

# Rhythm and Steel

Utilizing Steel Pans in the Elementary Classroom

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## History of the Steel Pan

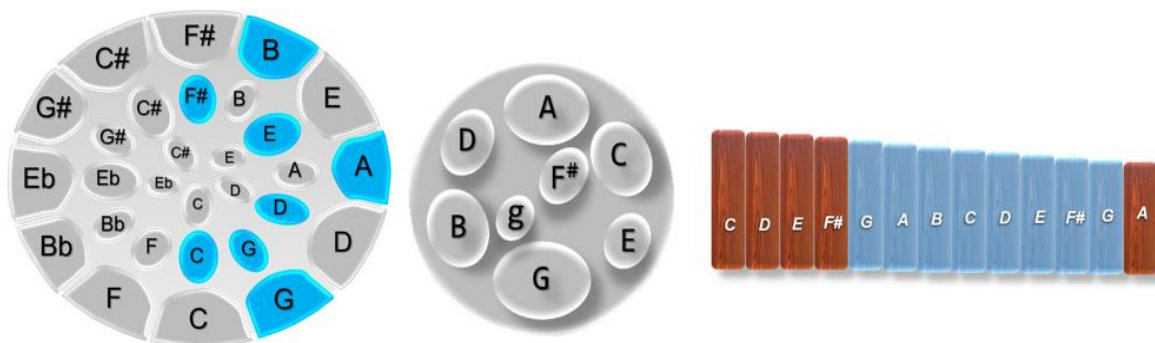
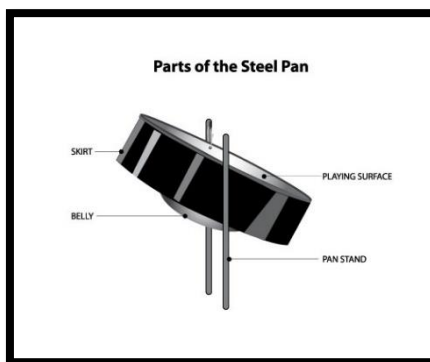
In the 1880's the British ruling class in Trinidad and Tobago banned the use of skin drums by people of African descent. People took to the streets and begin creating their own musical instruments out of Bamboo. Tamboo Bamboo developed as a result of this and many began playing large thick bamboo poles near the turn of the century. The government eventually banned Tamboo Bamboo as well. The steel pan developed in late 1930's with the arrival of the Oil industry in Trinidad and Tobago. Children in junkyards started beating on biscuit tins and car parts. Winston Spree Simon created the first musical tones on a convex shaped pan. These sounds inspired Ellie Mannette, who would craft the first concave bowl shaped steel pan. Ellie became known as "The Father of the Steel Pan". Over the years Ellie's Concave design would create an entire family of musical instruments.

## The Anatomy of a Steel Pan

Every steel drum has the same basic elements. Placement of Notes may vary by instrument and instrument builder. As you teach the pan, have students identify the main parts of the instrument. This will help familiarize them with the pan. Remind them that the belly is the most fragile part of the pan.

### The Main Parts of a Steel Pan

- The Skirt
- The Belly
- The Pan Stand
- The Plying Surface
- The Hangers
- The Grooves or Notes
- The Dead Zone (In-between notes)
- The Rim



*The Jumbie Pan can be used with both Orff and Steel Band ensembles in the Key of G Major.*

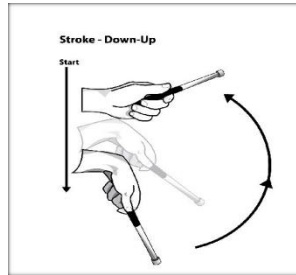
### The Grip and Playing Position

Steel pans should ideally be at waist length. If it's too high, the student will hit the rim too much.

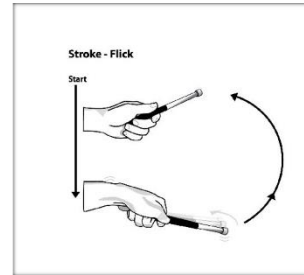
The grip for playing steel pan is different than the grip for drums or other percussion instruments. It is similar to the continental grip, but with more flow and movement. Wrap your four fingers loosely around the stick keeping the pinky should be around the base. You should be able to wiggle the stick in a circle without losing the stick. The grip has to be loose, as notes are arranged in a circle it allows you to move in any direction.



*Proper Pan Grip*



*Down Up Stroke*



*Flick Stroke*

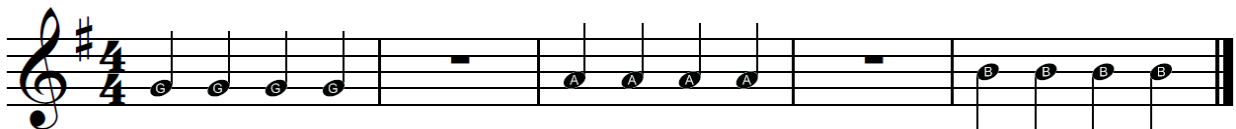
### Striking the Grooves

- Make sure that students are holding the stick correctly.
- The strokes should both be performed with a wrist motion and not an arm motion.
- If you hit the note too hard, it will go out of tune and will also sound very bad.
- If a student is hitting the rim of the pan a lot, the pan stand may be up too high.
- In the warmup activity following this, walk around and monitor children.

### Warmup

- Allow students an opportunity to locate their notes. I like to begin with playing through the notes that are used in a simple song. 4 quarter notes on "G" rest for four and then move onto "A" and so forth.
- Make sure that students are not playing on the rest. This allows them to develop a little bit of ensemble skills.
- Walk around to check the grip. I like to use an Agogo bell, and change tones, when the note changes. It gives them a different sound to line their strokes up with.

### Quarter Note Warmup



### Sing and Play- Balancing Rote and Note in Instruction

I like to have students sing their notes on pitch, but I will also allow them to use notation.

Singing the notes on pitch tells students:

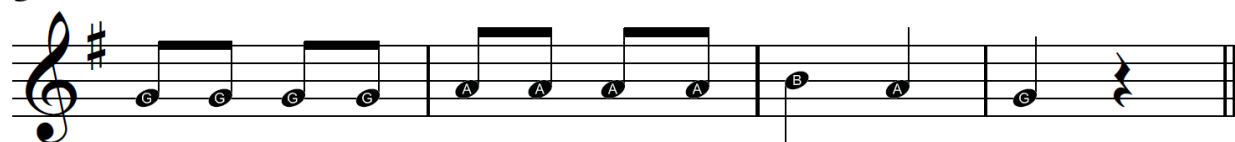
- What note to play.
- When to play it.
- Exactly how it should sound.
- Allows students to internalize the pitch and rhythm.

### Hot Cross Buns



Hot cross buns, Hot cross buns,

5

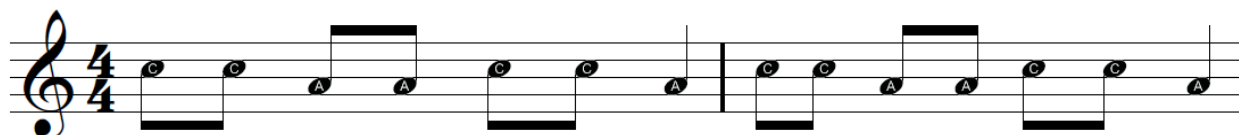


One a - pen - ny, two a pen - ney, Hot cross buns.

### Simple Songs

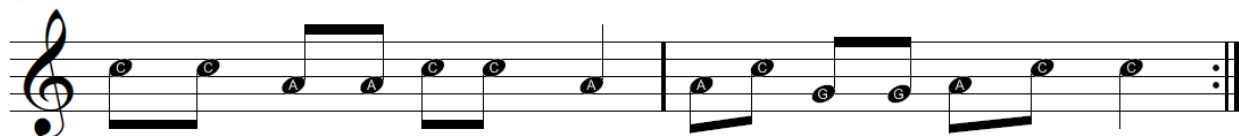
- Begin with some simple two or three note songs in the classroom. I always have the students familiarize themselves with the notes that we are working with. Make sure that students are alternating hands. You should never move more than twice in the same direction with the same hand.
- I like to start my unit on steel pan using the Jumbie book that came with the Jumbie pan, but many two or three note "Sol, La, Mi" songs work well and are easy to teach on pan.

### Cobbler, Cobbler



Cob-bler, Cob-bler mend my shoe. Get it done by half past two.

3



Half past two, I'm at your door, Get it done by half past four.

### Strumming

- Steel pan players use the mallets to play or “strum” through chords in songs.
- While this pan isn’t “plucked” like a guitar or ukulele. The notes change with the chords.
- Chord strumming simply means playing the chords in the music in the background to the melody.
- Pan Players can sing or a melody can be played along with this as a solo or on another instrument.
- There are many different patterns from simple to complex.

### I let her Go Go

Step 1: Teach the song

Step 2: Clap the rhythm as a clapping game with a partner. On measure three, turn around in a circle and end on the three claps at the end.

Step3: Move to Orff and Steel

Step 4: Teach students the chords in the progression. Play the changes using the rhythm of the words. There are only three chords, so it’s not too difficult.

Step 5: Sing and play on instruments.

Other options: Add Maracas playing steady eighth notes.

Please Note

If you don’t have Orff instruments or steel pans, this activity could be adapted to Boomwhackers.

## I Let Her Go Go

Traditional Fok song from Trinidad and Tobago

Arr. Shaun Bennett

The musical score is arranged in four systems. The first system includes a Voice part with lyrics and three instrumental parts: SX/Jumbie, AX/Tenor, and BX. The second system continues the instrumental parts. The third system features a vocal line with lyrics and three instrumental parts. The fourth system continues the instrumental parts. Chord progressions are indicated above the staves: G, Am, D7, and G. The score is in 4/4 time and G major.

### One, Two Three! – Folk Song from Barbados

One, two, three! Cut down de sug-ar cane all day. One, two, three! Cut down de sug-ar cane all day.

5  
One, two, three! Cut down de sug - ar cane all day. Work all de day - o, work all de day - o.

8  
Cut dow de sug-ar cane all day. Work all de day - o, work all de day - o. Cut down de sug-ar cane.

### Digital Resources

Steel Drums in Trinidad and Tobago( Shows traditional pan building)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReNbZFKKX7c>

Discover Channel How it's Made: Steel Drums (Shows modern pan building)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEs86f7-pNE>

Ellie Mannette Grip Discussion (From my Youtube Channel)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFk\\_ZzYE4Ho](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFk_ZzYE4Ho)

Ellie Mannette Short Interview from Smithsonian Folkways

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=23Bp59xfAUw>

When Steel Talks- [www.whensteeltalks.org](http://www.whensteeltalks.org)

National Society of Steel Band Educators- [www.weteachpan.org](http://www.weteachpan.org)

### Tuners

Tom Reynolds- Tropical Hammer Steel Drum Crafters [www.TropicalHammer.com](http://www.TropicalHammer.com)

Alan Coyle- [www.coyledrums.com](http://www.coyledrums.com)

### Assessories

Wetzel Pan Stands- Marta Wetzel [www.wetzelpanstand.com](http://www.wetzelpanstand.com)

Mallet Man-Emerold Gray – Mallet Maker [www.themalletman.com](http://www.themalletman.com)