

So, You Want to Start a Steel Band?

Common sense tips for the uninitiated director

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Background

Brief History

- Steel drum evolved out of the lower class in Trinidad around the 1940s
- As early as the 1950s the steel drum made its way to the US via Trinidadian musicians
- Today the steel drum is seen in the US in primary and secondary schools, colleges, universities, churches, and community bands

Ensembles

- Traditional steel bands in Trinidad & Tobago can be as large as 150 members
- Most school bands in the US are between 15 and 35 members
- Small chamber ensembles are also common, especially for extracurricular steel bands

Musical Styles

(will discuss in more detail later)

Steel bands play a large variety of repertoire:

- Calypso
- Soca (dance party music)
- Panorama (competition music)
- Classical
- Jazz
- Pop
- Pan compositions

Questions for the director?

- Whom will you be teaching?
 - Inclusive or exclusive?
- When will you be teaching?
 - Curricular or extracurricular?
- What will you be teaching?
 - What standards will you emphasize?
- How will you be teaching?
 - Rote or Note?

Why Steel Band?

Standards and steel band

Steel Band & Performance-Based Music Education

- Performance curriculum
 - Music reading literacy
 - Rhythm literacy
 - Dynamics, expression, style, balance
 - Characteristic tone and proper playing technique

Steel Band & Performance-Based Music Education

- Performance and standards
 - Large ensemble repertoire (NS 2B, SSS MU.A.2.3)
 - Chamber ensemble repertoire (NS 2C, SSS MU.A.2.3)
 - Individual repertoire (NS 2A, SSS MU.A.2.1)

Steel Band & Performance-Based Music Education

- Performance and assessment
 - Performance assessments serve as motivating goals for students
 - Connect curriculum to repertoire
 - Not sure what scales to teach first? Look at your repertoire.
 - Not sure what rhythm exercises to use? Again, look at your repertoire.
 - Assess students on performance of group repertoire
 - Assess students individually, as a group, or entire ensemble
 - Even if you are process-oriented, assessments can be used positively as guide posts and do not have to be a negative *"got you!"* moment

Steel Band and other Standards

- Improvisation (NS 3, SSS MU.B.1)
 - Steelband literature often includes solo sections
 - Include improvisation in scale warm-ups
- Composing and Arranging (NS 4, SSS MU.B.2)
 - Steelband literature is often arranged; include discussions and lessons about arranging and style that look at pieces the ensemble is currently playing
 - Some steelband literature is intentionally left up for interpretation (repeat or not, which instruments play on the vamp, etc); include students in the decision-making process

Steel Band and other Standards

- Listening to, analyzing, and describing music (NS 6, SSS MU.D.1)
 - Like other ensembles, listening is a vital component to developing proficient performers
 - Listening to and talking about music also facilitates national standard 9.
- Evaluating music (NS 7, MU.D.2)
 - Like other ensembles, students should become proficient at self-evaluation
 - Students should become effective in the positive evaluation of other students and performances

Why Steel Band?

Benefits of a non-traditional
music education

Nature of Instrument

- Popular attraction
 - People simply like the sound of the instrument!
 - It's still a rarity, which makes it a big draw for students.
- Immediate sound production
 - Unlike the clarinet or french horn, there are not a myriad combination of keys to press or embouchures to make before you can make a sound.
 - This is not to say that percussion does not require technical skill—it does! But a student can make a *good* sound on a steel pan within moments.
 - This can be very rewarding for non-traditional music students who may otherwise not achieve musical success.

Steel Band & Multicultural Music Education

- Natl. Standard 9, Sun. State Standard C
 - *Understanding music in relation to history and culture*
- Easy implementation of history and culture standards
 - Steel band has a rich cultural history
 - Its history is a living history. Many innovators from the 1940s are still alive!
 - There are some excellent resources (texts and videos) to draw from.

Steel Band & Multicultural Music Education

- World Music Education and Multicultural Music Education
 - Exposure to world music through repertoire is a great beginning place for cultural standards.
 - Why not give this standard more depth?
 - Studying cultural history of the music gives opportunity to study multiculturalism.
 - Explore concepts of self and other, identity, meaning, etc.
 - Easy to emphasize critical thinking skills through this curriculum.

Sample Curriculum

- Dudley's *Carnival Music in Trinidad*
 - Explores musical and cultural elements of Trinidadian carnival, and how they relate to Trinidadian society. Comes with listening CD.
- Panorama project!
 - Students adopt a Trinidadian steel band leading up to carnival season and discuss the bands preparations for the big Panorama competition at the end of February.

Sample Curriculum

- Directed Independent Study
 - Selecting from a dozen other texts, students select a topic that interests them and conduct a project (paper, powerpoint presentation, movie, etc).
- Calypso Songwriting
 - Have students write their own calypso using standard calypso chord progression and form.
 - In the spirit of calypso, have them write about something meaningful to their lives...PE class, bad cafeteria food.

Purchasing Pans

Pan Instrumentation

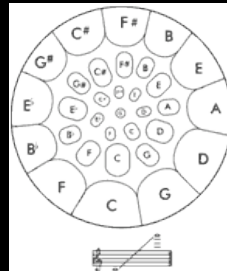
- Instrumentation varies:
 - There are still over a dozen different steel drum instruments
 - Even same instruments are not standardized in terms of layout and range
- Some instrument classes have multiple types
 - Double Tenor vs Double Second
 - Guitar vs Cello
- Pedagogical considerations:
 - Ease of switching drum layouts
 - Preparing students for future experiences

Basic Pan Instrumentation

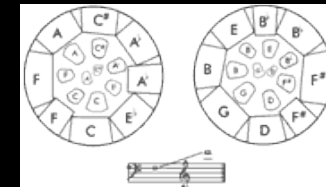
- Tenor (also called lead or soprano)
 - Single barrel, melodic, C4–E6
- Double Tenor
 - Double barrel, melodic, F3–D6
- Double Second
 - Double barrel, strumming, F#3–C#6
- Guitar/Cello
 - Triple barrel, strumming or bass, B2–C#5
- Six Bass
 - Six barrels, bass, Bb1–Eb3



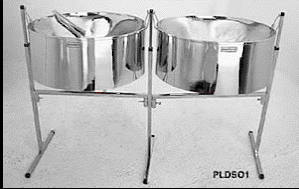
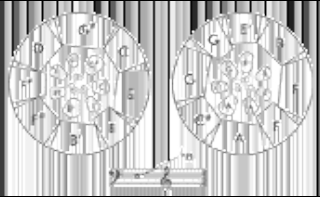
Tenor




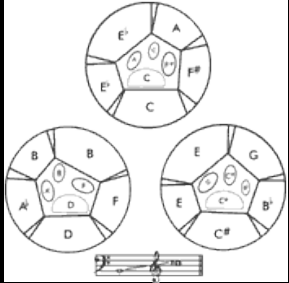
Double Tenor




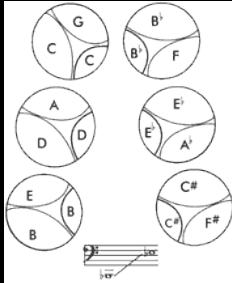
Double Second

Triple Guitar

Six Bass

Instrument Ratio

- Most steelband literature is 5-voice
- Sample ensemble sizes:
 - 5-piece: Tenor, Double Second 1, Double Second 2, Triple Guitar, Bass
 - 10-piece: 3 Tenors, 2 Double Second 1, 2 Double Second 2, 2 Triple Guitars, 1 Bass
 - 20-piece: 7 Tenors, 3 Double Second 1, 4 Double Second 2, 4 Triple Guitars, 2 Bases
 - This should be modified to fit individual situation

Double Second 1 same as Double Tenor

What to look for

- “Standard” layout
 - Pan is relatively new, there are some less-standard instrument layouts. Make sure the instruments you buy match the “standard” layouts listed on the handout
- Durability
 - This is important for institutional settings where drums receive more of a beating; good builders build for schools differently than for professional pannists

American vs Trinidadian builders

- Difficulty dealing with Trinidadian builders
 - Purchase orders, check requisitions, etc
- Trinidadian builders are not accountable to American buyers in the same way that American builders are
 - If you're unhappy with the product, will they allow you to return? Chamber of Commerce?
- With that said, there are viable Trinidadian builders
 - Mappo (real name Desmond Richardson)
 - Merlin Gill
 - Lloyd Gay

Instrument Price and Value

- Instrument market has still not settled on the normal price/value bell curve
 - You can find people selling overpriced drums and getting away with it
- How good of a drum do you need?
 - Sure, you can buy an oversize drum with much higher quality, but can you afford a \$4000 Lead?
 - Lower-priced instruments are cheap for a reason.
 - Have to balance financial constraints and pursuit of desirable sound.

High-end Builders

- Coyle Drums
 - Great instruments and service, located in Pensacola
 - Apprenticed with Ellie Mannette
 - 10 month turn-around
- Mannette Steel Drums
 - Father of the modern steel drum
 - Ellie builds very few drums now, most made by apprentices
 - 12 month turn-around
- Panyard
 - Very expensive
 - Faster turn-around

Lower-cost Alternatives

- Kyle Dunleavy
 - Apprenticed with Ellie Mannette
- Shields Musical Steel
 - Tony Slater and Bertie Marshall are well known Trinidadian builders now working in the US
 - Heard mixed reviews of their products.
- Tom Reynolds
 - Located in Sanford, FL
 - Lower-quality instruments

Other Considerations

- Chrome
 - Greater dynamic range
 - Warmer timbre
- Bore
 - Greater dynamic range
 - Brighter, thinner timbre
- Same builder
 - Getting drums from same source makes a band sound well-blended and full
- Oversized pans
 - Top notch builders can now make pans from stock metal, without using 55-gallon barrels! This allows them to make bigger drums with better tone at a higher price.

Other Gear

Engine Room

- Drumset
 - Fusion-sized 4 piece drumset
 - Don't go cheap on the cymbals
- Congas
- Iron (Brake Drum)
 - Get one from your mechanic
- Cowbells
 - Get at least two different pitched cowbells
- Scratcher (Merengue Guiro)
- Other percussion: clave, shakers, cabasa, triangle, samba whistle, timbales

Gear

- Pan stands
 - Chrome tripod stands are adjustable and sharp looking. \$145 for single barrel.
 - Powder coated wheel stands are adjustable and highly portable. \$125 for single barrel.
 - Pipe stands are inexpensive. \$30-\$45.
- Cases
 - Humes & Berg: \$170
- Mallets
 - Powder coated with tube tips: \$18 for tenor pair
- Earplugs
 - I require these for my students. I recommend Etymotic: \$12

Tuning

Tuning

- Tuning is a very delicate process
 - Tuners have years of experience
 - Tuning involves technology (use of oscilloscope), many different hammers, and an experienced ear
 - Reinforce to your students how delicate drums are
- Recommend tuning at least once a year
- Prevention is cheaper in the long run
- Going rate is around \$100/hour + expenses. 20-piece band will cost between \$1500 and \$2500 to tune.
- Like a mechanic, go with someone you trust.

Tuning

- Recommended tuners:
 - Alan Coyle
 - Billy Sheeder
 - Darren Dyke
 - Panyard
 - Mannette Steel Drums

Literature

Varied Repertoire

- Calypso and soca are exciting, by why not spice it up?
- Varied repertoire:
 - Prevents ensemble from becoming stale
 - Exposes students to diverse music
 - Develops audiences perceptions of steel band
 - It's called for in national and state standards

Style

- Calypso
 - Older popular song style; steel bands started out performing calypsos in the 1940s
 - Exciting arrangements
 - Often attainable by beginning bands
 - Lyrics from original song present great opportunity to discuss culture
 - Strophic
 - Groove is slightly swung

Style

- Soca
 - Contemporary Trinidadian dance music, developed from Calypso
 - Up-tempo
 - Strophic
 - Rhythms are more syncopated, strumming is more difficult than calypso
 - Original lyrics are generally less meaningful

Style



■ Panorama

- Competition pieces from Trinidadian carnival
- Long-format arrangements of calypso and soca tunes, between 8 and 12 minutes in length
- Very fast (in cut time, half note=120)
- Very syncopated
- Theme and variation with at least one key change

Style



■ Classical

- Steel bands since the beginning have included classical music in their repertoire
- Great way to demonstrate versatility of pan
- Timbre of pans work well for many classical pieces
- Range of drums approximates that of string instruments, making many classical tunes doable with little arranging

Style



■ Jazz

- Jazz arrangements work great on pan
- There are several successful jazz combos that feature the steel drum
- Jazz is a great opportunity for students to improvise
- Include traditional jazz instruments in your steelband performances; if you have a jazz band, feature a pan soloist

Style



■ Pop

- Since the beginning, steel bands have adopted popular tunes
- Students love playing popular tunes
- Audiences love hearing them
- It's a great opportunity to discuss arranging because students have the original to compare it to

Style



- Original Compositions
 - More and more, composers are writing for steel band
 - There are some excellent pieces out there that advance the musical range of steel band
 - Transforms student and audience perceptions of pan
 - Performing original compositions means that more composers will write for the instrument

Pedagogical Considerations

- Choose music that suits student level:
 - *Yellow Bird? For real?*
 - *Are you sure you want to do a Panorama?*
- Choose music that suits ensemble function:
 - *Is your band more of a get up and dance "Fire Down Below" type, or Barber's "Adagio"?*
- Gig or concert?
 - If you gig a lot, you may want to learn a number of simple, yet enjoyable tunes to supplement your concert repertoire.

Selecting Literature

- Make sure piece fits the ensemble
 - Does your ensemble have the drums?
 - Substituting parts is easy for some drums (like cellos and guitars)
 - If the music calls for quadrophonics, guitars and cellos, and you only have two guitars, it may be difficult to make it work.
 - Check ranges, some drums may not have the notes
 - Many composers write for low-E seconds, but yours may only go to F#.
 - Do you have low-Bb or C basses?

Publishers

- Pan Ramajay
 - Specializes in contemporary compositions for steel band.
 - Tom Miller, Andy Narell, Chris Tanner, etc.
- Panyard
 - Lots of calypso, soca and panorama charts
- Coyle Drums
- Pan Press
- Hillbridge Music
 - Editing often has errors

Why not arrange?

- Is there a tune you want to do, but it's not out there?
 - **Arrange it!**
- The genre isn't as foreign as it may look!
 - Typical inverted pyramid
 - Take a look at other steelband pieces and familiarize yourself with strumming patterns, breaks, riffs, etc.

Fundraising

Fundraising

Steel bands can be expensive, but if fundraising is done well, it can be self-sustaining

- **Traditional fundraising**
 - Make car washes, evening dinners, etc unique events
 - Concert CDs and DVDs are great, if done legally
- **Brand your ensemble!**
 - If steel drums is the cool thing at your school, market it with T-Shirts, buttons, temporary tattoos, etc
- **Gigs**
 - A great way to earn \$\$\$, make community contacts, and give students performance opportunities

Panyard Techniques

Panyard Techniques

- Warm-Ups
 - Scales to learn layout and develop characteristic tone
 - Spice it up by having back line play typical strum/bass line over scales
 - Use this time to focus on developing good groove
- Conducting
 - Develop visual cues, like jazz band
 - For timing, director on cowbell, drumset player, or engine room
- Sectionals
 - Instead of going from beginning to end, isolate difficult passages for each part
 - If you have the student leaders and the space, make good use of time.

Rote or Note

- Rote learning
 - Useful for new pan players, necessary for new musicians
 - If your ensemble is advanced, still have them learn an easier piece or two by rote
 - Develops groove and listening skills
- Note learning
 - Efficient way to learn a lot of music

Classroom Management

Classroom Management

- Group instruments by function
 - Put melody together, strummers together, and engine room in a central location
- Walk the room
 - Because steel band is usually not conducted, the director should take advantage of her mobility
 - Make pathway to each player
- Student equipment
 - Give every student a folder, a pair of mallets, etc. Make them responsible for their stuff and alleviate in class distractions. *"Who has my mallets?!"*

Tips

Ideas for the new steel band director

Tips

- Listen to characteristic steel band music. Pay attention to ensemble tone and engine room groove.
- Buy Chris Tanner's **The Steel Band Game Plan** from MENC's website.
- Accept the responsibility of promoting the growth and legitimacy of the genre by having a quality steel band program.

Resources

Books, recordings, dvds, websites

Books

- ***Steel Band Game Plan***
by Chris Tanner, MENC: 2007
 - Excellent introduction to starting and building a steel band program
- ***Carnival Music in Trinidad***
by Shannon Dudley, Oxford University Press: 2004
 - World Music textbook, great for grades 11-12!
- ***The Steelband Movement***
by Stephen Stuempfle
University of Pennsylvania Press: 1995
 - Historical overview of the development of pan

Listening

- **Calypso Awakening**
 - Smithsonian Folkways, CD40453
- **“Autobiography of the Now”** by David Rudder
- **“The Passage”** by Andy Narell
- **“Pan All Night”**
 - Delos DE4022
- **“Back for More”** by Pan Ramajay
- **“Burnin’”** by Miami University Steel Band
- **“Pan Jazz Concert”** by The Rudy Smith Quartet

Movies

- **Island Grooves DVD** by Chris Hanning
 - Excellent steelband drumset instructional DVD
 - available from panyard.com
- **Panorama Videos**
 - 2006 is available from insidecarnival.com
- **Music of the Caribbean**
 - Excellent ethnography from Smithsonian Folkways
 - Available from worldmusicstore.com

Websites

- Sanch UK (www.sanchuk.co.uk)
 - Distributor of steelband recordings
- Delos International (www.delosmus.com)
 - Distributor of steelband recordings
- Steel Drum Message Board (www.steeldrum.net/panblog)
 - Message board for steel drum community
- Pan Trinbago (www.pantrinbago.com)
 - Governing body of steel pan, part of Trinidadian Gov't

Coyle Drums

Tenor	22.5" Painted	\$1800
	22.5" Chrome	\$2500
	Oversize Painted	\$2300
	Oversize Chrome	\$3300
Double Second	22.5" Painted	\$2200
	22.5" Chrome	\$3200
	Oversize Painted	\$3100
	Oversize Chrome	\$4125
Triple Guitar	22.5" Painted	\$2400
	22.5" Chrome	\$3600
	Oversize Painted	\$3000
	Oversize Chrome	\$4600

Mannette Steel Drums

Tenor	22.5" Painted	\$2250
	22.5" Chrome	\$2475
Double Second	22.5" Painted	\$2550
	22.5" Chrome	\$3075
Triple Guitar	22.5" Painted	\$2450
	22.5" Chrome	\$2875
Six Bass	22.5" Painted	\$2995
	22.5" Chrome	\$4600

Panyard

Tenor	Oversize Painted	\$4195
	Oversize Chrome	\$4995
Double Second	Oversize Painted	\$6595
	Oversize Chrome	\$7995
Triple Guitar	Oversize Painted	\$6495
Four Cello	Oversize Painted	\$8495
Six Bass	Oversize Painted	\$9295
Eight Bass	Oversize Painted	\$12,995

Kyle Dunleavy

Tenor	22.5" Painted	\$1795
	22.5" Chrome	\$1995
Double Second	22.5" Painted	\$1895
	22.5" Chrome	\$2195
Triple Guitar	22.5" Painted	\$2295
	22.5" Chrome	\$2795
Six Bass	22.5" Painted	\$2995

Shields Musical Steel

Tenor	22.5" Chrome	\$989
Double Second	22.5" Chrome	\$1539

Tropical Hammer (Tom Reynolds)

Tenor	22.5" Paint or Chrome	\$900
Double Tenor	22.5" Paint or Chrome	\$1000
Triple Guitar	22.5" Paint or Chrome	\$1000
Six Bass	22.5" Painted	\$1250