriptions. Jason felt it would be interesting to do arrangements by other pan composers, such as Jit Samaroo, for a more diverse pan experience. The NIU Steel Band predominantly played calypsos, as well as Latin, classical, and American pop tunes, all arranged by the directors.

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7 Including Leon High School in Tallahassee, Florida, the Universities of Wisconsin, Arizona, and Akron, California State – Long Beach, and Elgin Community College.

8 Jason, interviewed by author, on April 8, 2003.
Members could practice outside of rehearsal, having full access to the rehearsal room and instruments at all times. The band generally performed in DeKalb but also had had performances throughout the eastern United States, South Korea, and Taiwan. The band did not typically play private, entertainment, or festival engagements but rather six to eight educational engagements a year and a large, on-campus performance at the end of the year.

Jason’s goal for the program was to maintain ten pan majors to help with the rehearsals of the bands, as their knowledge filters down to the other players. He hoped the band would continue to participate in international festivals to showcase the program and learn from other steel bands. Incorporating the All-University Band, a ‘training’ band for new musicians, into the overall pan program helped in learning and preparedness for all students. Furthermore Jason hoped to raise his confidence level by directing the All-University Band, as well as be more assertive as a leader. Prospective members are not required to audition, although they must read music. If greater interest in either band developed, Jason assumed the directors would need to incorporate an audition process.

Compared to other bands he has been in, Jason found steel band to be the most fun, energetic, unique, and enjoyable. He never encountered any negative stereotypes in steel band, receiving only encouragement and support from family and friends. Jason wondered if other professors looked down on the program, since it concentrated on music and instruments that were not well-established in the Western system. He attributed the success of the steel band to the efforts of O’Connor and Alexis. With only one instrument type, the directors spent less time addressing individual instrument techniques and more time on the entire ensemble. Jason claimed the close proximity to Chicago for gigs and West Indian population aided in their achievement. The strength of the percussion department contributed to talented membership. He felt people of DeKalb and the general university did not support the steel band as much as the music department. At the same time, the band received very little recognition or financial support for their trip to Trinidad. Paul Bauer, the chair of the music department, rarely cited the steel band when touting the music program. Jason hypothesized pan would be more fully embraced as the group and art form aged.
Jason believed the pan studio would get larger influence because one of Teague’s goals to give as many opportunities to West Indians as possible. The meeting of both worlds has been mutually beneficial in terms of cultures, music styles, knowledge, and technique. He felt it possible to say steel bands are gaining popularity in the United States based on Alexis’ instrument orders. Jason and I agreed that over the past few decades, schools have shown an increased interest in world cultures and a culturally diverse education, valuable for the melting pot of the United States. Trinidadians concert goers attended their concerts to get a taste of home, while others were individuals who purely enjoyed the music. He felt musical benefits from playing pan included increased ability to read complex rhythms, a better sense of time, rhythm section skills, and a better synthesis in other musical ensembles. Personally working with Alexis had improved Jason’s transcription and aural skills.

Steel drums held meaning for Jason in that they were a symbol of energy and power in Trinidad. He enjoyed that pans were 100% post-consumer recycled products when a used oil barrel supplied the raw materials for a new instrument. Pan gave Jason a musical voice. The NIU Steel Band affected the school community by adding another asset to the world music department. Locally, NIU provided pan lessons and at times had a community steel band for children. Playing in a steel band strengthened Jason’s sense of community as it allowed him to meet new people, because in his opinion steel bands seemed to attract “easy going and nice people; a certain type of person that was not stuck up or hoity-toity.” The only Midwest-specific attraction to pan that Jason could envision was helping take minds off cold weather.

I interviewed Wayne, graduate student and musical director for David Rudder, international calypso star. He started playing pans in 1999 and also played guitar. A native of Trinidad, he came to NIU for the pan program. Professionally he had arranged for Trinidadian steel band Skifflebunch for Panorama and was the musical director for the calypso tent Spektakula. His suggestions for the NIU program included more of an historical and cultural perspective and an increased cultural exchange between NIU and University of the West Indies, especially from the American to Trinidad direction.

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9 Wayne, interviewed by author, April 8, 2003.
Comparatively, he found the repertory in the United States to be wider and more challenging. Wayne claimed that until now the academic side of music, such as music theory, notation, social and cultural considerations, did not interest the average Trinidadian panman.

Ian was in his fifth year at Northern Illinois University as a mechanical engineering major. He first learned about pan from his private percussion teacher who graduated from NIU and owned pans made by Alexis. Ian began playing pans during his senior year in high school at Elgin Community College whose director was an NIU graduate. His interest in production and engineering eventually led him to design his own pan stands which he sells online. He wanted to learn how to make pans, but after five years Alexis had not shown him. This disappointed Ian, as he felt Alexis should pass his skills before he retires.

I spoke with the director and founder of the Northern Illinois University Steel Band, G. Allan O’Connor. His first exposure to steel drums came during his final semester as a graduate student at the University of Illinois where the “infectious rhythms” lured him. He exposed his students to steel drums, enhancing their candidacies for positions at other schools. Students have graduated from NIU every year to graduate assistant positions teaching pan. Although he was in the process of retiring in 2003, he was still helping run rehearsals while mentoring Teague to take over the program. O’Connor received unprecedented support from the university staff, which proved a draw for prospective band members. O’Connor said, “If anyone had told me in 1973 where we would be today, I would have told them they were out of their minds.” Major financial support came from Lester Trilla, president of the Lester Trilla Steel Drum Corporation, who had given the program over 300,000 dollars; greater than ninety-eight percent for student scholarships. Contact with Trilla was made in 1991 as his company’s oil barrel composition consistency was the best Alexis had found. When Alexis picked up oil barrels, Trilla came out of his office to get an understanding for what Alexis was doing.

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10 The major venue in which calypso artists perform.
11 Ian, interviewed by author, April 9, 2003.
12 Al O’Connor, interviewed by author, April 9, 2003.
After ten years of experimentation, O’Connor advocated having at least one of every type of pan in the front row in concert with the engine room in the middle. This helped the audience hear each part, which was important, as all timbres were the same. The sound of the ensemble changed over time with new and differently built and tuned instruments. Stylistically the group matured, with their repertory becoming more difficult and varied. Traditionally when the group performed, they wore red nylon jackets with a logo and black slacks: colors of Trinidad and Northern Illinois University. Teague had diplomatically hinted that he wanted to discard that attire in the future.

During the school year the band performed educational programs at public school. In the past they had a ‘little band’ of about seven people to perform club dates, block parties, and weddings, but O’Connor and Alexis tired of the required logistical work. O’Connor felt it was a learning opportunity for those in the ‘little band’, but those not in the ‘little band’ never received the chance to play off campus. Instead of ‘the little band’ they now divide the regular band into two bands which allows performance duties to more evenly divided between all band members, and greater fulfillment of performance requests. Typically the NIU band maintained a ‘concert rep’ which was more formal, and ‘gig rep’ which was easier listening for school children. No admission is charged for university supported concerts as per tradition within the School.

The future of the program includes Teague taking over and O’Connor’s concern for Alexis’ worsening health, knowing at some point the program would lose him. Alexis’ pan building business had slowed down considerably, and he had only one apprentice working with him. O’Connor felt steel bands were becoming more popular in the United States because there were more avenues for musical literature and pan purchasing. People had the option of waiting a long time for professional instruments or less time for medium quality instruments. Unfortunately, according to O’Connor, most percussion professors at universities had no idea how to transcribe a piece, requiring them to buy music from the commercial market.

Educationally the music reading experience was similar to Western ensembles, while the directors provided the West Indian experience through constant drilling, repetition, and learning by rote. Once
it started to click, students realized the value of increased attention span for a total musician. The dynamic range of pan is smaller than other mallet instruments, requiring musicians to use body language as visual cues for audience members. The biggest problem O’Connor had seen, primarily in soloists, was “overplaying” making the sound distorted.

One of the biggest values O’Connor had found, and felt the students shared, was the acceptance of diverse musics. Moreover, O’Connor felt the small West Indian population in Chicago contributed to the attraction of pan in the Midwest. O’Connor ended our interview with this story:

We had a...professor on our music education faculty, who was kind of like a crotchety old fart type of person. ...They used to have this event here...called Spring Fest [which was] a week-long festival, and the student association would usually hire us to open it up, and we would play out on the student center and stuff like that. And he [music education faculty] would just keep going on and on about what a bunch of nonsense this [steel drum music] all was, and I said, “Well look, why don’t come over and hear it sometime and then maybe you could make a decision.” And so I invited him to the opening program and I happened to see him kind of hiding in the back of the audience and everything. And as was always the case, we had a huge crowd there to hear usÉand they all loved it. So we brought the instruments back to this building here and I ran into him later in the afternoon, and I said, “Frank, what did you think?” And he said, “You know what I don’t like about that steel band? There isn’t anybody that doesn’t like it”.

I interviewed Paul Bauer, director of the School of Music. My only question addressed ways in which the NIU steel band had affected school, local, regional, and national communities. The steel band helped the School of Music develop its world music activities to include opportunities in Japanese, Indonesian, Chinese, Indian, and West African music traditions. The diversity of the musical opportunities attracted more diverse student populations, especially in the case of the NIU steel band. Students annually arrived from Trinidad or Tobago to study as pan majors. The work of Cliff Alexis led to innovations in making and tuning pans in the United States, and O’Connor and Alexis both received international recognition as leaders in the steel band movement. The steel band program attracted the attention of a Chicago manufacturer of steel drums, who provided continuing significant financial support to the program, including annual scholarships for international students.

Bauer found the music to be accessible for the general public, and the steel band regularly performed in regional schools. A number of graduates from NIU have started steel bands in public schools and community colleges. Besides these successful outreach activities, the community came in large numbers to campus for the concerts given each semester. The annual spring concerts attracted the largest audiences of any School of Music program. The steel band had attracted recognition and support to the University and School of Music; influenced and spawned other steel band programs in the region and around the country; and culturally enriched lives of the students and the community it serves.

As with Mott, themes of uniqueness, adaptability, and community pervade the Northern Illinois University steel band. The NIU program exhibits pan's adaptable capabilities through its success as a major instrument of study. Students developed traditional Western (notation, theory, transcription) and Trinidadian (aural/oral dissemination, drilling, stylistic) musical techniques. Beginner and ‘pan major’ students assimilated in the same ensemble. The fully chromatic instruments allowed students to play both ‘traditional’ Caribbean styles as well as Western art music. Close to fifty percent of students cited increased musical skills as an affect of playing pan, supporting the notion that instruments can be used in academia to provide a meaningful, well-rounded music education. Regarding school and

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local community contributions, approximately forty percent of NIU students felt the band provided both entertainment and increased culturally diverse awareness. Around twenty-five percent of students first experienced pan through community or high school bands, while collegiate bands accounted for roughly twenty percent. This supports the notion that pan is well integrated into academic and local communities, particularly in the Chicago area. Moreover, contributions have reached further than DeKalb as Cliff Alexis has provided instruments for numerous American programs. The NIU steel band has performed throughout the United States, in South Korea, and Taiwan, and members have gone on to various pan teaching positions and careers. Conversely the Chicago community contributes to NIU by way of the Lester Trilla Steel Drum Corporation, further emphasizing its regional community incorporation.

Roughly forty-five percent of students were interested in pan as a new music opportunity, pointing to its unique nature. Musical diversity was cited for approximately ten percent of responses for affect pan had on students. Distinctiveness promotes students’ and faculty’s identity with pan. Approximately fifteen percent of students considered the steel band an integral part of their life, as did each director.
OBERLIN STEEL

Background

Oberlin College, a private institution, was established when a conservatory of music merged with an undergraduate college of arts and sciences in 1865.\(^1\) In 1980, students Peter Mayer, Mike Geller, and Toby Gordon founded the pan program at Oberlin College. Instruments were brought by students from Chappaqua High School in New York, and at that time the band was named the Can Consortium.\(^2\)

Initially the university did not recognize the group as legitimate, but Conservatory percussion professor Michael Rosen located a space for the instruments and rehearsals.\(^3\) Now known as Oberlin Steel,\(^4\) the students continue to run the band fairly independently of the college. Minor financial backing comes from the Student Finance Committee and the Experimental College Committee. Members of Oberlin Steel were picked each semester to teach the Experimental College (ExCo)\(^5\). Although the band had a faculty advisor, he or she was not involved with the group. Income earned playing gigs was used for instrument upkeep, new instruments, music, sticks, tips, engine room items, clinicians, miscellaneous items, and performance transportation. Student musicians were not paid. Rehearsals occurred twice a week for two hours each, Wednesday nights and Sunday afternoons, while the ExCo met once a week for two hours. Students could only enroll in the ExCo band once due to high demand.\(^6\)

\(^1\) The Oberlin College Conservatory of Music, founded in 1865, is the nation’s oldest continuously operating conservatory. Information about the college can be obtained online at: http://www.oberlin.edu/con/glance.html

\(^2\) Shannon Dudley, email interview by author, September 5, 2002.

\(^3\) Ibid.

\(^4\) The steel band at Oberlin College changed its name from the Can Consortium to Oberlin Steel in 2001.

\(^5\) An institute that allowed students to teach other students in credited courses. No grades were given, but rather the course was pass/fail.

\(^6\) 60 applications with 25 acceptances.
Written Surveys

Through the process of written surveys I gathered the following general information. Most musicians first encountered steel drums in Oberlin, although a few had seen them on television (Reading Rainbow, Police Academy movie, Sesame Street), and one heard them at Chabot Community College in California. Musicians joined the group because it looked like fun, they enjoyed the music, and for social reasons. Playing pan had two general affects on students: new musical (often rhythmic) experiences and new/greater cultural experiences/appreciation. Other reported effects included improved planning, time management, and theory skills, professional and personal connections, happiness, and performance confidence. Students recounted that the band affected the school and local communities primarily through entertainment and educational exposure, increased social and community relations, and a diversified campus experience.

Individual Interviews

*The last names of those interviewed have been omitted for purposes of confidentiality.*

I spoke with four students individually concerning their knowledge of and experiences with Oberlin Steel. Noah, an Oberlin, Ohio native, drum set player, and packing coordinator for the band first heard pan on television. Other notable pan experiences of his youth included the night before commencement known as Illumination, where he saw the Oberlin steel band play downtown for five hundred people. He decided that if he attended Oberlin he would join the band. Noah believed his rock influences affected the sound of Oberlin Steel (O-Steel) as before he joined, the repertory consisted of more easy listening with jazz drummers in the group. Now they play louder and faster with more panoramas, calypsos, and socas in their repertory, although he noted jazzier styles showcased the versatility of the instrument.

Students who wanted to join the group had to audition to join the steel band, however engine room musicians and pan players were treated differently as engine room players by-passed the ExCo

7 Noah, interviewed by author, April 27, 2003

8 Police Academy Five: Assignment: Miami Beach. Upon arrival at the airport, there was a steel drum ensemble playing at the airport.
experience. The ExCo ensemble served as a training and audition group for Oberlin Steel. To audition for the band, students filled out an application and auditioned during their performance at the end of the semester concert. If not accepted, students could join a wait list.

The uniqueness of pan attracted Noah, and he enjoyed the “underground” nature of the instrument. Though a drummer at heart, he loved playing melody as well and felt pans combined the two. Oberlin Steel performed approximately ten times per semester on and off campus. On campus, O-Steel performed for various campus organization functions, the campus coffeehouse, dinner banquets, and Friday gatherings. Within the local community they regularly performed at an annual grass roots parade. Noah noted the band also performed a yearly tour at locations such as Georgia and New England where they played around ten gigs over the course of one week.

Every member was expected to practice outside of rehearsal, which was possible by signing out a key at the student union or having a personal key. Most members learned from sheet music and some by rote, but eventually all memorized their music for pragmatic and aesthetic reasons. Noah felt the goal of the group, as well as his personal goal, was to have a good time and produce a great sound.

Mostly the reputation of the band was good around campus according to Noah, but sometimes people criticized the group for cultural appropriation. He felt certain people in the conservatory did not consider the band a real musical group. Personally, he only received discouragement from his “rock and roll friends” who did not realize “we are pretty hard, we’re not jazzy.” Compared to other bands Noah played in, Oberlin Steel had more members, used more equipment, and was stylistically different, but still was powerful and energetic. He attributed steel band success in Oberlin to people’s enjoyment of the music. Noah noted that although Panyard, Inc. was very close geographically, sixty miles away in Akron, Ohio, they did not communicate and felt they should have.

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9 Over spring break the band picks a city or region and sets up gigs to play. Transportation is provided by a rental truck and personal vehicles.

10 A distributor of steel drums instruments and accessories.
With eight members preparing to graduate in 2003, the following year would necessitate major rebuilding. Noah noted that although steel bands continued to become more common, they remained fairly unknown throughout the United States. Playing in Oberlin Steel benefited Noah through experiencing new music, formal music training, music theory, and the ‘tour’ experience over spring break. Noah identified with the music because he belonged to a small percentage of people who played in a steel band. He became enthusiastic with the concept of Trinidadians adapting to their situation to create pans. Its testimony to humanity was remarkable, and Noah felt that should be taught in schools. He his sense of community strengthened with his experiences educating children. He could not say why pans gained popularity in the Midwest other than Caribbean sounds attract people because it is unique.

My second interview was with Patia, musical director of Oberlin Steel and senior pursuing an individually designed major in Caribbean Studies and ethnomusicology. Her senior thesis explored carnival music of Trinidad, Cuba, and Martinique. In high school in Portland, Maine, she started playing pans her senior year because it was the “cool” thing to do, and she won a lottery to join. The music and challenge were enjoyable, and “They say your instrument finds you.” Patia claimed that in her high school not everyone read music; individual practice and intense drilling were crucial. She enrolled in the ExCo band during her freshman year and became part of Oberlin Steel her sophomore year. As the director, she played most of the different instruments in the band. The challenge of percussion, timbre, pan mixed with other instruments, the instruments’ accessibility, panorama bands, parts of the standard repertory, and the small community of pannists who knew each other were cited as enjoyable characteristics of the art form. “I went to the workshop in Morgantown this summer and it is such a small community they can bring in the best clinicians to work with 100 people or 60...Robbie

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11 Patia, interviewed by author, April 27, 2003

12 This band was very involved in the local community performing at area schools, community fund raisers, and annual festivals.

13 Famous steel pan performer, composer, and arranger.
Greenidge\textsuperscript{13} knew my name. You don’t get there anywhere else.” Her dislikes included inability to vary the tone beyond banging, parts of the standard repertory, and the tone depending on the individual instrument.

Prior to her directorship, Patia’s musical background included classical and jazz piano, guitar, flute, and jazz music theory. At Oberlin she accompanied modern dance classes, took music theory, and music history. Her responsibilities to the band ended with the musical portion of the band; other members performed other roles. Oberlin Steel had its own panyard, which contained some original pans, and some instruments purchased from Ellie Mannette and Cliff Alexis. Unused pans were stored or donated for the establishment of new programs.\textsuperscript{14} Oberlin Steel instrumentation included leads, double tenors, double seconds, cellos, quadrophonics, and basses. In rehearsal, the high range pans faced the rest of the band.

Patia noted red and black attire was worn for formal performances; for less formal gigs musicians sometimes wore a different color from head to toe emulating a rainbow. Other times members wore themed clothing, such as 1980s attire. They “never ever wear Hawaiian shirts, ever, ever, never, ever”. More gigs were played in the spring than in the fall (roughly eight each semester) due to new membership being greater in the fall. Annually they played Halloween for the College Hanukah party and the Fireman’s Ball in Elyria, but public school performances were uncommon because of their own class schedules. However, many schools were visited on the spring break ‘tour’. The Oberlin Steel band repertory mainly consisted of calypso and soca “standards” including “Bee’s Melody”, “Fire Down Below”, “Pan in A Minor”, and “The Hammer”. They also played original compositions of previous band members. Tunes ranged from “party music” to background music depending on the performance, although not many jazz or classical pieces were in the repertory in 2003. Patia longed for a greater variety of tunes.\textsuperscript{15} Oberlin Steel does not charge admission for campus concerts, but requests payment when hired.

\textsuperscript{14} Some of the old pans were taken by member Jackie Davis who went to Alaska to teach. She brought up a lead and seconds that the band no longer used.

\textsuperscript{15} The band attempted not to purchase from Panyard, Inc. anymore.
Advantages of a student-run ensemble include complete control over their music and finances. Disadvantages included a large loss of information when members graduated, causing a loss of history of the band itself, playing technique, and how a piece should sound. They often relied on information being passed down orally within the band, or through students attaining information at workshops or when pan clinicians visited Oberlin.  

The band had an official mission statement that pertained to playing the traditional music of Trinidad and Tobago, educating others, and teaching the ExCo. Informally, according to Patia, they aimed to play well enough to get gigs, have fun, and continue the legacy of the people who started the band. Patia’s personal goal was to have a good time, be musically challenged, have a musical outlet, and perform. She hoped to improve the performance level of the ensemble, play panoramas and other interesting repertory, and direct productive but fun rehearsals. As a graduating senior, she wanted to pass on knowledge about the band and rhythms. Unsure of her continuation in the pan art form after graduation, she felt she had reached academic saturation point. At the same time, Patia always enjoyed being a source of knowledge for individuals seeking pan information.

Non-pan people viewed the group in different ways. According to Patia, some people did not know they existed, some were enormous fans, and some were ambivalent. Roughly five years earlier there was an incident with the refusal of an African-American into the band. Not admitted into Oberlin Steel, the female African-American cited her race as a reason while ensemble members denied these accusations. As time passed and with the refused student’s graduation, the issue subsided. There was also a perception held by some band members that the percussion department head thought Oberlin Steel would hinder desired percussion technique. They accepted students who were excited and committed, and consideration for an individual’s music performance opportunities was significant. Most students had some musical background but no other musical outlet; however the 2002-2003 band boasted four conservatory students.

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16 Cited workshops and clinicians were the Mannette Steel Drum Workshop, Tom Miller, and Gary Gibson.

17 The most enrolled in the recent past.
Unlike other ensembles in which Patia had been a member, the band was self-run, democratic, and everyone wanted to be there. She felt steel bands were successful in Oberlin, and becoming more visible across the United States. They gained popularity because those involved with the art form were very passionate. Moreover, Patia cited the presence of key Trinidadian figures such as Cliff Alexis, Ellie Mannette, and the pan community in New York City as contributing to the dissemination of pan through the United States. Lastly, Patia felt non-musicians learned easily on steel drums. Previous members of Oberlin Steel moved on to play with other bands, started their own bands, and taught lessons.\textsuperscript{18}

Pans had personal meaning for Patia because she played several years and developed many long lasting relationships throughout her playing. Academically she learned about the music, instruments, and culture allowing her to educate others. Pans pushed her toward studying Caribbean music, which became a big part of her life. In directing the band, she became skilled at dealing with people, presenting information tactfully, leading a group, and teaching music. She did not feel Oberlin Steel had affected the Oberlin community significantly as “many other ensembles existed; they were merely another group”. Although she was unsure that there was any special attraction to pan in the Midwest, Patia felt a special network for pan in the Midwest existed, largely due to people such as Ellie Mannette and Cliff Alexis who had settled there and the presence of Panyard, Inc.

My third interview was with Oliver, originally from California, a member of Oberlin Steel, part of the conservatory, and an economics major.\textsuperscript{19} His first exposure to pans occurred at a summer camp in Berkeley, California. He joined Oberlin Steel for a new music outlet, and to relieve stress and meet people. His complications with the ensemble included the large time commitment for rehearsals and frequent performances.

While the musical director organized rehearsals and offered suggestions, every member had equal input, which Oliver enjoyed, and rehearsals were fairly lax. Participation in “check-in”, a twenty minute session where members discussed any topic, varied from complaint sessions to general discussion

\textsuperscript{18} Locations included Washington D.C., Fairbanks, Alaska, and northern Massachusetts.

\textsuperscript{19} Oliver, interviewed by author, April 30, 2003.
on personal daily events from each member. Oliver felt the purpose of the check-in was to increase group morale and bonding, because the members did not see each other much outside of rehearsals. The band took any gig that would pay aside from political gigs. On tour, school children treated the band members like rock stars. He found tours beneficial as he anticipated their similarities to what his life would be like as a professional musician. The band tried to make performances as festive as possible by flashing big smiles and visibly enjoying themselves. Oliver felt O-Steel should improve their ‘background music’ abilities, as some audiences found the band too loud.

Regarding the conservatory, Oliver noted most of his conservatory friends paid little attention to nearly all non-conservatory groups as they were surrounded by music. “There certainly was not disdain.” Oliver believed he was the first conservatory student in Oberlin Steel in recent past, for which he felt proud. Like other ensembles in which he was a member, Oliver wanted to fix the small mistakes he continually made when playing. Musically, pans improved Oliver’s sense of rhythm and ability to sight read difficult rhythms. Although Oberlin Steel was more fun and relaxed than other ensembles in which he played, at times he wished for more organization, and did not understand all the musical decisions.

Oliver felt the steel band was successful as they had a good reputation around campus, and were hired for parties. However, a number of band members felt their fan response decreased in 2003. He noted one member, Cat, hypothesized that their lack of “wackiness” factored in the poor fan response. When selecting people for the group, they tried to balance musicianship with stage presence. With several members prepared to graduate, Oliver was both concerned about the future of the group and excited for new possibilities. It required careful consideration to keep the future of the band on the right track.

Playing in Oberlin Steel strengthened Oliver’s sense of community within the band, especially due to ‘check-in’. However, he did not feel any closer to the greater Oberlin community. When he thought of Oberlin’s collegiate culture, irresponsible politics and student protests came to mind, with which he did not want to have a connection. This mindset may have influenced his lack of connection between playing pan and a greater sense of community outside of the ensemble. Regardless, Oliver felt Oberlin
Steel had affected the larger Oberlin community by providing them with enjoyable entertainment: a ‘non-protesting student’ contribution.

Oliver felt Ellie Mannette contributed to the pan art form in the Midwest by providing resources. He did not know of any specific cultural magnet for pan in the Midwest. If anything, he presumed, the culture of the Midwest would NOT lend itself to steel bands.

Lastly, I conducted an interview with Lily from San Francisco, an English major and performance coordinator for Oberlin Steel. She first saw pans watching Sesame Street as a child, and wanted to play them from that point forward. Her first playing experience came her senior year of high school with the Chabot College Panhandlers. She enrolled in the ExCo her first semester at Oberlin and began playing in Oberlin Steel at the end of her freshman year. Lily claimed a number of people from the Oberlin group had moved to the Bay Area in California and from the Bay Area to Oberlin.

Lily enjoyed the freedom of dancing while playing, the accessibility of playing without reading music, and the timbre. Learning by rote made the process more difficult at first, but the lack of expectation of music literacy removed the stress from her overall experience. Her learning process included observing other band members, and making audio tapes of rehearsals. Lily disliked the cultural appropriation issues that made her question whether or not she should play pan as a white, American woman. She felt those considerations were important, however. As the performance coordinator she was the contact person for concerns such as directions, money, length of time, and attire. The spring semester of 2003 brought many more engagements to the band than in the past three years. Consequently, Oberlin Steel refused a handful of engagements, which had never been done before. She wished they could have done more public school performances to share with the community, but performance requests consistently came too late.

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20 Lily, interviewed by author, April 30, 2003.

21 Lily’s brother attended a middle school geared toward the arts that had a steel band. He was friends with the director, who also directed the Chabot Panhandlers. He brought lead pan home over the weekend and the director invited Lily to play with the Panhandlers on Tuesday nights.
The band tried to inspire listeners to dance, as they viewed themselves as a dance band. According to Lily, the goal of Oberlin Steel was to have fun, give students a chance to play music, share steel band music with the college, local, and national community, and make music. Criteria for admission into the band included personal, social, and musical compatibility. During her time the band changed their name from the Can Consortium to Oberlin Steel. The name changed with their CD release in the fall of 2001 because of the confusion of can with pan. Persons from Trinidad told them the instruments were not cans, and band members were already aware of that. After they contacted as many alumni as possible and received approval, they changed it.

Lily benefited from playing steel drums by learning about music, playing for an audience, and becoming part of a global pan community. She also learned about Trinidad, different rhythms, and rhythmical concepts. In the future she planned to have her own pan, play on her own and with Chabot, and move to England to play pan. Furthermore, Lily planned to go to Trinidad with Patia in a couple of years. Pans were meaningful to Lily in that everyone in her family was a musician and pan became her voice.

Lily believed any musical group that was well-known, enduring, and not part of the conservatory played an important part of the campus and community. Pans strengthened her sense of community through her relationships with other people, including friendships with other students, working with the town, office people, and community members. Being the performance coordinator was great professional experience. Lily felt there was an attraction to pan in the Midwest, but not necessarily because of the Midwest.

Not surprisingly, themes of uniqueness, adaptability, and community were found in Oberlin Steel. Oberlin particularly embraced uniqueness and community. The “underground” (not ‘mainstream’, unique) character of pan attracted Noah. He noted the uniqueness of pans may have helped their popularity in the Midwest. Oliver found pride in being the first conservatory student in Oberlin Steel in recent history. Roughly half the students remarked steel drums gave them a new music opportunity, and twenty-five percent a different cultural perspective. Approximately forty percent decided to play pan...
because it seemed fun compared to other musical experiences they had. With such a small community of players, Patia was frequently contacted for her specialized knowledge.

As explained by Noah, the pan itself is easily adapted to many situations; it successfully combines melodic and rhythmic components. Certain steel drums focus more on one of these elements, allowing players to focus on their abilities, or work on their weaknesses. Patia believed non-musicians easily learned on steel drums. While most O-Steel members learned using sheet music, Lily learned by rote. Conservatory, non-musicians, beginners, veterans, notation, and rote all coalesced. In contrast to Mott and NIU, Oberlin was run entirely by students. By distributing jobs, each student played a key role in the musical and logistical success of the ensemble. Although the information turnover was high, Oberlin Steel has existed for over twenty years.

Student musicians were concerned with education; several members mentioned the importance of educating school children, both in Oberlin and throughout the United States while on tour. Approximately fifty percent of Oberlin Steel felt their contributions to the community were educational. However, members also identified with entertainment ideals as forty percent of responses noted. Around sixty-two percent of students first encountered pan by way of academic programs, particularly Oberlin Steel itself. As the gig coordinator, Lily felt pans strengthened her sense of community through her working relationships with people in the town, and friendships with students and community members. With such a small community of players, Patia was able to personally know several, top-name pannists.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this research through a statistical and reflexive approach. In understanding the attractiveness of pan in the Midwestern United States, the most significant suppositions include the uniqueness of the instrument, its adaptability, and the concepts behind community. Although these deductions may not be exclusive to the Midwest, they significantly influence the growth and development of pan in this region, especially within academia. Steel drums and steel bands continue to gain popularity in the Midwest and are found in all areas of the music industry including recording, broadcasting, performance, publishing, and media coverage. (See Fig. 1-3.)

For each of the programs studied, two response categories were consistently present regarding initial pan encounters: college and television. This shows that pan has infiltrated the Midwest significantly at a local or community level within academia, and at a popular culture level within mass media. College (or academic programs in general) was the most common response for each of the groups. (See Fig. 4-6.)
Question One

When did you first learn about steel drums?

- Family
- Festival
- TV/Movie
- Internet
- Reggae
- College

Fig 1 Mott Middle and Community College

When did you first learn about steel drums?

- Television
- High School
- Caribbean
- Community
- College
- Family

Fig 2 Northern Illinois University

What affect has playing steel drums had on you?

- New Music
- Exposure
- Fun
- Relaxation
- Unique Identity
- Increased Skills
- Other

How does playing pan strengthen your sense of community?

- New Programs
- Entertainment
- Increased Awareness
- Recognition
- Expression
- Other

When did you first learn about steel drums?

- Television
- College

Question Two

Why did you decide to play steel drums?

- Drums
- Curriculum
- New Musica
- Asked to Play
- Unique
- Sound
- Other

How does playing pan strengthen your sense of community?

- Entertainment
- Education
- Diversified
- Campus
- Constructive Activity
- Fun
- Reputation
- Cultural Exposure
- Professional Experience
- Personal Relations

TRINIDADIAN STEEL DRUM (PAN) BANDS IN THREE GREAT LAKES STATES... By Janine Louise Tiffe
Why did you decide to play steel drums?

- New Music Opportunity
- Program Reputation
- Fun
- Asked to Play
- Cultural
- Social
- Environmental

Fig 5 Northern Illinois University

Why did you decide to play steel drums?

- Fun
- Music
- Social

Fig 6 Oberlin College
New musical experiences, fun, and social reasons1 were three responses out of seven that were cited in each steel band program as a reason for starting pan. At Mott the largest percent of members responded with the sound of the instrument; at NIU, new music opportunities (stylistic, rhythmic, performance practice); and at Oberlin, “fun”. This reflects the nature of both the program at NIU as an intensive pan program and Oberlin as a band that focuses on providing entertainment throughout their communities. The “sound” response appears to satisfy the aim of the Mott programs. In this case, the sound of pans provided an effective draw for students who were attracted by nontraditional classes and techniques. (See Fig. 7-9).

Question Three

![Pie chart](image)

Fig 7 Mott Middle and Community College

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1 Fun and social reasons are included in the “other” category for the Mott chart.
What affect has playing steel drums had on you?

- New Music Exposure
- Cultural Exposure
- Professional Experience
- Personal Relations

TRINIDADIAN STEEL DRUM (PAN) BANDS IN THREE GREAT LAKES STATES...

By Janine Louise Tiffe
New and improved musical skills and exposure, and new/greater cultural experiences/appreciation were the two response categories found for each of the programs. These musical experiences ranged from a foundation for formal music education (Mott and Oberlin) to knowledge and understanding of a new music tradition for vocations and professional careers (all three programs). This is due in part to the variety of programs to which pan can be adapted. Moreover, new musical experiences were a direct result of the uniqueness of steel drums.

Question Four

![Diagram showing how playing pan strengthens the sense of community.](image)

Fig. 10 Mott Middle and Community College

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2 Cultural reasons are included in the “other” category for the Mott chart.
How does playing pan strengthen your sense of community?

- New Programs
- Entertainment
- Increased Awareness
- Expression
- Recognition

Why did you decide to play steel drums?

- Fun
- Music
- Social

When did you first learn about steel drums?

- High School
- College
- Community
- Caribbean
- Television

What affect has playing steel drums had on you?

- Integral Part of Life
- Travel
- Outlet
- Increased Musical Skills
- Cultural Awareness
- Musical Diversity
- Appreciation for
- Dedication

How does playing pan strengthen your sense of community?

- New Programs
- Entertainment
- Increased Awareness
- Recognition
- Expression

Fig. 11 Northern Illinois University

Fig. 12 Oberlin College
Entertainment and education were common, and well supported answers for each program. The data diverged at Mott which additionally cited togetherness and constructive activities as substantial. Moreover several of the students cited the band itself as a family during personal interviews, bringing a more tight-knit community element to the band.

Uniqueness

While many Trinidadians and West Indians live in larger, metropolitan areas of the United States, particularly New York City, they are fairly scarce throughout the Midwest and none had any direct influence on the establishment of the three academic programs studied here. Although DeKalb is sixty five miles from Chicago, this had no direct connection to the establishment of the Northern Illinois University Steel Band. Bonnie Wade noted that populations of culturally homogenous people seek out diversity when it is not already found in the population, and this may be the case with steel drums in the Midwest. For example, Erica felt steel drums were successful in Flint because they were “different, and everyone likes something different.” Many people interviewed and surveyed cited the uniqueness and sound of pan. Several students at Mott and Oberlin noted that because not many people play pan, it personally gave them a sense of uniqueness and identity. Band member Andrew and director James Coviak from Mott claimed the instrument actually defined them in certain ways. Al O’Connor remarked that the rhythms were infectious.

Adaptability

Steel drums utilize a fully chromatic, Western tuning system that has facilitated their spread through the Midwest and integration into academic programs. Directors can easily find written arrangements, and for those that do not read musical notation, the common Trinidadian technique of rote learning can be utilized. Both techniques are frequently used in the United States. Rapid spread of music through written notation has also allowed many directors who know very little about the art form have successful programs without constructing their own arrangements and compositions. Unfortunately, this limits them

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as they must rely on published music available today. Initial instrument purchase cost is reasonable for a small ensemble, and bands can generally support themselves financially through paid performances.

Mott, Northern Illinois University, and Oberlin have different pan programs regarding organization and goals: Mott was established to reach underserved, at-risk youth, NIU includes a more professional and Trinidadian perspective, and Oberlin is a student-run performance band, and yet they all thrive in their respective surroundings. I hypothesize that over time the sound of Oberlin has changed much more than that of Mott or NIU, because the membership and directorship constantly changed. Pan has also moved from its historical use in Trinidad for community events to the stage in the United States, further demonstrating the adaptability of pan.

Steel drums are both rooted in the community and professional realms, which give players more options. This art form can adapt from “non-musical” beginners to serious musicians, and everyone can gain from it. It is an excellent addition or substitution for more traditional Western instruments in music education by exposing students to a variety of musical styles, including Western art music, complex rhythmic concepts, traditional music theory, and chord symbols. Mott Middle College demonstrated the acceptance of pan as an educational tool in public school systems and community colleges.

Community

Although most participants claimed they had an increased sense of community through their steel band experiences, personally and within their school, local, national, and international communities, many also expressed a sense of isolation. They did not know what was going on in the larger pan scene throughout their area and United States. James Coviak of Mott felt his bands were “out there” in isolation of the larger steel band scene, and several students could not comment on the growth or significance of pan in the Midwest. The bands at Oberlin College and Northern Illinois University had a network of other bands, workshops, or other pannists with which they associated, creating some pockets and webs of pan communication through the region and country. For example, Northern Illinois University

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linked with the University of Illinois, the University of Akron, and several other university programs. A wider platform of communication may bring standardization of instruments and repertory more quickly. Unifying themes may come from clinicians who travel the country. This may eventually provide for a larger web of information and band association. Its uniqueness and smallness contributes to a sense of community within the art form as it is fairly small. Particularly during the early days of pan in the Midwest, there was a significant need for communication and information exchange in Midwest, and other regions throughout the United States. There were no music publishers but instead music swapping between programs.

Steel bands started in a community atmosphere. They continue to flourish in that light helping students become parts of a community. Numerous participants from Mott identified the band as a second family. Pan builds communities within groups and within the greater community itself. The lack of a conductor during performances symbolizes the communal aspect, where everyone works together and listens to each other to produce a product, instead of focusing on one individual. During the formative years of pan in Trinidad, panmen had exceptionally bad reputations but in the Midwest pannists had no reputations. This lack of preconceived notions of the social context seen by the community may have helped the spread of pan throughout the Midwest. Each steel band evaluated gave back to their communities primarily through education and entertainment. The Mott Steelheads and Middle and Community College Steel Bands gave back to their community by embracing area youths, providing students with constructive activities to keep them off the streets and out of trouble.

As the steel band art form continues to spread across the Midwestern and greater United States, one can only hypothesize on its future expansion. While instruments and publications become increasingly accessible and pannists graduate and start their own bands, the sounds of steel will become increasingly audible and visible in American culture. Their versatility and accessibility has proven useful on a number of levels: academic and community oriented programs, music education, and the music

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5 Tom Miller, interviewed by author, February 24, 2003. The steel band program at the University of Akron was founded in 1982 by Larry Snider. Snider was a student of Tom Siwe at the University of Illinois, which had a steel band program. At that time many bands in the Midwest were swapping music because there was no “published” sheet music source.

6 Tom Miller, interviewed by author, February 24, 2003.
business. The pan art form in the Midwest and United States has influenced the view and use of pan in Trinidad. As Americans bring their influences, it helps bring a new level of legitimacy to pan. It shows that the rest of the world recognizes the importance of the pan movement. On a more basic level, it brought several Trinidadians to the United States to earn degrees in pan.7

As an insider, a pan player of the same peer/age group as most respondents, responders may have purposefully or inadvertently skewed their answers. Students, teachers, and administrators had different goals for each of their programs. Pieced together, significant elements became apparent. Pans are highly visible in academia and mass media, and their sound and musical opportunities attract musicians and listeners. Band members obtain a range of musical skills and cultural experiences, as well as fostering many levels of communities. By combining all the parts, we can generate the whole of what the pan movement represents in the Midwest and United States. These data may provide an avenue or foundation for increased multi-cultural education, better cultural awareness and sensitivities, and present better members of society as both students and adults. Academic Midwestern bands are being used to provide entertainment and education for community members, as well as to bring music education to students making stronger, happier, healthier, more involved, and openminded members of humanity. As seen during the early development of pan in Trinidad, vagabonds were transformed into respected members of society over time. Similarly, pan in the Midwestern United States brings positive change, but in addition, new purpose and meaning to the steel drum art form through uniqueness, adaptability, and community.

“As an illustration, in my home town of Wichita, there were no record stores which carried Caribbean records, and, of course, no internet at the time. I had about three records from the Folkways collection and National Geographic that served as my only resource for what these instruments were used for in their native home. But these records were mostly historical, and I knew from hanging a little with Andy Narell what the potential was. He taught me a few nice Kitch\textsuperscript{1} tunes, and always had a few tapes with him. And, of course, I had been absorbing his recordings like a sponge. But in his absence, there was no one to turn to. I learned a lot of fiddle tunes on the pans, and, as a fan of composer Steve Reich, even composed some minimalist pieces for the steel drum band. I transcribed most of the classics I heard on the Folkways and National Geographic records I had (“Queen of the Bands”, “Play Mas”, etc.), but had to compose my own calypso songs for our band based upon what little I knew of the style. This had interesting, though not always good, results.

“One day, when working as a bellhop at the local Holiday Inn, I picked up three men from the airport there on business in the hotel limo. Their accents told me they were Caribbean, and I immediately spun my head around and said ‘Where are you guys from?’

“‘Trinidad...it’s a little island in...’

“…and I jumped right in and said ‘I play pan!!!’ These guys could not believe that someone in Wichita, Kansas played pan.

“They tried tipping me, and I wouldn’t take their money. Instead, I wrote down my address on a piece

\textsuperscript{1} Shortened name for calypsonian Aldwin “Lord Kitchener” Roberts.
of paper and asked them to send me records from Trinidad. I took good care of those guys while they were in town for a few days.

“And, lo and behold, about a month later, a package in the mail with 10 or so records. The Despers, Renegades, a couple of Panorama recordings, Exodus, Starlift, Fonclaire...you name it. All the good stuff. I feasted on those records for years.

“And that’s how I had to discover the native music of pan. Before I had those records...the whole genre was an almost empty slate to me. Others will have similar stories.

“It was a clumsy, clumsy beginning for many of us.”

WHY THEY PLAY STEEL DRUMS

When asked why they were attracted to steel drums, students responded they are neat, new, soothing, cool, exotic, unique, different, rhythmic, and eccentric and they look fun and shiny. Some students were looking to get involved with music (either by choice or had to dictated by the curriculum), while others had liked and/or wanted to play drums, sometimes because friends or family had played them previously. Still others wanted to broaden their horizons and get a varied and diverse background in music and musical instruments. It was of interest for me to know where these at-risk students from Flint and the surrounding area first learned about pan. The most common response was when they signed up for the class, but also several had their first experience by witnessing the Steelheads or other Mott Steelbands play in a concert. Other initial experiences were reportedly from festivals, movies, television, computer downloads, listening to reggae music, workshops, and family members. These primary encounters show that the program is reaching out and affecting the school and local Flint communities.

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2 Names of some Trinidadian steel bands.
When asked how pan affected them, students replied with a variety of answers. While a few claimed there was no affect, most felt it has either affected their educational and musical skills or attitudes. Students reportedly paid better attention, opened musically to other instruments and had helped them keep a rhythm and beat, made them aware of other cultures’ musics and had expanded their musical backgrounds and studies in music, more organized and better memory, furthered knowledge of music theory, better attendance, increased determination, given a new challenge, sense of accomplishment and ability to make music, relax/anti-stress (3), increased reflexes, a starting point for their music education, and helped with group skills. Others maintain that they have learned to play a new instrument (3), obtained enjoyment (8), made music fun, made them happy, feel better, feel special, and that they now play the drums differently now at their church. Lastly I asked how steel band had affected their community, both school and local. While several responded that they did not know (9), some had no response (2), and others claimed it had not had an affect (7), others revealed affects steel drums have had on their communities. It gives the community a chance to hear different kinds of music (2), keeps kids focused and off the streets, an opportunity to attend concerts (2), community enjoys the group (7), boosts students’ egos (2), keeps them motivated to keep working, given a “name” to the school, gives students an opportunity not found in other schools, brought people together (2), made it exciting, it gave hope and changed lives, and it has brought people together regardless of nationality.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Alexis’ love has always been arranging, not building and tuning. When NIU competed in the World Steel Band Festival, Alexis changed the band’s arrangement between semi-finals and finals. This moved them from 7th to 2nd place, which made many European bands upset because they did not know they could change the arrangement through the course of the competition. As a Trinidadian, Alexis knew panorama bands did that and he applied that rule to the festival.
WRITTEN SURVEY

First encounters with steel drums included the following: from a percussionist who came to play in the pit orchestra for their high school musical, and his personal enrollment in beginning steel band during his freshman year of college;³ the NIU steel concert⁴ her freshman year; a two week summer camp in Trinidad; a band performed at her high school; had a steel band class in high school;⁵ carnival in Jamaica in the 1980s in high school; on Sesame Street;⁶ the 1995 Milwaukee festival which showcased “Bakra Bata”;⁷ television; at Elgin Community College⁸, at SUNY Potsdam in an undergraduate clinic; a Trinidadian who grew up with pan; was Liam Teague perform with the Elgin Symphony Orchestra; a percussion conference as a high school junior and joined as undergraduate at Arizona State; at Milwaukee’s Summerfest and the Birch Creek Music Center in July 1996, fall semester at Harper College in 1996.⁹

When asked how and why students became involved with pan the following responses were collected: the sound and chance to play a style of music that required “grooving”; well-respected program combined with a quality, authentic education about Trinidadian music; high-energy and fun; asked to play in the band; distinct sound and knowing there was a fairly stable and growing Caribbean and pan community in the Maryland and D.C. areas; previously had a fun workshop experience with NIU; all of the “cool kids” in high school were doing it; found learning by rote liberating; drafted to play at community college by a music theory professor; the energy, music, people, and instruments; general

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³ In California at a Bands of America Summer Percussion Symposium workshop done by Al O’Connor.
⁴ Two people
⁵ Two people
⁶ Two people
⁷ Steel band from Seattle
⁸ Northwest Chicago Suburb
⁹ Chicago Suburb
interest for musics of other cultures along with the pleasing sound and the act of recycling; it was cool and exclusive in their high school; unique musical and educational experience for a future educator; percussion graduate student who felt pressure to do so combined with rumors that the NIU group was excellent; natural attraction due to growing up Trinidadian as an essential part of their culture; it is neat; unique timbre and tone quality; fun groove; initially hesitant but once he joined his community college group he was instantly attracted.

Responses to “How has playing steel drums affected you?” included: It is a big part of their life now and plan to always play as it provides the chance to travel to Trinidad; increased sight reading skills; increased knowledge of voice leading of inner voices; first-hand experience of a different musical culture and outlook on music; broaden musical outlook; exposure to calypso; greatly increased rhythm reading skills as a singer; increased cultural awareness; brought closer to her Caribbean roots (in the USA), and improved her musicianship and confidence; increased musicality and reading music especially bass clef; primary musical outlet that sparked his interest for Trinidadian and pan-Caribbean cultures as a whole, and increased his rhythmic vocabulary and sense of pulse; increased interest in arranging and composing music enough to quit her job and return to school for music; cheers them up and is a reminder that music is fun; increased rhythmical skills, groove, musical abilities, and brain dexterity; personal internalization and movement when playing; improved sight reading and technical skills; gained knowledge of the culture and history of pan, moved from Florida to Illinois and learned to read music, also traveled to Korea for free, has made friends, and spent money on instruments and music; more culturally aware, will be a better educator via cultural experiences; clarinetist’s exposure to reading bass clef; chance to work with non-classical styles and calypso; expanded musical tastes and appreciations; pan playing has become their passion in life and has exposed them to many different styles of music that otherwise probably would not have; helped them feel Caribbean, Latin rhythms, clave, and off-beats; opened to new styles (soca and calypso) along with achieving an edge as a percussionist being proficient at pan; cultural exposure; direction in their life and career, and desire to compose and their involvement has prevented them from dying “I honestly believe that if I were not
involved in pan at this point in life, I would die (literally)”; better understanding for the dedication and hard work necessary to perform music; a greater respect for musicians knowing the disciple and effort they put in for proficiency and expertise.

The final question on the written survey was “How has your steel band affected both your school and local community?” which revealed the following results: in his California State University - Long Beach experience the band was the only ensemble that made money by playing out, and also was instrumental in starting two high school programs in the area; community enjoyment of concerts and increased awareness of non-Western music and cultural diversity; NIU program has become recognized nationally and internationally causing the School of Music to recognize the validity of world music styles; unites audience members through the sense of fun; other than barbed wire, the NIU Steel Band is the only thing to put DeKalb on the map; in Maryland pan has become a phenomenon allowing the student’s mom to start a youth group in 1996, since then high school and other groups have been popping up, teaches children in urban communities about music while having fun with immediate results; compared to his high school and Florida State University, the NIU band receives little notoriety for two possible reasons: the suburban nature of northern Illinois or focus of the group on national and international impact; made a name for NIU in the pan world; shows the community’s contemporary approach to music as well as diversity and depth of both communities; gives people a way to express themselves constructively.

10 Six responses
11 Seven responses
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE MOTT STEELHEADS

(Please use back and/or extra sheets if necessary. Please be as SPECIFIC as possible)

1. What is your: Name Age

   • Title (student, steel band president, etc. – if applicable)

   • Major (if applicable)

   • How long have you been playing steel drums in general, and with this group

   • What instrument(s)/voice(s) do you play in the band

2. What is your first memory of pan? (both hearing about and first personal experience)

3. How and why did you decide to become involved with steel drums? What attracted you to them?

4. How have steel drums and playing steel drums effected you?

5. How has your steel band effected your community, meaning both school community and local community?

Please include your email address below (and/or phone number) if you wouldn’t mind me contacting you, if I have further questions, or need clarifications to one of your answers.

Thank you very, VERY much for your time!!!
QUESTIONS FOR DIRECTORS/
PERSONAL INTERVIEWS/ADMINISTRATOR

1. What is your: Name, Age, Title (administrator, director, student, steel band president, etc. – if applicable), Major (if applicable), How long have you been playing steel drums in general, and with this group, What instrument(s)/voice(s) do you play in the band?

2. What is your first memory of pan? (both hearing about and first personal experience)

3. When, how and why did you decide to become involved with steel drums? What attracted you to them?

4. Under what umbrella is your program run? In other words, is it affiliated with a university? Who is it being run by? What is their background/training? How is the ensemble managed?

5. What is the nature of your program?

6. How is the ensemble run? How often and when do you rehearse? Who attends rehearsals? How are rehearsals organized and designed?

7. How and where did you get your pans? Why? How are the instruments arranged for performances?

8. What does the band wear for performances?

9. How often, where and what type of gigs do you do? What are performances like? (In other words: For what events and purposes is your group used? For what occasions/venues does your group perform?)
10. What is your repertory like? (What musical styles does your group play?) Why? What has your repertory been like over past 5 years? What has your repertory been like over the course of the history of your program?

11. How often is sheet music used? Where do you get your charts? Do students write or arrange?

12. Do you charge admission? Why?

13. What is the goal of your group? What is your personal goal in/for the group?

14. Is there any type of reputation, stigma, or label commonly attached to the members of your steel band? Have you ever received any resistance from others (peers, administrators, audience members, friends or family, etc.) because you are involved with steel band?

15. Have any of your members gone on to start their own steel bands?

16. How does playing in a steel band compare to other bands that you have been in? Do you think steel band would change if there were the presence of a conductor? Why or Why not?

17. Why this town?

18. Why this art form?

19. Where is your group headed? Where will it be in 10 years?

20. Do you feel that steel bands are becoming more or less popular in the USA? Why?

21. What is the demographic nature of your audience? What kinds of people come to your performances? What do they find appealing about steel band?
22. What kind of educational goals do steel drums achieve? What do you get out of playing? What are the pedagogical aspects involved in teaching pan?

23. Has the sound of the group changed over time? If so, how and why has it?

24. Do steel drums hold any kind of meaning for you?

25. How have steel drums and playing steel drums effected you?

26. How has your steel band effected your community, meaning both school community and local community?

27. Does playing in steel band strengthen your feeling or sense of community?

28. What is the attraction of pan in the Midwest?
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR NIU STEEL BANDS

(Please use the back and/or extra sheets if necessary. Please be as SPECIFIC as possible)

1. What is your: Name Age
   • Title (student, steel band president, etc. - if applicable)
   • Major (if applicable)
   • How long have you been playing steel drums at NIU? Prior to NIU?
   • What instrument(s)/voice(s) do you play in the band?

2. What/When was your first encounter with steel drums? (both hearing about and first personal experience)

3. How and why did you decide to become involved with steel drums? What attracted you to them?

4. How have steel drums and playing steel drums effected you?

5. How has your steel band effected your community, meaning both school community and local community?

Please include your email address below (and/or phone number) if you wouldn’t mind me contacting you, if I have further questions, or need clarifications to one of your answers.

Thank you very, VERY much for your time!!!
QUESTIONS FOR DIRECTORS

1. What is your: Name, Age, Title (administrator, director, student, steel band president, etc. – if applicable), How long have you been playing steel drums in general, and with this group, What instrument(s)/voice(s) do you play in the band?

2. What is your first memory of pan? (both hearing about and first personal experience)

3. When, how and why did you decide to become involved with steel drums? What attracted you to them? What do you like and dislike about them?

4. What is your background/training?

5. Under what umbrella is your program run? Is it affiliated with a university? Who runs it? How is it run?

6. How often and when do you rehearse? Who attends rehearsals? How are rehearsals organized and designed? Tell me about your rehearsal space. Do students practice outside of rehearsal time? How?

7. How and where did you get your pans? Why?

8. How are the instruments arranged for rehearsals? Performances?

9. What does the band wear for performances?

10. How often, where and what type of gigs do you do? For what events, occasions, and purposes is your group used? What types of venues does your group perform in?
11. What is your repertory like? What musical styles does your group play? Why? What has your repertory been like over past 5 years? How has your repertory changed over the course of the history of your program?

12. At what pace does the band learn music?

13. How often is sheet music used? Where do you get your charts? Do students write or arrange for the group?

14. Do you charge admission? Why?

15. What is your goal for the group? What does the future hold for your band?

16. Is there any type of reputation, stigma, or label commonly attached to the members of your steel band? Have you or your group ever received any resistance from others (peers, administrators, audience members, friends or family, etc.)?

17. What are the demographics of the band members? (musical backgrounds, etc.)

18. Have any of your members gone on to start their own steel bands?

19. How does playing in a steel band compare to other bands that you have been in?

20. Why is this art form successful in this town?

21. Do you feel that steel bands are becoming more or less popular in the USA? Why?

22. What is the demographic nature of your audience? What kinds of people come to your performances? What do they find appealing about steel band?
23. What kind of educational goals do steel drums achieve? What are the special pedagogical considerations involved in teaching pan?

24. How are your members evaluated?

25. Tell me about your pan major program.

26. Has the sound of the group changed over time? If so, how and why has it?

27. Do steel drums hold any kind of meaning for you?

28. How have steel drums and playing steel drums effected you?

29. How has your steel band effected your community, meaning both school community and local community?

30. Do you feel that there is a special attraction of pan in the Midwest?

(Special questions to get answered: How and when and where did Cliff come to the US? How did he end up in St. Paul, with that teaching job? How did O’Connor initially get involved with pan, first exposure? Playing? Teaching? Clifford Alexis – Moved to USA in 1964. Ended up in St. Paul, Minnesota...where else did he go and why? Why move to USA? Where did G. Allan O’Connor first learn of/become interested in pan?)

Al has retired and the plan is for Liam to take over instruction while Cliff does tuning and arranging. Cliff taught at St. Paul at an arts magnet school (for problem kids) for 10-12 years prior to NIU ...1967... just went to them and said “Do you want to hire me?” He was good for the students because he was a strict disciplinarian.
QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

1. What is your: Name, Age, Title (administrator, director, student, steel band president, etc. - if applicable), Major? How long have you been playing steel drums in general, and with this group, What instrument(s)/voice(s) do you play in the band?

2. What is your first memory of pan? (both hearing about and first personal experience)

3. When, how and why did you decide to become involved with steel drums? What attracted you to them? Now that you’ve been playing for a while, what do you like and what do you dislike?

4. How is the ensemble run? Who runs it?

5. How often and when do you rehearse? Who attends rehearsals? How are rehearsals organized and designed? Do members practice outside of rehearsals?

6. How often, where and what type of gigs do you do? What are performances like? (In other words: For what events and purposes is your group used? For what occasions/venues does your group perform?)

7. What is your repertory like? (What musical styles does your group play?) Why?

8. How often is sheet music used? Where do you get your charts? Do students write or arrange?

9. What is the goal of your group? What is your personal goal in/for the group?

10. Is there any type of reputation, stigma, or label commonly attached to the members of your steel band? Have you ever received any resistance from others (peers, administrators, audience members, friends or family, etc.) because you are involved with steel band?
11. Have any of your members gone on to start their own steel bands?

12. How does playing in a steel band compare to other bands that you have been in?

13. Why is this art form successful in this town?

14. Where is your group headed? Where will it be in 10 years?

15. Do you feel that steel bands are becoming more or less popular in the USA? Why?

16. What is the demographic nature of your audience? What kinds of people come to your performances? What do they find appealing about steel band?

17. How do you benefit from playing steel drums?

18. Do steel drums hold any kind of meaning for you?

19. How have steel drums and playing steel drums effected you?

20. How has your steel band effected your community, meaning both school community and local community?

21. Does playing in steel band strengthen your feeling or sense of community?

22. Do you feel that there any special attraction to pan in the Midwest?
QUESTIONS FOR ADMINISTRATOR

1. What is your: Name, Age, Title (administrator, director, student, steel band president, etc. – if applicable)? Have you ever played steel drums?

2. What is your first memory of pan? (both hearing about and first personal experience)

3. How much involvement do you have with the steel band? When, how and why did you decide to become involved with steel drums? What, if anything, is attractive about them—both for your school and personally?

4. In what ways is the steel band influenced and governed by the university and school of music?

5. How often, where and what type of gigs does the band do?

6. What types of musical styles does the band play?

7. Does the band charge admission for any concerts that they play? Why?

8. What is your personal goal for the steel band?

9. Is there any type of reputation, stigma, or label commonly attached to the members of your steel band? Have you ever received any resistance from others (peers, administrators, audience members, friends or family, etc.) because you are involved with steel band?

10. How does the steel band compare to other bands on in the school of music?

11. Why do you feel this art form is successful in this town?
12. Where do you feel the group is headed in the future?

13. Do you feel that steel bands are becoming more or less popular in the USA? Why?

14. What is the demographic nature of your audience? What kinds of people come to your performances? What do they find appealing about steel band?

15. What kind of educational goals do steel drums achieve? What do members get out of playing?

16. Do you feel that the sound of the group changed over time? If so, how and why has it?

17. Do steel drums hold any kind of meaning for you?

18. How have steel drums affected you?

19. How has your steel band affected your community, meaning both school community and local community?

20. Is there any special attraction for pan in the Midwest?
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR OBERLIN STEEL BAND

(Please use the back and/or extra sheets if necessary. Please be as SPECIFIC as possible)

1. What is your: Name 
   Age 
   • Title (student, steel band president, etc. - if applicable)
   • Major
   • How long have you been playing steel drums at Oberlin? Prior to Oberlin?
   • What instrument(s)/voice(s) do you play in the band?

2. What/When was your first encounter with steel drums? (both hearing about and first personal experience)

3. How and why did you decide to become involved with steel drums? What attracted you to them?

4. How have steel drums and playing steel drums affected you?

5. How has your steel band affected your community, meaning both school community and local community?

Please include your email address below (and/or phone number) if you wouldn’t mind me contacting you, if I have further questions, or need clarifications to one of your answers.

Thank you very, VERY much for your time!!!
QUESTIONS FOR DIRECTORS

1. What is your: Name, Age, Title (administrator, director, student, steel band president, etc. – if applicable), how long have you been playing steel drums in general, and with this group, What instrument(s)/voice(s) do you play in the band?

2. What is your first memory of pan? (both hearing about and first personal experience)

3. When, how and why did you decide to become involved with steel drums? What attracted you to them? What do you like and dislike about them?

4. What is your background/training?

5. Under what umbrella is your program run? Is it affiliated with a university? Who runs it? How is it run?

6. How often and when do you rehearse? Who attends rehearsals? How are rehearsals organized and designed? Tell me about your rehearsal space. Do students practice outside of rehearsal time? How?

7. How and where did you get your pans? Why?

8. How are the instruments arranged for rehearsals? Performances?

9. What does the band wear for performances?

10. How often, where and what type of gigs do you do? For what events, occasions, and purposes is your group used? What types of venues does your group perform in?
11. What is your repertory like? What musical styles does your group play? Why? What has your repertory been like over past 5 years? How has your repertory changed over the course of the history of your program?

12. At what pace does the band learn music?

13. How often is sheet music used? Where do you get your charts? Do students write or arrange for the group?

14. Do you charge admission? Why?

15. What is your goal for the group? What does the future hold for your band?

16. How do people, not in the steel band, view the members of the steel band? Have you or your group ever received any resistance from others (peers, administrators, audience members, friends or family, etc.)?

17. What are the demographics of the band members? (musical backgrounds, etc.)

18. Have any of your members gone on to start their own steel bands?

19. How does playing in a steel band compare to other bands that you have been in?

20. Why is this art form successful in this town?

21. Do you feel that steel bands are becoming more or less popular in the USA? Why?

22. Who comes to your concerts and why? What do they find appealing about steel band?
23. What kind of educational goals do steel drums achieve? What are the special pedagogical considerations involved in teaching pan?

24. How are your members evaluated?

25. Tell me about your pan major program.

26. Has the sound of the group changed over time? If so, how and why has it?

27. Do steel drums hold any kind of meaning for you?

28. How have steel drums and playing steel drums effected you?

29. How has your steel band effected your community, meaning both school community and local community?

30. Do you feel that there is a special attraction to pan in the Midwest?
QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

1. What is your: Name, Age, Title (administrator, director, student, steel band president, etc. - if applicable), Major? How long have you been playing steel drums in general, and with this group, What instrument(s)/voice(s) do you play in the band?

2. What is your first memory of pan? (both hearing about and first personal experience)

3. When, how and why did you decide to become involved with steel drums? What attracted you to them? Now that you’ve been playing for a while, what do you like and what do you dislike?

4. How is the ensemble run? Who runs it?

5. How often and when do you rehearse? Who attends rehearsals? How are rehearsals organized and designed? Do members practice outside of rehearsals?

6. How often, where and what type of gigs do you do? What are performances like? (In other words: For what events and purposes is your group used? For what occasions/venues does your group perform?)

7. What is your repertory like? (What musical styles does your group play?) Why?

8. How often is sheet music used? Where do you get your charts? Do students write or arrange?

9. What is the goal of your group? What is your personal goal in/for the group?

10. How do people, not in the steel band, view the members of the steel band? Have you ever received any resistance from others (peers, administrators, audience members, friends or family, etc.) because you are involved with steel band?
11. Have any of your members gone on to start their own steel bands?

12. How does playing in a steel band compare to other bands that you have been in?

13. Why is this art form successful in this town?

14. Where is your group headed? Where will it be in 10 years?

15. Do you feel that steel bands are becoming more or less popular in the USA? Why?

16. Who comes to your concerts and why? What do they find appealing about steel band?

17. How do you benefit from playing steel drums?

18. Do steel drums hold any kind of meaning for you?

19. How have steel drums and playing steel drums affected you?

20. How has your steel band affected your community, meaning both school community and local community?

21. Does playing in steel band strengthen your feeling or sense of community?

22. Do you feel that there is any special attraction to pan in the Midwest?
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