So, You Want to Start a Steel Band?

Common sense tips for the uninitiated director

David Knapp

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

- 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

  - 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, B♭₁–Eb₃

Tenor

Double Tenor
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 Basses

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.

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.

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

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.

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 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.

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

- 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

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

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
- Jazz is a great opportunity to discuss arranging because students have the original to compare it to

Pop
- Since the beginning, steel bands have adopted popular tunes
- Students love playing popular tunes
- Audiences love hearing them
- 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

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

- 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

- 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 Stuempfe
  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](http://www.sanchuk.co.uk))
  - Distributor of steelband recordings
- **Delos International** ([www.delosmus.com](http://www.delosmus.com))
  - Distributor of steelband recordings
- **Steel Drum Message Board** ([www.steeldrum.net/panblog](http://www.steeldrum.net/panblog))
  - Message board for steel drum community
- **Pan Trinbago** ([www.pantrinbago.com](http://www.pantrinbago.com))
  - Governing body of steel pan, part of Trinidadian Gov’t
### Coyle Drums

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>22.5” Painted</th>
<th>22.5” Chrome</th>
<th>Oversize Painted</th>
<th>Oversize Chrome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tenor</strong></td>
<td>$1800</td>
<td>$2500</td>
<td>$2300</td>
<td>$3300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Double Second</strong></td>
<td>$2200</td>
<td>$3200</td>
<td>$3100</td>
<td>$4125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Triple Guitar</strong></td>
<td>$2400</td>
<td>$3600</td>
<td>$3000</td>
<td>$4600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Mannette Steel Drums

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>22.5” Painted</th>
<th>22.5” Chrome</th>
<th>Oversize Painted</th>
<th>Oversize Chrome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tenor</strong></td>
<td>$2250</td>
<td>$2475</td>
<td>$2550</td>
<td>$3075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Double Second</strong></td>
<td>$2450</td>
<td>$2875</td>
<td>$2995</td>
<td>$3600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Triple Guitar</strong></td>
<td>$2400</td>
<td>$3200</td>
<td>$3100</td>
<td>$4125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Panyard

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Oversize Painted</th>
<th>Oversize Chrome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tenor</strong></td>
<td>$4195</td>
<td>$4995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Double Second</strong></td>
<td>$6595</td>
<td>$7995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Triple Guitar</strong></td>
<td>$6495</td>
<td>$8495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Four Cello</strong></td>
<td>$8495</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Six Bass</strong></td>
<td>$9295</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eight Bass</strong></td>
<td>$12,995</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Kyle Dunleavy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>22.5” Painted</th>
<th>22.5” Chrome</th>
<th>Oversize Painted</th>
<th>Oversize Chrome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tenor</strong></td>
<td>$1795</td>
<td>$1995</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Double Second</strong></td>
<td>$1895</td>
<td>$2195</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Triple Guitar</strong></td>
<td>$2295</td>
<td>$2795</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Six Bass</strong></td>
<td>$2995</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Shields Musical Steel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>22.5” Chrome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tenor</strong></td>
<td>$989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Double Second</strong></td>
<td>$1539</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Tropical Hammer (Tom Reynolds)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>22.5” Paint or Chrome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tenor</strong></td>
<td>$900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Double Tenor</strong></td>
<td>$1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Triple Guitar</strong></td>
<td>$1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Six Bass</strong></td>
<td>$1250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>