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## The History of Pan

The sound of a steel band brings to mind warm sunny beaches, cruise ships, and all things tropical. While steel drums are certainly an instrument of "tropical" or "island" flavor, to generically label them as such would be inaccurate. The origin of the steel drum or pan is specifically from the Caribbean's southern-most islands, the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Sometimes there is a misconception that pan is an instrument from Jamaica. This is because Reggae, a style of music native to that island, is commonly played on steel drums. Most of the islands in the Caribbean have adopted the steel drum to some degree, but Trinidad is the only island that can truly call itself the "birthplace of pan". This beautiful instrument is a source of national pride and has infiltrated every level of Trinidadian culture. Images of steel drums have even appeared on Trinidad and Tobago's currency! The influence of pan in Trinidadian culture is comparable to the role sports play in the United States.



## Tambo Bamboo

In Trinidad in the mid 1800's, a type of stick fighting called *ka/enda* was popular. Bands of singers and drummers using traditional skin drums would accompany the fighters as crowds looked on. Following a riot in 1881 between police and those gathered at a stick fight, the government passed a law banning the playing of skin drums. It was thought that taking away the music used to accompany these fighters would prevent further incidents.

Not wanting to give up their drumming heritage, these musicians turned to other sources for making music. Bamboo is an abundant resource on the island, and was used to fill the role once held by skin drums. Large bamboo poles, or stamping tubes, were beaten on the ground to produce a rhythmic bass tone. Bamboo of various sizes, including hand-held sticks called *cutters*, were used to round out this rhythmic ensemble. These bands were called "Tamboo Bamboo" bands, and created a sense of neighborhood pride. With the introduction of this new instrument musicians were back in the street playing. Their focus was no longer stick fighting, but musical entertainment for Carnival and other public gatherings.

# Biscuit Drums & Bottles

As the carnival processions grew in size, Tamboo Bamboo bands were no longer loud enough to accompany the masqueraders. Over time other instruments were introduced to the Tamboo Bamboo bands, such as bottles played with spoons, brake drums from cars (called "irons"), and an assortment of common everyday items. One of the most popular items at that time was a biscuit tin. "Biscuit" is the Trinidadian word for "cookie", borrowed from times of British rule.



Gradually, the Tamboo Bamboo bands became entirely metal bands because of the durability of metal compared to bamboo as well as the increased volume that the metal instruments could produce. The first Tamboo Bamboo band to use only metal instruments was called "Alexander's Ragtime Band".

## Ping Pong and "Pan 'Round de Neck"

The late 1930's and 1940's marked a time of rapid change and innovation for pan. Fueled by an air of community competition, pan men tried to find a way to produce actual pitches instead of just "clinks" and "clanks". Each hoped to be the one to produce a full melody. The first instrument to resemble the modern day pan was made from a caustic soda drum, and was called a "Ping Pong". No one person is given full credit for the development of this unique instrument, and there are many stories about who the inventor was.

One widely-accepted version is that in 1938 Winston "Spree" Simon loaned his drum to a friend, "Thick Lip" Bartholomew. "Thick Lip" was known to be a very strong man, and when Spree's drum was returned it was badly smashed. While he was attempting to fix the drum using a hammer, Spree discovered that it produced a variety of pitches. He could play melodies on his drum!

A man named Ellie Mannette was also a pan pioneer. He began using larger oil drums and was able to create more pitches. Oil drums were in abundance in Trinidad during and after World War II. They had a larger surface area and were made from a better grade of metal than biscuit tins and caustic soda drums. This provided a better starting point for producing pans with improved tonal quality. Mannette also developed a mallet that was better suited for playing pan. Wooden sticks were wrapped with rubber to produce a richer and more sustained tone.

During the early days of the steel band, it was common to play your pan hung from a strap around your neck. This way, the steel bands could travel through the streets and accompany the Carnival masqueraders. The steel bands became known as "Pan 'Round de Neck" bands. Even today at Carnival in Trinidad you may still find "Pan 'Round de Neck". However, most steel bands use stands to hang their pans while they play.

# Innovations

Since World War II, the steel drum has gone through many changes, most of which focused on refining the sound of the instrument. A steel drum called a "Solid Hoop Pan" has been developed by Panyard, Inc. of Akron, Ohio. Its notes sustain longer than those on traditional steel drums and produce a clearer, richer tone. Solid Hoop Pans can also produce a much louder sound, enabling the pan player to use a wide dynamic range when performing. This reduces the need for sound amplification in most settings. The **NEWEST** innovation in steel drumming is your Jumbie Jam!

## Carnival & Panorama

Carnival is the single biggest celebration in Trinidad each year and occurs immediately prior to the season of Lent. Carnival-goers flood the streets as parades of costumed revelers march and dance to the sounds of calypso music blared from DJ trucks. Costumes during carnival range from simple mud and body paint to ornate and very elaborate creations adorned with feathers and sequins. The largest of these costumes can be twenty-five feet tall and so wide that they require wheels to allow the wearer to parade through the streets. Each community rallies to show support in hopes that their representative will win the prestigious and coveted title of "King and Queen of Carnival".

Panorama is a nationwide steel band competition in Trinidad that began in 1963 and takes place during the weekend before Carnival. After weeks of preliminary competition, the top twelve steel bands gather at the Queen's Park Savannah to compete in front of a stadium-sized audience and a panel of judges. These community-based steel bands can have as many as 120 members. They perform calypsos lasting approximately 10 minutes each. Panorama is Trinidad's largest single music event and is highly publicized on TV, radio, and in newspapers. The winning steel band is held in high esteem and tours the world as Panorama Champions.

## Facts about Trinidad

Trinidad is a Caribbean island that covers 1,864 *sq.* miles. It is located approximately 7 miles off the coast of Venezuela, South America.

- Christopher Columbus discovered the islands of the Caribbean in 1492. It was not until his third voyage in 1498 that he discovered Trinidad. He named the island in honor of the Holy Trinity and three mountain peaks found in Trinidad. Its capital, Port of Spain, was chosen in honor of Columbus' homeland.
- Trinidad's natural resources include petroleum, natural gas, and asphalt. The Pitch Lake on Trinidad's southwestern coast is the world's largest natural asphalt reservoir. The first oil well in the world was sunk in Trinidad in 1857.
- Agricultural products include sugar, cocoa, rice, citrus, coffee, vegetables, and poultry.
- Trinidad's flag is red, black, and white. Its background is red with a diagonal black stripe, outlined in white, running the length of the flag from top left to bottom right.

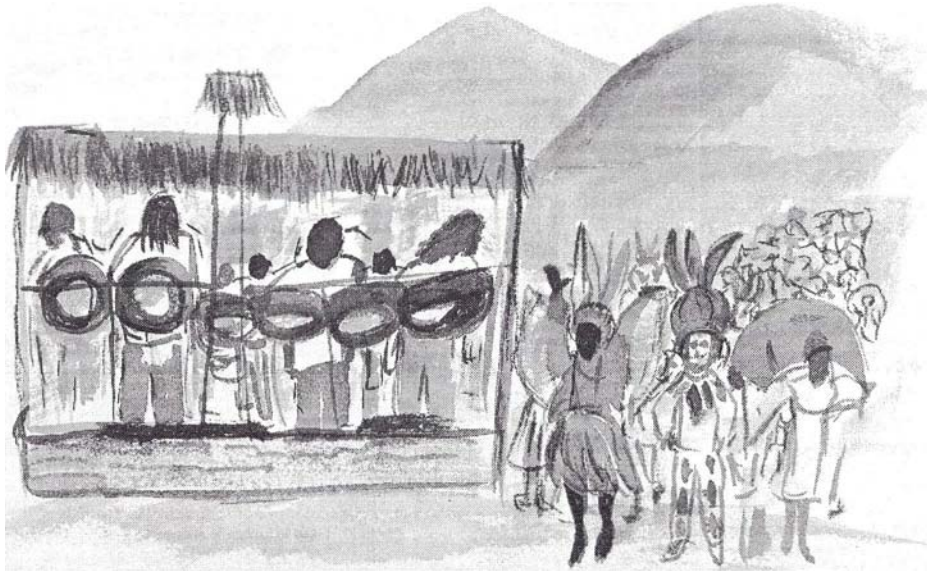
National bird: Scarlet Ibis  
National instrument: Steel drum (Pan)

National flower: Chaconia (Wild Poinsettia)  
Predominant language spoken: English

## The Island of Tobago

Tobago was politically joined to Trinidad as part of an island nation on January 1, 1889. It is thought that Tobago is named from the Carib word "tavaco". This is a pipe that island natives used to communally smoke tobacco. No one is sure of the true origins of the island's name. It is located 21 miles north-east of Trinidad.

Tobago has seen a turbulent past. This little island, only 116 square miles in size, has a history colored with fierce battles, pirates, destructive hurricanes, and civil unrest. Today, Tobago has become a friendly tourist destination known for its lush landscape and exotic wildlife. Its National Forest serves as a wildlife preserve for hundreds of animal species and provides a nesting area for the leatherback turtle. Trinidad is an industrialized Caribbean island, whereas Tobago is more of a pristine island paradise.



# Classroom Activities

- 1 What types of everyday items do we have in our classroom, in our homes, outside, etc., that could be used to play rhythms? (Note: without damage to these items)
- 2 Is this a form of recycling? If so, how?
- 3 Can we divide these instruments into categories? For example, what they are made of, type of sound produced, where these can be found, etc.
- 4 What does "resourcefulness" mean? How were the musicians of Trinidad resourceful?
- 5 What does "ingenuity" mean? Were the musicians of Trinidad ingenious? Why or why not?

## **Create your own "Biscuit Drums & Bottles" band.**

1. Gather up some of the everyday items your students mentioned when discussing #1 listed above. If possible, allow students to bring an item from home. It will give them a greater sense of involvement and you will most likely collect a wider array of items.
2. Also, ask your cafeteria staff to collect empty lunchroom cans, such as the kind that applesauce and green beans come in. They make wonderful biscuit drums. Make sure they are fully washed and thoroughly dried. These type of cans rust very quickly. If there are any sharp edges where the top was removed, cover them with masking tape.
3. Teach each child, instrument or instrument category a four-beat rhythmic ostinato. Use one of the Tamboo Bamboo rhythms from page 1a, or make up your own.

## **Turn "Biscuit Drums & Bottles" into a game by acting it out.**

Younger children especially will enjoy creating a dramatization of the poem.

1. Give each child a wooden pole as previously used during Tamboo Bamboo. If wooden poles are not available, rhythm sticks can be used.
2. Students march around the room playing the rhythmic ostinati in Tamboo Bamboo, or playing their own improvised rhythms. You may want to play a steady beat on your choice of a non-pitched percussion instrument to keep everyone in time while they march.
3. When you give a signal, students choose predetermined items around the room as their new instrument.