This dissertation titled
Molten Steel: The Sound Traffic of the Steelpan

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ABSTRACT

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Molten Steel: The Sound Traffic of the Steelpan

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This dissertation explores the steelpan instrument and steelband performances in three countries: Trinidad & Tobago, Ghana, and the United States. Through engagement with the multiple sites, this dissertation traces the routes of the steelpan, and its distinctive sound, in order to delineate a multidirectional web of sound traffic.

Elements of fluidity, influences and travel connected to the steelpan are employed as people and the steelpan itself frequently cross borders literally and figuratively. I make use of a transnational lens and consider complex, interconnected relationships between my three focal countries. Through analysis of the interconnectedness of pan players as well as their situation of isolation, this dissertation challenges static understanding of the steelpan as merely an island instrument. My conception of the transnational steelpan diaspora shows how the instruments, recordings, sounds and rhythms of the steelpan transcend borders in connecting people.

Like the predictable and unpredictable nature of vehicular traffic, sound and the instruments that create it move easily to and within some regions of the world and are slowed in others. The elements of this dissertation help to draw conclusions about the dispersal of the instrument, both literally and figuratively, in order to chart future expansion as well as development in established locations. This dissertation charts a path
of influence and musical communication through a combined analysis of my own pan experiences as well as the movements of other people and the instrument itself.
I dedicate this work to my brilliant and beautiful wife, Allison,
and our compassionate artist, Sora Afia.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

| Abstract | 3 |
| Dedication | 5 |
| Acknowledgments | 6 |
| Table of Figures | 13 |
| Introduction | 16 |
| The Steelpan | 19 |
| Rhizomatic Spaces of Influence | 23 |
| Research Design | 28 |
| Prior Studies | 33 |
| Steelpan Literature | 37 |
| Sound Traffic Literature | 42 |
| Music and Performativity | 48 |
| Chapter Organization | 51 |

**Chapter 1: Locus: Tamboo Bamboo and Steelpan in Trinidad and Tobago** | 55 |
| Colonization of Trinidad | 56 |
| Colonial Regulation | 59 |
| Tamboo Bamboo | 62 |
| Transition from Bamboo to Metal | 68 |
| Notable “Firsts” | 69 |
| Steelpan in Trinidad | 71 |
| Old Yard Carnival Celebration | 74 |
| birdsong Steel Orchestra | 82 |
| Rehearsals | 89 |
| The Last Word | 90 |
| Exodus Steel Orchestra | 94 |
| African Elements in Trinidad’s Carnival | 101 |
| Conclusion | 105 |

**Chapter 2: Bamboo Shoots: Bamboo Orchestras and Musical Confluence in Ghana** | 107 |
TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1 - Molten steel in ladle (AISI) ............................................................................. 20
Figure 2 - Sheets of steel ................................................................................................... 21
Figure 3 - Tuner Sheldon Bess grooving a pan................................................................. 22
Figure 4 - Bamboo plant near Caura River, Trinidad & Tobago .................................... 27
Figure 5 - Kukyekukyeku Bamboo Orchestra, Mesomagor, Ghana ............................. 27
Figure 6 - Gasparillo Tamboo Bamboo Specialists, St. Augustine, Trinidad ................. 63
Figure 7 - Tamboo Bamboo patterns as recollected by George Goddard ....................... 64
Figure 8 - Tamboo Bamboo rhythms as recollected by Ellie Mannette ......................... 66
Figure 9 - Kalinda stickfighting at Old Yard celebration, St. Augustine, Trinidad ......... 75
Figure 10 - Grounds of Old Yard celebration, St. Augustine, Trinidad ......................... 76
Figure 11 - Gasparillo Tamboo Bamboo Specialists, St. Augustine, Trinidad ............... 77
Figure 12 - Transcription of Gasparillo Tamboo Bamboo Specialists ............................ 79
Figure 13 - Kpatsa bell (gakogui) pattern ........................................................................ 79
Figure 14 - Brass band and single pan-around-the-neck parade ..................................... 80
Figure 15 - birdsong Academy woodwind class, Tunapuna, Trinidad ............................ 86
Figure 16 - birdsong panyard, Tunapuna, Trinidad .......................................................... 88
Figure 17 - Calypso pattern (left) and Soca pattern (right) ............................................... 93
Figure 18 - Excerpt of “The Last Word” (2013) by Andy Narell ...................................... 94
Figure 19 - Exodus staging area south of Queen’s Park Savannah ................................. 97
Figure 20 - Example of community members “pushing the racks” ................................. 99
Figure 21 - Exodus iron players performing on the track ............................................... 100
Figure 22 - Cinquillo pattern (left) and Tresillo pattern (right) ........................................ 119
Figure 23 - Clave pattern. .................................................................................................. 119
Figure 24 - Sikyi bell pattern ............................................................................................ 123
Figure 25 - Couva Joylanders steelpans at Jon Moore Warehouse in Tema, Ghana ...... 126
Figure 26 - Nii Buckie and band at Accra Holiday Inn .................................................. 128
Figure 27 - Palm nuts drying in Mesomagor, Ghana ....................................................... 131
Figure 28 - Members of Kukye kuyekyeku Bamboo Orchestra ........................................ 132
Figure 29 - Ma yenko ham and yenko ntem ................................................................. 137
Figure 30 - Cinquillo pattern (left) and Tresillo pattern (right) .......................................... 137
Figure 31 - Basic ma yenko ham pattern ........................................................................ 137
Figure 32 - Ma yenko ham pattern translated to tresillo. ................................................ 138
Figure 33 - Basic conga pattern (left) and Sikyi/highlife pattern emphasis (right) ......... 139
Figure 34 - Higher ma yenko ham pattern compared with soca comping pattern ........ 139
Figure 35 - Soca comping pattern in 2/4 (left) and in cut time (right) ......................... 140
Figure 36 - Basic yenko ntɛm pattern .............................................................................. 140
Figure 37 - Bismark with kokobɔ na akokɔ ................................................................. 142
Figure 38 - Kokobɔ na akokɔ proverb ............................................................................ 143
Figure 39 - Ampa pattern (left) and Ampa variation (right) ............................................ 143
Figure 40 - Ampa variation (left) and Ampa tresillo variation (right) ............................. 144
Figure 41 - Bismark playing the ampa .......................................................................... 144
Figure 42 - Samuel Assan playing timeline instrument ................................................. 146
Figure 43 - Harmony panyard, Brooklyn, NY .............................................................. 164
Figure 44 - Trini business near the Harmony panyard, Brooklyn, NY ....................... 167

Figure 45 - C Tenor Layout (left) and D Tenor Layout (right). ................................. 169

Figure 46 - Harmony supporter painting racks and pans for Panorama. ...................... 172

Figure 47 - Preparations for Panorama on President Street ........................................ 173

Figure 48 - Community Steelpan Workshop Performance, Redwood Falls, MN .......... 182

Figure 49 - Pandemonium! Steel Orchestra at Panorama Caribbean Music Fest .......... 184

Figure 50 - Mass Steelband, Panorama Caribbean Music Fest. ................................. 185
INTRODUCTION

This dissertation explores the steelpan instrument and steelband performances in three countries: Trinidad & Tobago, Ghana, and the United States. Through engagement with the multiple sites, this dissertation traces the routes of the steelpan, and its distinctive sound, in order to delineate a multidirectional web of sound traffic. I approach this project both as a researcher and a performer.¹ I have witnessed steelpan on three continents and use that insight to guide the focus of this dissertation.

Trinidad is the locus of the steelpan, as it is the birthplace of the pan and the pan’s predecessor, tamboo bamboo. Despite its relatively small geographic size, Trinidad still exerts significant international influence. The roots of the steelpan are considered in the context of Ghana. This is because musical similarities exist between Ghana and Trinidad, which include rhythmic framework and performance practice. Finally, I claim and explore how the steelpan is a diasporic instrument by examining the routes of sound traffic through the example of the United States and my experience in the 2012 Brooklyn Panorama competition.

Transnationalism, “the multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states,”² is the field of study that informs part of the theoretical framework of this dissertation. As an instrument that is simultaneously a Trinidadian as well as a world instrument, the steelpan symbolizes the connections

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¹ Given my positioning as a researcher and performer, I do not separate the instrument from performances through recordings or observations. A thorough understanding of the scope of this project requires that the instrument be considered in conjunction with those that build, play and listen to the steelpan, not in isolation.

concerning its creation and its dispersion in multiple locations throughout the world. There are elements of the steelpan phenomena that exemplify what Thomas Turino calls cosmopolitan, “objects, ideas and cultural positions that are widely diffused throughout the world and yet are specific to only certain portions of the populations within given countries.” In addition, the steelpan does have a grounding or specific point of origin that many other cosmopolitanisms lack and, therefore, exhibits elements of both cosmopolitanism and diaspora. This dissertation explores fluidity, influences and travel connected to the steelpan as people and the steelpan itself frequently cross borders literally and figuratively.

The steelpan and its associated movement continues to gain footing throughout the world, but an exhaustive description of the locations of pan presence is not within the scope of this dissertation. I acknowledge the full country of Trinidad and Tobago as well as the contributions of Tobagonian builders, tuners, arrangers and players, yet my research centers on Trinidad as a specific site of my field research and location of Panorama. I foreground Ghana by making this my specific place of research in Africa, yet additionally acknowledge general influences across the region of West Africa. I use the United States as a specific illustration of the pan diaspora. I make use of a transnational lens and consider complex, interconnected relationships between my three focal countries. Through analysis of the interconnectedness of pan players as well as their

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4 Ibid., 8.
5 I borrow the idea of linking the concepts of steelpan and diaspora from Ken Joseph Archer in his dissertation “The Brooklyn Carnival: A Site for Diasporic Consolidation.”
situation of isolation, this dissertation challenges static understanding of the steelpan as merely an island instrument.

It is typical for pan players and scholars to acknowledge a unidirectional relationship between Trinidad and the region of West Africa: African musical traditions and rhythms came to Trinidad and developed on the island from the late 1700s until the appearance of the first steelpan in the late 1930s. My research reinforces this relationship; however, I expand upon this by developing the notion of a multidirectional sound network. I also offer more nuances through an engagement with the pan diaspora and transnational travel. My research takes the historical elements of influence and connects information about people and ideas that have been moving to and from Trinidad before, during and after the invention of the steelpan. Locations where the steelpan has an established presence as well as those where the steelpan is absent are analyzed.

The migration of the steelpan has its own flow, inconsistent and ongoing like molten steel. The instrument itself has traveled to many areas of the world and its builders, tuners, performers and patrons have supported its dispersion and have even become pilgrims of the pan, returning to its homeland as explained below, to experience the steelpan and its largest competition, Panorama. This dissertation engages with locations where the flow of the steelpan has “hardened,” like the United States, as well as where it has not fully caught on, like Ghana.

The concept of sound traffic is a theoretical framework that I use to document how sound “travels,” both with, and independent of, individual agents. Building upon the

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work of Harry Elam, Jr. and Kennell Jackson in considering black cultural performance throughout the world, the steelpan is an instrument that can be understood like their concept of “mobile black music: it can travel, settle, and flourish in niches beyond its point of origin.” The approach encourages looking at the steelpan as an object of study and focusing on how the instrument and its distinctive sound have traveled from its inception in the 1930s and 1940s in Trinidad.

Like the predictable and unpredictable nature of vehicular traffic, sound and the instruments that create it move easily to and within some regions of the world and are slowed in others. The elements of this dissertation help to draw conclusions about the dispersal of the instrument, both literally and figuratively, in order to chart future expansion as well as development in established locations. This dissertation charts a path of influence and musical communication through a combined analysis of my own movement when playing the steelpan with others, as well as the movements of other people and the instrument itself.

The Steelpan

The steelpan, a musical instrument forged from a 55-gallon steel barrel, was proclaimed the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago on August 12, 1992. Before it is made into a barrel, the raw material of the steelpan is a liquid -- molten steel (Figure 1). As the liquid cools, it hardens into a strong solid. Without the benefit of molds, steel

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can flow like lava and harden along its path. The molten steel is formed into sheets of steel (Figure 2 left) that are then shaped into barrels (Figure 2 right) and are exposed to extreme force as well as heat to harden and strengthen the material for use as a container for all types of material. The barrels then go through a series of work hardening processes: sinking, grooving, tempering and tuning. The first process, called sinking, is the hammering of the playing surface which is the bottom of a steel barrel. Individual notes are created by using templates to draw ovals of specific size on the concave surface.

Figure 1 - Molten steel in ladle (AISI).

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The second process, grooving, (Figure 3) minimizes sonic bleed when a note is struck. The third process, tempering, is firing the steel over intense heat and cooling it with water to help keep the pitches stable by achieving a uniform tension within the steel. The final process, tuning, involves hammering specific sections of each note to attain pitches and harmonics to create the distinctive steelpan sound.

The historical elements that synthesized the creation of the steelpan and its distinctive sound were brought to Trinidad & Tobago in the minds, voices and hands of people taken from Africa and enslaved on the islands. These musical affinities were reconfigured in Trinidad among various ethnic groups in regions or settlements. After the abolition of slavery, the British would settle West Africans from intercepted slave ships.
of other countries as well as immigrants from Sierra Leone.\textsuperscript{19} West Africans primarily settled on the outskirts of urban areas in rural settlement areas in similar ethnic groups that remained distinct from the Creole population of Trinidad.\textsuperscript{20}

Figure 3 - Tuner Sheldon Bess grooving a pan (2013) – photo by author.

In order to continue traditional cultural practices, including music, people of varying African descent would visit these settlements, which often included spaces devoted to cultural and spiritual practices. Prominent locations of these communities included the Rada\textsuperscript{21} (descendants of Dahomean [modern-day Benin] people) on Belmont Circular Road (east of the Queen’s Park Savannah in Port of Spain) and Shango (the

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 98.
\textsuperscript{21} Andrew Carr, \textit{A Rada Community in Trinidad} (Port of Spain: Paria Publishing Company, Ltd., 1989).
Yoruba [ethnic group of modern-day Nigeria] orisha of thunder) shrines in the East Dry River area of Port of Spain.\(^{22}\) As the urbanization of the island continued through the nineteenth century, traditional celebrations from West Africa began to be celebrated in barrack yards, the name given to open spaces within residence compounds.\(^{23}\) The barrack yards became the loci of the steelpan, as they were spaces with frequent traffic yet were partially protected from the eyes of authorities and other pannists. Yoruba Town, an area of the capital city of Port of Spain now known as Laventille, produced a number of steel bands and is the epicenter of the creation of the steelpan.\(^{24}\)

**Rhizomatic Spaces of Influence**

I consider the three regions of focus: Trinidad, Ghana and the United States, as rhizomes and, as such, build on the work of Gilles Delueze. “A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles.”\(^{25}\) The influence of these regions on the steelpan expands and contracts unevenly. At some points in time, the importance of a region increases and the influence exerted is unidirectional. Sometimes,

\(^{22}\) Brereton, *A Modern History of Trinidad*, 134.

\(^{23}\) Bridget Brereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad: 1870-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 116-117. “They were situated behind the frontage of each city street, with its respectable stores and houses, and hidden from the passer-by. The barrack range consisted of a long shed built against a back wall, facing a strip of yard, often with a similar shed on the other side. The shed was divided into six, eight, ten, or more rooms of ten or twelve feet square…The only provision for bathing was the single public tap. Washing of clothes was carried on in the yard, with the water and soap-suds sinking into the already water-logged soil…Sometimes six or seven persons were crowded into unventilated rooms as of little as eight or ten feet square.”

\(^{24}\) Kim Johnson, *If Yuh Iron Good You is King: Pan Pioneers of Trinidad and Tobago* (Port of Spain: Pan Trinbago, 2006), 32-35.

that influence is reversed or diminished. The focus of this dissertation is on how the interactions of sounds, music, people and instruments is multidirectional and multivocal.

I explore the steelpan in its indigenous landscape, among neighbors and community members that witnessed its growth and development. I have studied and experienced the musical traditions of both Ghana and Trinidad in a variety of locations for over 20 years. My training as a pan player and teacher have taken place most extensively in the United States. I first played steelpan in Missoula, Montana, in high school, and then returned to it in earnest when I was completing my Master’s Degree at West Virginia University, also the location of my first in-depth experience with Ghanaian music and dance. From 2005-09, I founded and led Pandemonium! Steel Orchestra, an ensemble at Redwood Valley High School in Redwood Falls, Minnesota. I attended the Panorama Caribbean Music Fest in Virginia Beach on multiple occasions: as a performer, as a director of a student performing group, and as a researcher/audience member. I competed in the Brooklyn Panorama as a member of the Harmony Steel Orchestra, under the leadership of Michael Joseph and arranger Marc Brooks, in 2012. As part of the research for this dissertation, I made a pilgrimage to Trinidad for the 2013 Panorama competition, where I performed with birdsong and Exodus steel orchestras.

Steelpan is an instrument that one can learn, perform and study, but not fully understand more holistically until after experiencing it in Trinidad. The role of pan in the community and culture is a perspective only gained through experience, practice, and research. Through experience in locations such as Trinidad and Brooklyn, I gained an
understanding of what a “panyard” was and could be. I have learned the technical aspects of the instrument at high levels in academic settings in the United States, but the panyard is a completely different environment and one that solidifies my understanding of the instrument as a grassroots invention of young people searching for a sense of belonging.

I chose Ghana as my second case study because of the direct connection I maintain occurs between bamboo ensembles in Ghana and Trinidad. In both locations, performers use stalks of bamboo as stomping tubes. In Trinidad, the ensemble, known as tamboo bamboo grew out of skin drum rhythms that were transferred to bamboo tubes as drumming was regulated by the Peace Preservation Ordinance of 1884. In Ghana, ensembles developed in the late 1800s as musicians began using stalks of bamboo as “drums.” Although the bamboo ensembles I researched did not acknowledge awareness of each other in Ghana and Trinidad, this dissertation demonstrates that diasporic relationships and correspondences in performance practice and rhythms connect the ensembles transnationally. Now occurring in varying diasporic communities, the ensembles developed independently of one another while maintaining similar roles within society. In addition, I elucidate resemblances in performance aesthetics. My fieldwork in

26 A panyard is a space where steelpans are stored, rehearsed, performed and tuned. In addition it serves as a congregating point for people associated with a particular steelband even when the pans are not being played. Often, panyards have food and drinks for sale and through interaction a sense of community is created and preserved.


29 Bismark Amoah, Interview with author, 2014.

30 Ibid.
both Ghana and Trinidad attests to these very real, tangible connections that have been a part of my experience as a performer on steelpan and of traditional Ghanaian music.

Building on the resources of my own study and that of my primary teacher, Dr. Paschal Yao Younge, I use analysis of traditional music in Ghana to draw musical connections between Trinidad and Ghana. Tamboo bamboo was a predecessor of the steelpan and some of the elements of tamboo bamboo bands still exist among steelpan groups in the form of rhythms and competition. In Ghana, bamboo ensembles such as Kukyekukyeku Bamboo Orchestra and Nyamebɛkyɛre Bamboo Orchestra perform music on stamped bamboo tubes that incorporate rhythms that are also used in tamboo bamboo.

Could the existence of these groups lead to a similar development of steelpan in Ghana? Steelpan in North America and Europe occurred without this intermediary ensemble, but the climates of those two continents aren't necessarily conducive to widespread bamboo growth. Although the evolution of the steelpan from tamboo bamboo is documented in scholarly literature on steelpan, it is not clear whether this ensemble was necessary in the development. Once the pan, in its modern form, began to be built and performed outside of Trinidad, the fate of tamboo bamboo may have been sealed as a historical recreation. The supply of bamboo is prevalent in both Trinidad and Ghana (Figure 4). In Trinidad, the use of bamboo as a musical instrument developed as a method to circumvent colonial control. In Ghana, the use of bamboo as a musical instrument (Figure 5) was a project to use locally available resources to accompany storytelling.
Figure 4 - Bamboo plant near Caura River, Trinidad & Tobago (2013) – photo by author.

Figure 5 - Kukyekuyeku Bamboo Orchestra – Mesomagor, Ghana (2014) – photo by author.
Research Design

This project is a multilayered, ethnographically-informed study involving both research and performance components. I conducted interviews, completed library and archival research and performed with ensembles in the United States, Trinidad and Ghana. I attended performances, rehearsals, parties and fetes, classes and lectures, took lessons from musicians in all three countries and interacted with individuals connected to the performance and transmission of music in a variety of settings. I performed in competitions of steelpan music in both the United States and Trinidad.

I did research in Trinidad on tamboo bamboo, the ensemble of stamped bamboo tubes that was a precursor of the steel band, studying the performances of groups like Gasparillo Tamboo Bamboo Specialists. Tamboo bamboo ensembles form a link with similar ensembles that I studied in Ghana like Kukyekukyeku Bamboo Orchestra and Nyamebêkyere Bamboo Orchestra. Comparisons of these groups highlight similar voicing, rhythms and social roles. Scholars such as Jeff Ross Thomas\(^\text{31}\) and Shannon Dudley\(^\text{32}\) as well as steelpan pioneers like Ellie Mannette\(^\text{33}\) have notated the rhythms played on bamboo that were then subsequently transferred to early steelpans. These transcriptions, as well as my own from a performance of the Gasparillo Tamboo Bamboo Specialists are correlated with transcriptions of bamboo ensembles in Ghana.

\(^{31}\) Jeffrey Ross Thomas, "A History of Pan and the Evolution of the Steel Band in Trinidad and Tobago" (Master’s Thesis, Wesleyan University, 1985), 76-78.

\(^{32}\) Dudley, *Music from Behind*, 33.

\(^{33}\) Elliot Mannette, “The Tamboo Bamboo Era: The Late 1800s – Early 1930s,” transcribed by Chanler Bailey, unpublished, 1999. While a graduate student at West Virginia University, I was part of a concert that demonstrated the development of the steelpan from the skin drum tradition to the modern steelpan, narrated by Ellie Mannette. We used the rhythms transcribed by another WVU graduate (and current business partner at Mannette Musical Instruments), Chanler Bailey, for our demonstration of tamboo bamboo and metal band components of the presentation.
In order to ground my studies on the steelpan as both performer and researcher, I completed ethnographic research in Trinidad where I performed with birdsong Steel Orchestra (intentionally not capitalized) and Exodus Steel Orchestra in Tunapuna, a community just east of the capital Port of Spain. Both birdsong and Exodus are large steel orchestras in the annual Panorama competition and their panyards are about 5 blocks apart. They serve as examples of community mobilization and multi-generational involvement that are characteristic of the pan movement in Trinidad.

This dissertation also highlights the resonance between Trinidad and Ghana in terms of performance practice and transmission of musical knowledge. Although steelpan music incorporates melody, harmony and rhythm, it began as more of a rhythmic artform and still accentuates rhythmic possibilities in a symphonic setting. The interaction of performers and audience and the community focus of steelpan groups and the panyard are additional areas that bear resemblances with traditional music in Ghana. The space of the panyard is distinct in Trinidad, usually an open area that serves as a rehearsal and storage space, community meeting place, bar and restaurant and safe haven. Nowhere else can one experience the space steeped in the history of the instrument, defended and protected even after forced dispersion of the pans by authorities or the menace of violence.  

Furthermore, locations of steelpan lore like Hell Yard or the breadfruit tree from the

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34 Corey Connely, “Despers is Laventille,” *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday* (Port of Spain, Trinidad), Jan. 17, 2016.
history of the Invaders Steel Band and Ellie Mannette can be physically seen, touched and experienced to this day.

Ensembles of stamped bamboo tubes form a key link between the regions of the world selected in this dissertation. In Trinidad, it is known as tamboo bamboo; in Ghana, each group I studied had its own name for the ensemble. I analyze two contemporary ensembles in Ghana—Kukyekukyeku Bamboo Orchestra and Nyamebekyere Bamboo Orchestra—in tandem with a contemporary ensemble in Trinidad—the Gasparillo Tamboo Bamboo Specialists.

In Trinidad, tamboo bamboo today is performed as a historical recreation, reminding Trinis of their history. As the preference for Carnival celebrations shifted from bamboo to metal instruments, the ensembles waned in popularity and number. Students of the steelpan know the role of tamboo bamboo in the development of the steelpan and thus it is preserved through the performances of ensembles like Gonzales Tamboo Bamboo and Gasparillo Tamboo Bamboo Specialists. In Ghana, the bamboo ensembles are similarly a work of cultural preservation, but are more integrated into community life. In so doing, the Ghanaian ensembles resemble the stories of early tamboo bamboo bands in Trinidad.

I offer a connection between Ghana and Trinidad in relation to the migration of people that is two-fold. Specifically, enslaved people were brought from West Africa to Trinidad. Secondly, the West India Regiment first purchased men from the Gold Coast\(^\text{37}\) (colonial name of present-day Ghana) and brought them to Trinidad to work as soldiers.

and then brought soldiers from Trinidad to West Africa and the Gold Coast throughout the nineteenth century. Starting with the Portuguese in 1482 and including Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany and finally Great Britain, the Gold Coast endured a colonial presence until independence as Ghana in 1957. The West India Regiment was a company of soldiers, primarily from Trinidad, Jamaica and Barbados that were stationed in West Africa in the mid-to-late 1800s.

One characteristic of the British colonial presence in Ghana was the proliferation of brass instruments and the teaching and performance of British marching band music, especially in coastal areas where a military presence accompanied colonial interests, and where bands were used for British celebrations, as a show of royal pomp and circumstance and a method to “intimidate opponents and eventually ‘pacify’ several communities.”

The presence of the West India Regiment influenced popular music in Ghana from the late nineteenth century into the 1920s. The West India Regiment soldiers that were stationed in Cape Coast started performing calypsos, a genre of popular music that originated in Trinidad in the early 1900s, on brass instruments as they would march, and the style of music was emulated by Ghanaians. The Ghanaian imitations began to be called adaha, a Fante phrase meaning “dance here.” Adaha, “a vibrant combination of...

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38 See Alfred Burdon Ellis, *The History of the First West India Regiment*. (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1885); Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*.
39 Ellis, *The History of the First West India Regiment*, 357-359.
41 Ibid.
drum and fife music, military mime, and local rhythmic elements,” was a predecessor of highlife, a prominent popular music style in Ghana. The artistic connections and physical movement of people between the two regions of focus in this dissertation solidify the claims made connecting the music and performance of Trinidad and Ghana, even before the countries were independent nations.

As a performer and a researcher, I include musical examples that I analyze from both perspectives: structurally as a scholar and musically physically as a performer. Selected excerpts of the music I studied and performed in all three countries are utilized to justify connections established in this dissertation. The focus of these analyses is to relate the characteristic patterns and rhythms that occur and reoccur in steelpan music and how they are related to patterns and rhythms that are foundational to traditional music in Ghana.

The concept of a pan diaspora is understood through theories of diaspora and transnationalism in relation to the steelpan. From its beginnings in Trinidad in the late 1930s, the steelpan has moved throughout the Caribbean and the world, serving as a symbol of resistance as well as a symbol of tropicalism. Tropicalism is a theoretical frame posited by ethnomusicologist and pannist Janine Tiffe, an analytical tool that deconstructs the generic American image of the steelpan in a manner similar to Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism. By connecting steelpan with Hawaiian attire, Jamaican reggae and tropical climates, many people fail to understand the versatility of the

instrument as well as its violent past. In so doing, the image of the steelpan becomes “a construct of Western imagination rather than a reflection of cultural realities.”

Through a discussion of the two-fold dispersal of the instrument in the United States, the web of sound traffic is further expanded to include the larger world music scene, connecting pan players throughout the world in a shared sonic community.

Prior Studies

I consider the steelpan a diasporic instrument (playing the instrument connects people in a diaspora), and as such, I have divided the review of literature into three main dimensions: steelpan, sound traffic, and music and performativity. The initial category is relatively straightforward as the instrument of focus in this dissertation is the steelpan, its history and a small chronological body of scholarship. The concept of sound traffic, developed just for this project, combines areas of cultural studies and perspectives of diaspora, specifically music in and derived from Africa. In the present study, these various disciplines are applied to assess the movement of the distinctive sound of the steelpan. Finally, the category of music and performativity includes scholarship on the music of the regions of focus and the aspects of performance aesthetics that connect Trinidad, Ghana and the United States.

This dissertation incorporates theories of diaspora and the transnational in order to analyze the dissemination of the steelpan. Specifically, I draw upon James Clifford, Patricia Moran, Arjun Appadurai, Patricia Alleyne-Detmers, Paul Gilroy, Ian Isidore Smart, Robert Farris Thompson, Eintou Pearl Springer and James Matory. Diaspora, a

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theoretical term applied to many populations that have been dispersed, either forcefully or voluntary, has a contested history, both within specific populations and among scholars who study them. Originally applied to the dispersion of Jewish populations of modern Israel, scholarly focus on the term has more recently centered on the effects of colonialism and the slave trade throughout the world, with diaspora often referring to the dispersion of people from Africa and their descendants. Whether a natural evolution of scholarly discourse and Positivist thought or a continuation of colonialism and early ethnography, the study of African cultures both in Africa and their connections with cultures abroad began as a “discovery” of elements of African cultures, most often across the Atlantic Ocean in the Americas.47

Starting with the oft-referenced Herskovits/Frazier debate, scholars argue whether cultural traits that were observed in the Americas were continuations of indigenous African ways or completely new creations of people traumatized by the effects of the Middle Passage.48 Within the past few years, though, a more nuanced change has come to the world of diaspora studies. Scholars such as James Lorand Matory and Stephen Palmié have argued against the often essentialist past, suggesting that the study of cultural norms that travel with populations are affected by much more than previous experience and maintaining ways of life. Questioning the viability of previous claims about diaspora and its effects on people, “finding” Africa in the Americas is no longer enough;

48 Ibid., 11.
understanding and acknowledging multi-directional influence should be the underlying goal of diasporic research.

Diaspora studies are contested on a number of fronts. Scholars who argue for Africanity of cultural products in the diaspora are unwittingly essentializing the cultures they are trying to empower. Scholars of invented tradition may be silencing populations that have continually been marginalized. Proponents of cosmopolitanism may be so open-minded as to unwittingly support exploitation. The pitfalls are numerous, but the benefits of a more expanded approach to the concept of diaspora outweigh them.

Acknowledging and empowering individuals and groups both in countries of origin and abroad helps to foster the kinds of conversations suggested by Kwame Anthony Appiah. Approaches such as Matory’s lead us to conclusions that may not be as succinct as previous conclusions, but open the debate to the ‘ethnoscpes’ and flexible boundaries advocated by Arjun Appadurai. The current move in diaspora studies is a benefit to the field and the populations that are being studied and celebrated.

The application of the theories of diaspora and the transnational in the proposed study are flexible and nuanced. Although diaspora speaks to conditions of “dispersion, exile, ethnicity, nationalism, transnationalism, postcolonialism, and globalization,” this study considers the place of the steelpan both in its and in its various diasporic places.

The steelband movement, throughout its history, speaks to James Clifford’s definition of

diaspora as “a signifier, not simply of transnationality and movement, but of political struggles to define the local, as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement.” My conception of the transnational steelpan diaspora shows how the instruments, recordings, sounds and rhythms of the steelpan transcend borders in connecting people. Mark Slobin documents that the application of diaspora to musicological projects has only occurred since the mid-1990s and that its overuse can complicate its effectiveness. Nonetheless, scholars such as Paul Gilroy and George Lipsitz effectively frame the concept and its application in a musicological project and are used in applying diaspora to the proposed study.

Musical influence on the steelpan and its connections with traditional music in West Africa is neither unidirectional nor sustained. Various points of more intense interaction and influence created musical borrowings that then “developed” within local populations. The steelpan is still traveling and “appearing” throughout the world, including in West Africa. The steelpan is still establishing itself in Ghana and may expand with the growth of the oil industry as raw materials for making steelpans are more available and prevalent like in Trinidad.

Through careful analysis of the various musical examples, one can see the connections between continents as well as the diverse audiences that have accepted the instrument into their own musical cultures and expanded its sound traffic. These webs

should continue to flow, expand, contract and entangle as the process of construction and maintenance moves forward. The steelpan travels with individual performers and builders, yet its sound can move independently as more people are exposed to recordings and videos. Furthermore, the electronic reinterpretations of the steelpan are being used like electronic drum sounds and are replacing live players, adding a further layer to the concept of diaspora and detachment.

Steelpan Literature

As an instrument with a short life span, the steelpan has an equally small corpus of scholarly literature, although the numbers of dissertations and master’s theses have recently increased in the twenty-first century. The common thread through most current steelpan literature derives from two works that will also provide a foundation for the present research: Shannon Dudley’s *Music from Behind the Bridge: Steelband Spirit and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago* and Stephen Stuempfle’s *The Steelband Movement: The Forging of a National Art in Trinidad and Tobago*. Both works could be classified as ethnomusicological endeavors, with Dudley’s involving more transcription and notational examples to support his work and Steumpfle’s focusing on the socio-cultural dimensions of the steelpan movement. Both works are comprehensive collections of the master narrative of the steelpan, and, although the power of the pan master narrative is its fluidity and refusal to be codified in one written story, both scholars have collected the primary players and the general path of the pan’s rise to prominence on the island. Myrna Nurse’s work *Unheard Voices: The Rise of Steelband and Calypso in the Caribbean and North America* offers vignettes from some of the major figures in the rise of the steelpan
that further muddies the “story” of where the steelpan started but also illustrates the organic nature of its development and “flow” from Trinidad.

Andrew Martin, in his dissertation “Pan America: Calypso, Exotica, and the Development of Steelpan in the United States,” documents the role of the Exotica movement and the coinciding timelines of pan development and American interest in the exotic. If Martin’s claims that the steelpan grew in popularity in the United States because of its “otherness” are valid, it could speak to how the steelpan can exist in areas without significant Caribbean populations. Janine Tiffe’s “Trinidadian Steel Drum (pan) Bands in Three Great Lakes States: A Study of Musical Migration” also speaks to these realities as she documents the growth of the steelpan within the Midwest United States.

In order for individuals or groups to create a steelpan presence within a particular community or region, there typically is an initial experience that is used to create interest and financial support. Sustainability is a constant concern due to the financial investment required, especially in a case similar to my own as a performer and teacher, but not a builder.

Francesco Adinolfi’s *Mondo Exotica: Sounds, Visions, Obsessions of the Cocktail Generation* offers insight not only into the specific economic and political realities of the 1950s that saw a surge in Exotica music, but also explains the revival in the 1990s, during which there was a time of similar growth in the American steelpan industry.

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Approaching the Exotica movement from a slightly different perspective, Adinolfi documents the role of the culture industry in creating exotic locations and moods that catered to the reality of increased disposable income in postwar industrialized nations. Contemporary steelpan artists are constantly challenged by catering to an audience that enjoys “classic” island tunes like “Yellow Bird,” a song made famous by the Exotica singer Martin Denny or Jimmy Buffet’s “Margaritaville,” pieces that are neither musically challenging nor actually connected to the islands at all. Proponents of the steel band are continually hampered by audience’s misconceptions of the instrument because of artists like Denny, who “set off an unprecedented exotic mania with pieces that suggestively evoked the sounds and colors wafting from the atolls of the Pacific, or from a highly stereotyped, Americanized, and exotically delimited Africa.”

Soon after its initial appearance in the 1940s and bolstered by a major change in United States immigration policies in 1965, recent work on pan in the United States by Andrew Martin, Janine Tiffe and Ken Archer points out that with an increased migration of Trinis, the pan also began to be heard by Americans, initially clustering in areas with large Caribbean populations like Brooklyn. Although the instrument has been introduced to public schools and universities throughout the country, the relatively few manufacturers and even more rare tuners to maintain the instruments encourage proliferation where those resources are more accessible, notably the coasts, Texas, Florida, and a few pockets around Dekalb, Illinois; Akron, Ohio; and Morgantown, West Virginia.

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The steelpan as an object and Trinidad and Tobago as a socio-political location are what scholars such as Immanuel Wallerstein would refer to as the periphery in a world system. In most cases, the center is the locus of power and during the time of the steelpan, this would be the United States. Johnny Coomansingh, in his dissertation, *Commodification and Distribution of the Steelpan as a Conflicted Tourism Resource*, offers a Steelpan Heritage Trail, which could be expanded in terms of the musical influences and dispersion throughout the world. The periphery, a small island nation in the Caribbean, through the medium of the steelpan, is affecting educational offerings and music education in the United States as well as the various forms of popular music that are now employing steelpan players. The work of steelpan builders and performers troubles the conventional direction of world system influence. The steelpan then exists as an example of what Keith Nurse calls “globalization in reverse”\(^{59}\) or what Arjun Appadurai would refer to as “globalization from below.”\(^{60}\) The most common definition of globalization acknowledges the economic interconnectedness of the planet, but is typically in a manner where those in power control interests in developing nations to maintain the prevailing structure. The steelpan may be an agent for economic growth both within its originating space and those spaces to which it is transported.

As part of a historical phenomenon, the steelpan is currently an instrument whose players, builders and supporters are breaking conventional gender norms. When the instrument was invented in the 1930s and 1940s, it was an instrument primarily built and

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played by men. Although contemporarily, the steelpan is not a gender specific instrument, it is often seen as notable for a group, at least in Panorama to be made up entirely of women, to have a female arranger, or to have a female tuner. There is not anything specific about the instrument that makes easier to perform by either gender, but the steelpan world is still likely reeling from the negative connotations associated with panmen in the early years. Richard Burton builds on the work of Peter Wilson’s Crab Antics by troubling the view that the social structure of Trinidad is gendered in a binary of respectability (female) and reputation (male).\textsuperscript{61} These social conditions, as well as the violence that became associated with the steelpan meant that the instrument and its players developed the reputation of “badjohns.” Steelbands maintained a legacy of confrontation and associated violence passed on from early stickfighting organizations, carnival bands and tamboo bamboo bands, although violence was much more frequent between steelbands.\textsuperscript{62} An editorial from the April 18\textsuperscript{th}, 1947, issue of the Trinidad Guardian sums up the negative public opinion of steelpannists.

[S]teel “music” of itself may not be a fomenter of strife, but unfortunately its exponents in many cases are drawn from the criminal elements and use its practice as an outlet for their vicious tendencies…Thus it has become almost impossible to separate steel “music” from the questionable characters who engage in it.\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{63} Trinidad Guardian, 18 April 1947, 4.
As an instrument accessible to anyone, women and men alike can experience success, although there may ingrained beliefs that restrict complete access to tuning pans and arranging.

As the instrument has spread across the central areas of the United States and the United Kingdom, authenticity and signifying power still lie in the hands of Trinis. Ken Archer\textsuperscript{64} expands this metaphor to panyards in both Trinidad and New York, which are consistently forced to “migrate” as their spaces are realistically only necessary around Carnival time, but are expensive to maintain. Even the instruments themselves are forced to move almost continuously, sometimes avoiding authorities and the financial obligations that exist more and more in today’s society. Panyards, the space where a steelband stores their instruments and rehearses, initially developed in open barrack yards\textsuperscript{65} of Port of Spain settlement houses and then began to be “claimed” in open areas and vacant lots. As ownership of specific land became profitable with the development of the island (and areas of Brooklyn), these communities were forced to relocate. Extending the metaphor of diaspora, although the steel band community is relatively tight knit, players and directors can feel a sense of isolation depending on their proximity to other groups and/or tuners.

\textbf{Sound Traffic Literature}

The steelpan has a distinctive sound that is extremely versatile, allowing performers to adeptly recreate most genres of music, from the high energy distinctive

\textsuperscript{64} Ken Joseph Archer, “The Brooklyn Carnival: A Site for Diasporic Consolidation” (PhD diss, The Ohio State University, 2009).

\textsuperscript{65} Gordon Rohlehr, \textit{Calypso & Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad} (Port of Spain: Gordon Rohlehr, 1990), 214.
sound of Trinidad and Tobago in Panorama to arrangements of choral and orchestral literature, both as originally conceived and in combination with different groove foundations. The literature documenting the diasporic spread of the instrument is notably small, so the current theoretical engagement will be in taking resources on diaspora and transnationalism and applying it to the steelpan. I borrow the concept of the steelpan as a metaphor for diaspora from Ken Joseph Archer,66 expanding on his insights to evaluate its dispersion “back” to the acknowledged roots in Africa.

A number of seminal texts in the study of African music document distinctive aesthetic preferences that appear to connect populations on both sides of the Atlantic, most notably works by J.H. Kwabena Nketia, John Miller Chernoff and Francis Bebey. Although Nketia is widely acknowledged as the paramount African musicologist, he, like others after him, creates scholarly works for the academy in Europe and the United States. Therefore, although song texts and instrument names are shared in their indigenous context, extensive translation can obscure the realities of musicians and audiances in countries of study.

With this in mind, contemporary scholars both in and out of Africa are challenging many of the documented traits of music in Africa as essentialist. The two scholars most responsible for this critical perspective on ethnomusicological research are Kofi Agawu and Paschal Yao Younge. My use of these scholars is both as a critical voice and as a bridge between seemingly competing academic approaches. Both Agawu and Younge have extensive experience studying and teaching in Ghana and abroad; they

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66 Archer, “The Brooklyn Carnival,” 120.
respect the distinct understanding of the arts, especially in Ghana, and they bring a holistic approach into dialogue with the more hegemonic approach of the Western academy. Agawu’s *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* attacks the oft-cited expression “African rhythm” as the defining feature of music in Africa by explaining it is “an invention, a construction, a fiction, a myth, ultimately a lie.”\(^{67}\) Agawu’s scholarly work is not to deny that certain characteristics exist within regional musics, but to challenge and redirect the scholarly work that would codify a static musical Africanness.

A brief discussion of the changing role of how the concept of diaspora has been developed in terms of cultural products, especially in the Caribbean, is crucial. Diaspora scholars often discuss the Herskovits-Frazier debate as to whether cultural products such as music among African-Americans were continuations of indigenous practices from the regions of Africa from which slaves were brought or whether they were independent creations of a distinct population. Robert Farris Thompson and James Lorand Matory have argued for differing perspectives on the cultural products of contemporary artists whose genealogy is connected with the African continent. Thompson, in his landmark work *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* connects elements of various African cultural groups with the art and music of diasporic populations in the Americas. Matory takes a different approach, arguing in his study of Candomblé societies in Brazil that contemporary rituals there are a synthesis of

transnational elements from people and ideas crossing and recrossing the Atlantic in the past two hundred years. Acknowledging the benefits of both Thompson’s and Matory’s approach to diaspora studies seems to speak to the work of Ingrid Monson, who advocates that “establishing the particular network of the linkages made between music, cultural identities, and globalizing economic, historical, and political forces thus is crucial to the larger project of analyzing African diasporic musical sensibilities.”

In addition, Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* offers insight into the reality of the triangular effects of the slave trade and continued travel between Africa, Britain and the Caribbean. The reality of power relationships and the continued legacy of the brutality of the slave trade affect not only the artistic creativity of people of African descent, but, in the case of the steelpan, its acceptance into the academy of musical study. The reality is that much pan composition is done without a written score, living and existing in the mind of the composer or arranger; furthermore it is learned by rote. In this manner, the steelpan continues to suffer from the hegemony of Western empiricism, where scholars who cannot “see” the music performed disregard the incredible virtuosity and creativity of performers, composers, and builders. Furthermore, the construction of the steelpan is still a non-standardized process that allows for individual creativity but hampers its widespread acceptance because different builders may still use different arrangements of notes.

This dissertation, an examination of cultural continuity and creativity, will attempt to avoid the pitfalls warned of by Argeliers León:

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The attempt to identify African influence through such rhythmic figures, which in some instances sufficed to assign them the status of ‘markers’ of national identity, is simply the result of a lack of discrimination in aural perception by excluding from the listening experience the communicative function that syntactical structures carry in traditional African musics.69

León challenges the simple assertion of African retentions but qualifies this challenge with an awareness of the importance of aesthetic preference in terms of timbre, or tone color. Referencing specific rhythmic figures that have been studied most notably by Samuel Floyd as the tresillo-cinquillo complex (three-note and five-note figures), 70 León suggests that the African retentions in the Caribbean are actually in sound preference. His citation of Cuban musicologist Fernando Ortiz, who claims “African music uses the sound potential of wood, skin, and metal,”71 can be applied to the steelpan in the sense that metal is used like a drum skin. This dissertation will take the specific rhythmic patterns and assess them contextually and inject a sense of aesthetic timbral preference in the case of the steelpan sound.

Adding further nuance to the understanding of the traffic of culture is the story of Domingos Álvares, a traditional healer from the ancient kingdom of Dahomey, who was enslaved by the Portuguese and forcibly taken to Brazil. He was then transported to Portugal as part of an Inquisition trial on charges brought against him claiming his

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71 León, “Music in the Life,” 22.
traditional Fon/Gbe healing was contrary to Catholic teachings. Linguistically, Álvares belongs to the Fon/Gbe family of languages, a vast belt of West Africans that includes the Ewe of Southeastern Ghana and the Yoruba of modern Nigeria, who will also be tied to the creation of the steelpan through the work of Shango drummers in Trinidad.

In James Sweet’s *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World*, the path of Álvares highlights the reformulating of his identity as a traditional healer in Brazil, both connected with African communities of the enslaved as well as the Catholic Church. Sweet’s work demonstrates the propensity of cultural traditions to synthesize and incorporate local traditions as well as those recalled from memory and passed on through generations. Álvares’s time in Portugal to face the charges of the Catholic Church led to his awareness of the migration of Africans to Europe, where an estimated one-fifth of Lisbon’s population consisted of African or African-descended people, leaving Álvares feeling distinctive influence of Africa on the local population.72

Álvares’s story demonstrates the cultural project that is tangentially related to music and dance, his re-creation of the profession of traditional healer. “Though separated from his African homeland by nearly twenty years and two continents, Domingos still clung to a set of core understandings passed along to him by his ancestors.”73 These core understandings were also in the minds of enslaved musicians from throughout the continent as they made sense of their forcible dispersion from the

73 Ibid., 215.
land of their birth, not necessarily to be identically recalled, but to be reinterpreted and integrated into their new lives in the Caribbean.

Music and Performativity

The challenges of quantifying (or even qualifying) the merits and intellectual properties of a musical performance are challenging yet necessary in a project of this construction. One characteristic that appears to connect performances like Panorama in Trinidad and traditional music in West Africa is the interconnectedness of performers and audience. Part of that has to do with the timbre of the instruments, the physicality of performing and the integrated role of dance. In both cases, the music is not meant to be listened to by a static, non-participating audience. Although not necessarily affiliated with the field of performance studies, a critical resource in this dissolution of the separation between performer and audience is Mikhail Bakhtin’s discussion of the carnivalesque. In Rabelais and His World, Bakhtin discusses the role reversals and social purpose of carnivals. “All were considered equal during carnival….a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession and age.”\(^74\) Trinidad’s Carnival, one of the world’s largest, is directly related to the development and showcasing of the steelpan, so Bakhtin’s discussion of the performance characteristics of Carnival can be applied to the pan and, furthermore, to its ability to travel outside of Trinidad.

Kim Johnson, in If Yuh Iron Good You is King, speaks to the connectedness of audience and performer, “all here grooving collectively to the beautiful sounds being

\(^{74}\) Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 10.
produced specifically to evoke and touch the mood we are in at this moment in time...to match the music and the mood of the moment so the performers and audience fuse into a single community."

The distinct timbre of the steelpan, metal stretched to act like the skin of a drum, has even been argued to have medical benefits. Even this connectedness is challenged though as the formerly “mobile” steelpans used to involve additional members of the community as pan pushers, literally pushing or pulling pans on racks as people played them. Although this role still exists in the movement of pans during the Panorama competition, pushers have largely been replaced by large trailers for smaller steelpan groups in the Carnival activities on the road as well as by large trucks with recorded music blasting from racks and racks of speakers.

Scholars such as Charles Keil and Steven Feld speak to the reality of performance and the difficulty in assessing its cultural aspects in their work *Music Grooves*. Keil makes analogies to another diasporic art form noting that jazz performances do not have an equivalent to an orchestra or choir using a written score. Although elements can be tightly controlled, those moments of freedom are simultaneously poignant and difficult to quantify. The concept of groove, a vital component in steelpan performance and experience, is one that should be evaluated as a process, not just as a product. “Consider, however the system or style in action – music as a creative act rather than as an object – and remember that outside the West, musical traditions are almost exclusively

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76 Jeffrey A. Jones, “Music and Healing with the Skiffle Bunch Steel Orchestra in San Fernando, Trinidad” (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2010).
performance traditions…illumination of syntactic relationship or of form as such will not go far in accounting for expression.”

Richard Schechner encourages scholars to “expand our vision of what performance is, to study it not only as an art but as a means of understanding historical, social, and cultural processes.” This study will engage with what Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett shares as a primary premise of performance studies, one that incorporates more fully those art forms that can take many forms and, much like performances of steelbands, are typically marginalized.

Although this dissertation is not affiliated with a specific ethnomusicology department, it builds upon the concepts of musical performance ethnography outlined in Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology, edited by Gregory Barz and Timothy Cooley. The contributors to this volume speak to the specific characteristics of musical performance that have made conventional, detached ethnographies difficult if not impossible to complete. As a participant and observer, researchers who focus on music are challenged with incorporating the elements of experience into their written work. Throughout this dissertation, I build upon the work of these scholars by incorporating analyses of my experience as well as the specific musical structures I performed as part of my research. As Michelle Kisliuk notes, “[m]usical expression is usually so interlinked with the very life that music and other expressive

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forms embody, that the intuition of the ethnographer who lived a particular field experience is sometimes the only determining factor.\textsuperscript{80} The connections I draw throughout this dissertation are phenomenological examples of visceral musical experiences in the United States, Trinidad and Ghana.

The case study of Ghana and the study of music from Ghana, both domestically and abroad, revolves around the work of J.H. Kwabena Nketia. Nketia, a world renowned ethnomusicologist, is still the most widely read scholar on music in Africa. His \textit{Music of Africa}, a seminal text on sub-Saharan music, is invaluable in my analysis of social components as well as drumming of all kinds in Ghana\textsuperscript{81}. In addition, my own mentor, Dr. Paschal Yao Younge, has studied contemporary traditional music in Ghana extensively and his research and writings are used to help draw out contemporary links between traditional music and steelpan music in Trinidad.

Chapter Organization

In Chapter One, I examine the steelpan in Trinidad and the existence and development of rhythmic patterns from West Africa. I use West Africa because the vast majority of slaves that were brought to Trinidad came from West Africa and I acknowledge that the traditions that gave birth to the steelpan are from more than a single country or a single ethnic group. By following the steelpan’s archetypical rhythmic patterns and performance practices to connected traditions in West Africa, the ideas of diaspora are extended through a discussion of the dispersion of the steelpan itself.


Although a number of West African as well as East Indian influences are acknowledged in the development of the steelpan, I focus specifically on musical connections between Ghana and Trinidad. These connections began in Trinidad with the Cedula of Population in 1783, a decree by the Spanish government that offered free land in Trinidad to plantation owners in the French Caribbean colonies, who then immigrated, bringing those they had enslaved. As the plantation economy grew, it resulted in increased slave trade from Africa to Trinidad.

Enslaved people from various ethnic groups continued traditional celebrations and rituals involving drumming until such performances were outlawed in 1884. Rhythmic patterns were then transferred to bamboo stamping tubes, an ensemble that still exists throughout both West Africa and Trinidad. In Ghana, the most well-known bamboo ensembles are in Mesomagor, Central Region, and Nyamebekyere, Eastern Region. These bamboo ensembles bear a resemblance to the predecessor to the steelpan, tamboo bamboo. Contemporary performances on bamboo in Ghana incorporate the same rhythmic patterns and relationships between instruments. I explain the rhythmic correlations in three ways: (1) as retentions of music brought to Trinidad that influenced the development of the steelpan, (2) as rhythms that were adopted in Ghana via recorded and live music, and (3) as musical frameworks that developed simultaneously and separately on both sides of the Atlantic.

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82 Brereton, A History of Modern Trinidad.
In Chapter Two, my research in Ghana is focused on the bamboo ensembles that resemble tamboo bamboo ensembles in Trinidad. I show that the rhythms and instruments are the same, but not the eventual transition to steelpans. From May 28, 2014 to June 15, 2014, I was in Ghana conducting interviews, research and performance study with local musicians. Part of my time was spent studying with Bismark Amoah, leader of the Kuykyekukyeku Bamboo Orchestra of Mesomagor, Central Region, Ghana. Bamboo “drums” among the community of Mesomagor were used to accompany village celebrations, entertain and instruct children, accompany storytelling and to maintain traditions of the community.\textsuperscript{84} My analysis of the rhythms of pieces I was taught, as well as those I experienced as an audience member, are used to draw musical connections with tamboo bamboo of Trinidad & Tobago as well as Bismark’s reaction in Ghana to seeing videos of the Gasparillo Tamboo Bamboo Specialists.

In Chapter Three, I document how these migrations (voluntary and forced) led to the steelpan’s creation and contributed to a transnational migration of the instrument itself. Both with and independent of steelpan advocates (performers, tuners, builders, patrons), the pan has migrated far beyond the streets of Port of Spain, Trinidad. Tracing the routes of the steelpan and its distinctive sound, one can create a web of sound traffic. These routes radiate from Trinidad to various parts of the world as well as from additional hubs of pan activity. Furthermore, through competitions like Panorama, players return home or come with their love of pan to visit the island nation. It is through

\textsuperscript{84} Bismark Kweku Nimo Amoah, interview by the author, June 10, 2014.
these movements that I claim that the unidirectional influence that is widely understood is more nuanced and multidirectional.

In addition, I also connect the two locations of Trinidad and Ghana with the sound traffic of the steelpan specifically, examining routes of travel in a steelpan diaspora. The reach of the steelpan is worldwide, yet, similar to the hardening that occurs during the instrument’s construction, the steelpan’s presence has “hardened” in some locations more than others. Possibly the most expansive is in the United States. The proliferation of steelpan in the United States is basically two-fold: as a part of educational music programs (ranging from elementary school to college/university); and as an extension of the Trinidadian community of Brooklyn centered around the West Indian Carnival on Labor Day and its Panorama competition in which I performed in 2012. Although a number of prolific community ensembles exist, the vast majority are still connected with some sort of larger educational entity.

Finally, in the conclusion, I combine the chapters in a manner to support my claims that the steelpan is a diasporic instrument, one forged through the creative genius of young people in Trinidad, building upon the legacy of musical ideas brought to the island and then shared with the world through the sound traffic of players, recordings, instruments, tuners, builders and enthusiasts.
CHAPTER 1: LOCUS: TAMBOO BAMBOO AND STEELPAN IN TRINIDAD AND
TOBAGO

This chapter closely examines Trinidad as the locus for the steelpan by considering early incarnations of the instrument as well as shared influences in Ghana as part of a sound traffic analysis. Rhythmic patterns in Trinidad are cultural retentions that were reformulated in Trinidad during and after the slave trade. Enslaved people were brought to Trinidad originally from other Caribbean islands by French planters in the 1770s during the implementation of a plantation economy by the Spanish. 

Through a brief discussion of the colonization of Trinidad and the regulation of the music and dance of enslaved Africans, a foundation is laid for an understanding of the steelpan as a continued iteration of rhythmic and performative cultural meaning that came in the minds of men and women forcibly removed from through West and Central Africa and was reformulated in the Caribbean. These performances molded and influenced the preferences of Trinis throughout the centuries and can still be seen in modern-day performances of steelpan.

The steelpan was an instrument of and for the people, crafted in the minds of young and impoverished of Port of Spain, and, as such, was connected with and supported by the main popular music genre of Trinidad, the calypso. A study of steelpan would be incomplete without an understanding of how calypso, like steelpan’s predecessor, tamboo bamboo, is connected with kalinda stickfighting, and how it helped shaped the development of the steelpan as arrangers crafted music for the growing

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steelpan orchestras based on well-known calypso tunes. Calypso and steelpan are not independent entities, especially in the early years of the steelpan.

Although calypso is typically an individual artform, the steelpan is primarily a collective artform, where large numbers of performers and supporters work together to fuse music and community. Through a discussion of my experience with birdsong Steel Orchestra and Exodus Steel Orchestra, both of Tunapuna, Trinidad, I highlight the communal aspects of steelpan performance as well as how the instrument has been a signifier of national pride and community spirit. Pan is a movement and even when its players were ostracized, performance groups were communities within communities, providing support, protection and even employment for each other.  

Colonization of Trinidad

By this point in the colonization of the Caribbean, the Spanish crown had established colonies elsewhere and did not have the means to send settlers to Trinidad. Their solution was to turn to French settlers already in the Caribbean. Under the auspices of two Cedulas (decrees) de Poblacion, the Spanish encouraged non-Spaniard Roman Catholics to migrate to Trinidad and set up plantations in exchange for land grants and protection of agricultural interests. White males were entitled to four and two-sevenths fanegas (an old Spanish unit of measurement equivalent 30 acres) for each member of the family. Because of these early settlers, Trinidad’s population was religiously Catholic,
linguistically French, officially Spanish, but soon to be controlled by the British in 1797.\footnote{MacDonald, \textit{Trinidad & Tobago}, 24.}

Bridget Brereton notes that in 1813, there were 25,617 documented enslaved people on the island.\footnote{Brereton, \textit{A History}, 54.} In addition to white emigrants, the Cedula de Poblacion encouraged the extensive migration of free colored planters, some of whom owned slaves as well.\footnote{Ibid., 13-14.} As part of the classification system of the time, 11,629 were labeled as “Creole” slaves who were born in Trinidad or other West Indian islands, and 13,980 were taken from West Africa.\footnote{Ibid., 54-55.} Prior to 1797, Trinidad had the largest free Afro-Creole population in the Caribbean.\footnote{MacDonald, \textit{Trinidad & Tobago}, 25.} In 1813, the majority of the enslaved in Trinidad & Tobago were African born, but from 1834 those percentages flipped and the majority were Creole.

Trinidad was distinct as a late developing plantation economy and one in which an unusually high proportion of the enslaved were urban.\footnote{Brereton, \textit{A History}, 55.} After the abolition of slavery in 1834, the plantation workforce was supplemented by an influx of indentured servants from India and China.\footnote{Jeffrey Ross Thomas, “A History of Pan and the Evolution of the Steel Band in Trinidad and Tobago” (Master’s Thesis, Wesleyan University, 1985), 11.} Cultural population centers began to shift throughout the nineteenth century as the East Indian population was concentrated in rural, agricultural areas while the Afro-Creole population included the lighter-skinned urban middle sectors and black popular sectors that were increasingly urbanized.\footnote{MacDonald, \textit{Trinidad & Tobago}, 29.}
The enslaved Africans who were taken to the islands continued to perform their traditional music upon their arrival in Trinidad. In addition, Trinidad was a Caribbean island where the British navy resettled freed Africans intercepted after the abolition of slavery in Great Britain. More than 6,500 Africans who were freed from foreign slave ships arrived in Trinidad from 1841 to 1861. Many of these groups found and settled with people of similar ethnic background in which they were able to maintain their languages and customs. Diverse “towns” and societies that maintained traditions from Africa began to appear throughout the island of Trinidad. In the capital, Port of Spain, there is still a Yoruba Village Square that commemorates an area east of downtown where descendants of the Yoruba (although ethnic designations may not necessarily be accurate because of the vast expanse of places from which people were enslaved) used to practice their traditions.

Spiritual reformulations in Trinidad among Yoruba descendants through Shango and Fon descendants through Rada communities connect the island not only with modern-day Nigeria, but also ethnic groups across Togo, Benin and Ghana. The Ewe of Ghana are closely related to the Yoruba, both geographically in West Africa as well as in terms of spiritual hierarchy. Among the Ewe, the orisha of thunder is known as So, and is one of the principal deities of the Yeve secret society. The primary symbol of both

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98 Munro, Different Drummers, 92.
100 Munro, Different Drummers, 92.
101 Carr, A Rada Community in Trinidad.
Shango and So is a double-edged axe and both deities are associated with the color red; furthermore, both share historical ties with the Dahomean (Fon) deity Hevioso.\textsuperscript{103}

These organizations began to assimilate European systems of order and designation (e.g. “King,” “Captain” and “Major”) as a method to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the colonial government, a practice that would continue in early steel bands (and it still does to this day in some respects).\textsuperscript{104} Gatherings were organized to celebrate life event celebrations away from the plantation. Plantation owners were often paranoid about these performances and celebrations, fearing it would lead to revolt.\textsuperscript{105} Regardless, music and dance accompanied work and life much like the regions they were taken from in West Africa.\textsuperscript{106}

\textbf{Colonial Regulation}

The Peace Preservation Ordinance of 1884 was a legal inhibitor to musical performance that shaped the development of the steelpan. On March 2, 1884, Proclamation No. 1 of 1884 was published which, for the first time, stated Carnival would not commence until 6:00 a.m. on the morning of Shrove Monday and outlawed the procession known as Canboulay.\textsuperscript{107} It was an ordinance that banned “the beating of any drum, the blowing of any horn or the use of any other noisy instrument,”\textsuperscript{108} and, as such, disproportionately affected the formerly enslaved and their offspring.\textsuperscript{109}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{103} Ibid.
\bibitem{104} Thomas, ”A History of Pan”, 28.
\bibitem{105} Stuempfle, \textit{The Steelband Movement}, 14.
\bibitem{106} Nketia, \textit{The Music of Africa}.
\bibitem{108} Ibid., 100.
\bibitem{109} Stuempfle, \textit{The Steelband Movement}, 30.
\end{thebibliography}
Canboulay was a torchlight procession that began at midnight on Carnival Sunday and was most visible in the capital of Port of Spain. Before the 1840s, Canboulay was a celebration associated with Emancipation Day. The procession depicted symbolically the extinguishment of a cane fire by the formerly enslaved and possibly, a symbolic overthrow of slavery. In the 1850s, the masquerade comprised black participants dressed as nègres jardins, or field laborers, with baskets on their heads being driven by a man with a long whip. Prior to Emancipation in 1838, Canboulay was also the name given to a parody masquerade by the white elite during Carnival who, in the press, thought that mimicking the enslaved through dress and song was merely “amusing themselves in a harmless manner and at the same time amusing others.”

As the struggle over the meaning of and acceptable participation in Carnival changed, the masquerade was appropriated by the formerly enslaved and enacted annually as “a kind of commemoration of the change in their condition.” There is conflicting information on the origin of the word, some scholars cite a French etymology, the patois translation of “cannes brulees,” or “burnt cane,” and others claim KiKongo origins of kambule, or “procession”. This procession, too, was regulated by colonial authorities. The Peace Preservation Ordinance outlawed torch processions, dances and

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100 J.D. Elder, *From Congo Drum to Steelband: A Socio-historical Account of the Emergence and Evolution of the Trinidad Steel Orchestra* (St. Augustine: University of West Indies, 1969), 11.
102 Ibid.
104 Ibid., 33.
105 Dudley, *Music from Behind the Bridge*, 41.
assemblies of more than ten “armed with sticks or other weapons of offence,” both elements of celebration of the black communities of Trinidad.

Government officials claimed that the Peace Preservation Ordinance was a reaction to the 1881 Canboulay Riot, a clash between police and masqueraders that had been brewing for a few years. After his appointment in 1876, Captain Arthur Wybrow Baker took a distinctly authoritarian approach to Canboulay processions, sending police throughout the capital where they engaged participants in each stickband conflict and forced the surrender of torches, drums and sticks. In 1881, “Baker and his men lay in wait to ambush the bands as they began their parades at midnight. Special effort was made by stickband supporters to lay down broken stones for ammunition against the police. There was also systematic breaking of the kerosene street lamps” as revelers prepared to overpower the police and continue their annual Carnival celebration. The riots, or in the minds of contemporary Trinis, the local population’s resistance to official repression, are still re-enacted each Friday before Carnival in Port of Spain in the early hours of the morning.

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117 Cowley, *Carnival*, 100.
119 Ibid., 83.
120 Brereton, *A History*, 85.
Tamboo Bamboo

The populations affected by the Peace Preservation Ordinance of 1884 responded by continuing to perform the same music on stalks of bamboo. According to historian Errol Hill,

Deprived of their drums, finding the shack-shack and thumping on odd bits and ends unsatisfying, spurned by the string band for social reasons, or themselves rejecting it because it lacked the rhythmic force to which they were accustomed, masqueraders from the lower ranks of society developed a new type of percussion orchestra from bamboo stems. This innovation became known as the tambour bamboo band.

These groups are often referred to collectively as tamboo bamboo. The name comes from the Creole form of the French word for drum, tambour, and the stalks that make up the “drums.” Tamboo bamboo (Figure 6) is now associated with carnival festivities as an art form to be preserved, but, in the immediate aftermath of the Peace Preservation Ordinance, the stalks of tamboo replaced the canboulay drumming that would accompany processions as well as kalinda stickfighting.

Kalinda, a form of Caribbean stickfighting that was brought from West Africa and is often accompanied by music, is connected with the steelpan through its association with tamboo bamboo and eventually calypso. In Trinidad, kalinda combined the martial

124 Thomas, “A History of Pan”.
art with musical accompaniment by tamboo bamboo and the verbal “warfare” of chantwells. For analytical purposes, I have included three transcriptions of tamboo bamboo, via the recollection of George Goddard (Figure 7) and Ellie Mannette as well as my own transcription of the Gasparillo Tamboo Bamboo Specialists from a performance in St. Augustine, Trinidad, on February 2, 2013.

Figure 6 - Gasparillo Tamboo Bamboo Specialists performance at Old Yard Carnival celebration, St. Augustine, Trinidad – photo by author (2013).
The three main voices are the boom, foule and cutter; these are three different lengths of bamboo that are struck on the ground and sometimes also struck with a stick to recreate the rhythms and sounds that were formerly played on skin drums. Although many resources mention these three main voices, the instrumentation was far from standard as the ensemble was an organic creation of mutual influence. The names for these instruments also are used in Shango drum ensembles, a drumming group that accompanies the Trinidad version of the primarily Yoruba veneration of Shango, the orisha of thunder.\textsuperscript{127}

The boom, or bass voice, is typically a stalk of bamboo about 5 inches in diameter and between 3.5 and 5 feet in length.\textsuperscript{128} All the joints except the bottom one are punctured. In most cases, boom players stamp a single bamboo on the ground, but sometimes two are used. The name is likely derived from the deep, resonant sound created by the stamping of this largest of the bamboo tubes.

\textsuperscript{126} Thomas, “A History of Pan”, 76-77, and Dudley, \textit{Music from Behind}, 33.
\textsuperscript{127} Rohlehr, \textit{Calypso & Society}, 71.
\textsuperscript{128} Thomas, “A History of Pan”, 72.
The cutter, or chandler, is slightly smaller than the boom, and the player is often free to improvise over the more consistent patterns of the boom and the foulé players. The cutter is the lead instrument of the tamboo bamboo ensemble, and is typically 3.5 inches in diameter and between 2.25 and 3.5 feet in length.¹²⁹ The instrument is held across the shoulder and struck with a stick or simultaneously hit with a stick and stamped on the ground. This particular style of playing, with a stick and stamping on the ground, has become the norm for contemporary tamboo bamboo ensembles where most of the patterns are played by members using this technique on various lengths of bamboo. In Fig. 7, the cutter pattern is notated with two pitches where the bamboo is struck and hit simultaneously and the upper pitch denotes where the stick hits the bamboo.

Ellie Mannette’s recollection of Tamboo Bamboo rhythms has the cutter represented by a single pitch, reflecting that these intricate rhythms were typically struck by a stick (Figure 8). The cutter was also the instrument with which the player was allowed freedom to improvise, as rhythms would then “cut” through the ensemble. Many modern steel orchestras have an iron, or brake drum, player that is free to improvise in this manner. The piercing sound of the iron continues to “cut” through the ensemble as the cutters did before them.

¹²⁹ Thomas, “A History of Pan”, 73.
The foulé, fuller or buller, was a pair of bamboo tubes that were either struck together, hit end to end, or alternately struck on the ground or some other appropriate surface. The foulé were 3 inches in diameter and about a foot in length. I have not seen this type of bamboo tube used in the contemporary performances I have witnessed, but, as will be discussed in Chapter 2, it is quite similar to the highest voice of the Ghanaian bamboo ensembles.

The final voice, one that is merely rhythmic, is the bottle and spoon, an instrument that all the tamboo bamboo bands used as timekeepers. “The sturdy Dutch gin flask was the preferred type, and these bottles were sometimes filled to different levels so that they would emit different tones…Their objective was to create an intense polyrhythmic background to the call and response singing of a chantwell and chorus.”

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131 Thomas, “A History of Pan”, 73.
The bottles provided ensembles with a distinct timbre that could be heard above all the bamboo instruments as well as vocalists. The preference for rhythms that cut through all the other rhythmic patterns is one that continued into steelbands, replaced by the brake drum from a car, or “iron,” and still used to this day to start steelband pieces and to create a single sound with which any number of players can coordinate their sound.

In this dissertation, tamboo bamboo ensembles are compared with performing groups of bamboo stamping tubes throughout Africa, including two Ghanaian groups, the Kuykyekuyeku Bamboo Orchestra of Mesomagor, Ghana and the Nyamebɛkyɛre Bamboo Orchestra of Nyamebɛkyɛre, Ghana. The similar principles of voicing, rhythms and performance practice connect Ghana with Trinidad in a manner that is extended to the steelpan. The groups in Trinidad continued to accompany kalinda competitions as well as Carnival street processions. During the early 1900s, rival “bands” would meet on the street to establish supremacy. Most confrontations ended in violence, which contributed to the negative connotations that carried over into the early years of the steelpan.

Tamboo bamboo was both a stationary and mobile ensemble. Its mobility, accompanying processions, especially during Carnival, carried on in the transition to iron bands, the name given to groups that gradually preferred performing tamboo bamboo rhythms on various metal containers, and early steelpan groups. The rhythms that were characteristically tamboo bamboo smoothly passed to metal equivalents. According to

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musicologist Anthony Prospect, “kalinda and Orisha (Shango) drum rhythms were reproduced by the tamboo bamboo band and...these same rhythms were in turn transferred to the early steel band.” As an accompaniment to kalinda fights, tamboo bamboo is an ensemble performed to accompany and embolden a band’s particular stickfighter or chantwell. As the musical arm of a community of citizens who were connected by the yard where they lived or who they associated with, these ensembles resemble the modern steel band whose base of supporters is more expansive, even reaching beyond the boundaries of Trinidad.

Transition from Bamboo to Metal

A group that called themselves Alexander’s Ragtime Band, based in a barrack yard called Hell Yard in eastern Port of Spain, are generally recognized as the first tamboo bamboo band to use metal objects in street processions in 1939. The band replaced the stalks of bamboo with dustbins, oil cans and biscuit tins, but retained the characteristic rhythms of tamboo bamboo. There is evidence of people using metal objects as rhythmic instruments before the appearance of Alexander’s Ragtime Band, but they were the first organized ensemble to usher in the transition from bamboo to metal. During World War II, Carnival festivities were cancelled in Trinidad & Tobago, but young musicians continued to experiment with innovative sounds created from metal objects, including small oil barrels. The actual beginnings of the modern steelpan are a

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138 Smith, Steeldrums, 32-33.
139 Stuempfe, The Steelband Movement, 36.
140 Stuempfe, The Steelband Movement, 36.
141 Smith, Steeldrums and Steelbands, 47-48.
subject of lore, with conflicting stories that have been the subject of studies and manuscripts in the past.\textsuperscript{142}

What \textit{is} known is that the transition from bamboo to metal instruments was relatively seamless, even if the exact dates and people aren’t known definitively. The boom, foule and cutter were replaced by instruments like the boom, dudup or kittle, and ping pong, all names given to instruments used in the early steelband.\textsuperscript{143} All the early pans were either hung around a player’s neck or held with one hand while the other played. The boom, sometimes called a kittle boom or bass kittle, was made from a biscuit tin.\textsuperscript{144} The large containers had a hole on one end and were played most often by hand. The dudup and kittle were often made from caustic soda drums, the material of choice for the mobile ensembles because of their larger size yet lighter weight than other metal containers.\textsuperscript{145} The ping pong was an early steelpan held with one hand and played by the other that allowed the player to play simple melodies as builders increased the number of notes possible in one pan.\textsuperscript{146} The ping pong debuted in the first Carnival after Victory in Europe Day, and from that point on melodic playing on the steelpan would continue to develop.

\textbf{Notable “Firsts”}

In the early years of the steelpan, many pioneers were involved in charting the path for the instrument, yet the exact dates and names are still the subject of debate. Elliot

\textsuperscript{143} Stuempfle, \textit{The Steelband Movement}, 39.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 38.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{146} Stuempfle, \textit{The Steelband Movement}, 40.
“Ellie” Mannette, a founding member of the Invaders Steel Orchestra from Woodbrook talks of his use of the first 55-gallon oil barrel that he called “Barracuda.” Myrna Nurse offers a conflicting story of the “first” large oil drum being used and as such, there is no definitive account of the early years of the steelpan. In an interview with Neville Jules, another prominent early panman, the first person to use a large oil drum was Cyril “Snatcher” Guy, at a competition in which Mannette and Jules also competed. Many of the innovations during these early years of 1939 – 1945 were centered in the East Dry River area of Port of Spain, between the capital and hills of Laventille.

Although the steelpan is played throughout the world today, and despite conflicting accounts of its origins, the instrument’s traffic can still be traced to a few specific events and people. In 1951, the Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra (TASPO) was formed of members from the largest steelpan groups on the island. The group toured England for the Golden Jubilee but Sterling Betancourt opted to stay in England when the group returned to Trinidad and has been a significant figure in the establishment of English steelbands and the Notting Hill Panorama competition. It was the first performance of steelpan in the United Kingdom, but was not the first time a steel orchestra performed outside of Trinidad. That honor lies with Red Army, the benefactors of a competition sponsored by Ranee Phillips that provided a tour to British Guyana. A similar fate met some of the members of the Esso Tripoli Steel Orchestra that traveled to...

147 Ibid., 41.
148 Nurse, Unheard Voices, 13.
150 Kim Johnson, From Tin Pan to TASPO: Steelband in Trinidad from 1939-1951 (Port of Spain: University of West Indies Press, 2011).
the 1967 World’s Fair in Montreal. Upon completion of their duties at the World’s Fair, Tripoli toured the United States and even performed and recorded with Liberace. One of the leaders of that group was Hugh Borde, who eventually settled in Ypsilanti, Michigan to share the steelpan with the Upper Midwest. Winston “Spree” Simon traveled to Ghana and Nigeria in the late 1950s but this is only briefly mentioned in written sources and is not remembered by the members of the Trini community in Ghana with whom I spoke.

Steelpan in Trinidad

The developments above primarily occurred among the Afro-Trinidadian populations. Most of the early innovators in the move from tamboo bamboo to metal objects and then steelpan were young men in their teens and twenties. An island wide unemployment problem in the 1930s and 1940s and the progressive violence that would occur when steelbands would meet led to association of the steelpan with the more dangerous and unsavory components of the population. These associations caused a slow acceptance of the pan as the national instrument of Trinidad & Tobago.

Conflicting opinions exist as to the colonial regulation of tamboo bamboo in order to stem the violence that ensued when rival groups would meet. Jeff Thomas claims “I could find no evidence that tamboo bamboo was ever legally suppressed, as had been drumming before it” and J.D. Elder shares “it must be made clear that ‘tambour

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152 Caspar Durant, interview with author, Tunapuna, Trinidad & Tobago, February 19, 2013.
bamboo’ was never really completely suppressed”157 yet Angela Smith counters that “[i]n 1934, the use of bamboo instruments was banned. Along with violence, authorities cited illegal harvest of bamboo at bamboo plantations.”158 Smith’s assertions coincide with the stories I was told by Ellie Mannette, but Thomas’s findings are more widely cited in scholarship. If tamboo bamboo was similarly restricted, it “draws a genealogical connection between the steelband and the 1884 Peace Preservation Ordinance, casting pan as the latest in a series of ingenious circumventions of colonial law.”159

In the wake of challenges to tamboo bamboo and the cancellation of Carnival during World War II, young people transferred the rhythms of the tamboo bamboo onto various metal containers160 before experimenting with the oil barrels that were increasingly available because of the U.S. military presence in Trinidad.161 The United States military presence in Trinidad began in 1940 with the establishment of bases at Chaguaramas and Waller Airfield as part of the Destiniers for Bases Agreement with Great Britain.162 In addition to providing materials for steelpan production, the U.S. Navy also fielded a steelband from 1957-1999. Previous scholarship has documented the influence of the U.S. Navy Steel Band on the development of steelpan in the United States as well as the multiple, interweaving paths of individuals connected to the U.S. Navy Steelband, including their first pan builder, Ellie Mannette, and the one-time custodian of the U.S. Navy Steelband pans, Anthony Hailey.163

157 Elder, From Congo Drum to Steelband, 15.
158 Smith, Steel Drums, 33.
159 Dudley, Music from Behind, 43.
160 Ibid., 41-47.
161 Tiffe, “Tropicalism”, 152.
162 Martin, “Pan-America”, 151.
163 Martin, “Pan-America” and Tiffe, “Tropicalism”.
When musicians started using 55 gallon oil barrels around 1946, the innovation in sound and size of ensembles became a field of competition as well. The violence that plagued tamboo bamboo ensembles carried over into early steel bands as there are battles of groups like the Invaders and Tokyo that approached mythological status. Through a concerted effort of performers, politicians and supporters of the steelpan, public perception of the pan player changed from the 1940s through the 1970s as more and more people, especially from the middle class, became involved in the pan movement.

Steelpan in Trinidad and Tobago is prevalent yet hidden, celebrated yet ostracized, welcoming yet territorial. In the realm of Panorama, the large competition that occurs in connection with Carnival each year, Trinis have “my band,” which typically ends up being one of the large bands clustered around the capital of Port of Spain. Even if a player is part of a specific band, familial ties may be to another band. In the early days of steelpan, these allegiances were life-long and often violently proclaimed and protected. Although younger pannists may feel freer to play with multiple bands or change allegiances, there is still an extended network or family that surrounds each band, especially the large bands. I performed with two different large bands (albeit in different rounds of competition); although this does occur among “crackshot” players, I think this was more acceptable because of my nationality. I don’t necessarily associate with a

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165 Dudley, Music from Behind, 89.
166 Ibid., 86-112.
167 “Crackshot” refers to pannists who are able to learn Panorama tunes very quickly and act like hired guns, as Trini nationals are eligible for prize money in the Panorama competition. “The problem stems from bands offering ‘crack-shot’ players top dollars to play for them.” Quoted in Angelo M. Marcelle, “Vacancies for Pan Players,” Newsday January 17, 2015.
particular band, but follow the groups in which my friends play. My intent is to support
the achievements of all the players, even in the midst of competition.

Old Yard Carnival Celebration

One of the places that tamboo bamboo is still performed is in carnival re-creation
celebrations. The University of the West Indies in St. Augustine, Trinidad, has a Carnival
Studies department that works to maintain Carnival traditions. They also plan and present
a program called “Old Yard” that showcases specific characters and music from the
history of Trinidad & Tobago, including tamboo bamboo and steelpan around the neck.
On February 2, 2013, I attended the Old Yard to experience the history of Carnival in
Trinidad.

Throughout the afternoon, performers of various masquerades such as the moko
jumbie, baby doll, burrokeet, cow band, jab jab and jab molassie presented their skills to
an audience that was able to visit artisans and food vendors on the campus of the Carnival
Arts department. As part of the event, the Gasparillo Tamboo Bamboo Specialists
performed and there were kalinda fighters (Figure 9) who were accompanied by hand
drummers performing on instruments that would naturally fit in a celebration in West
Africa.
In an open area of the University grounds, a small sign was labelled “De Gayelle,” (Figure 10) the name given to the arena where stickfighting, a kalinda, would take place. Gayelle was actually a small hole that is dug for a kalinda match in order to catch “the blood that would surely flow.”\textsuperscript{168} There were grandstands set up on the east and west sides of the space and attendees were free to wander the grounds of the Carnival Arts department as various masquerade characters would enter the gayelle to perform their mas.

After a number of groups performed, some plywood was set on the ground and the Gasparillo Tamboo Bamboo Specialists performed for the Old Yard audience (Figure 11). The group appeared to include a wide range of ages among its performers. The band included multiple booms, fullers and cutters. Aside from the booms, which were of a larger diameter, most of the bamboo tubes appeared to be similar in size. In addition, there was a single bass (two pitches) made from a caustic soda drum that emphasized the boom, a scratcher and a round iron. All the players both struck their bamboo on the

Figure 11 - Gasparillo Tamboo Bamboo Specialists, in performance at Old Yard Carnival celebration, St. Augustine, Trinidad – photo by author (2013).

At the beginning of each selection, the player of the iron, a large round metal ring, would perform simple downbeats that would eventually lead to more improvisational playing, emphasizing some of the composite rhythms that were created between the bamboo tubes. The bell serves a similar purpose to the bottle and spoon in early tamboo
bamboo as well as bells in Ghanaian music; it can be heard above all other rhythms. It serves as the conductor in the sense that all players can feel their pattern in relation to the bell. In the included transcription (Figure 12), the first measure includes the basic bell pattern and the second measure shows an extended variation, with the inclusion of the cinquillo pattern, a five note rhythmic pattern common in much Caribbean music.\textsuperscript{170}

The Gasparillo Tamboo Bamboo Specialists performance included a larger number of instruments (and therefore rhythms) than many scholarly discussions of tamboo bamboo. This short transcription does not take into account the variations performed by the cutter player nor the variety of songs performed, yet serves as a bridge with similar ensembles in Ghana. The rhythm performed by the cutter player is an inversion of one of patterns (ma yenkɔ ham) played by the Kukyekukyeku Bamboo Orchestra in Mesomagor, Ghana, highlighted in Chapter Two. The boom 3 pattern is known as the ampa pattern in Mesomagor. Finally, the resultant patterns of the bamboo above resemble prominent bell patterns (Figure 13) in Ghana from dances such as Kpatsa (Foule 1 and 2) and Gota (Boom 1, 2, and 3).

After the Gasparillo Tamboo Bamboo Specialists performed a few selections for the audience, a brass band with a few steelpans and then a pan-around-the-neck group
marched around the grounds with audience members “chippin’” behind them (Figure 14). Early steel bands were mobile ensembles where each player carried the pan and played it at the same time, originally with one hand and then suspended around their neck. There is still a competition for single pan bands, where each player plays on one pan instead of two, three, four, six, nine or twelve at a time.

Figure 14 - Brass band and single pan-around-the-neck parade at Old Yard Celebration – UWI, St. Augustine, Trinidad – photo by author (2013).

The Old Yard is a celebration that maintains some of the traditions of Carnival that are becoming overshadowed by the flow of corporate money into masquerade organizations. Masqueraders number in the thousands and parade through the streets of
Port of Spain for Carnival. The elaborate costumes and massive speaker trucks that are characteristic of contemporary Carnival are becoming all that Trinis know of the spectacle. Ernest Brown describes the legacy of Trinidad Carnival as “overloading the senses as a means of creating a ritual space that is outside of everyday life, a space where personal expression can roam free and where people can escape from, reverse, and comment upon social realities and restrictions.”

Building on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, carnival theorists have developed a continuum of understanding, ranging from utopian (carnival as a reversal of social roles and an opportunity for the powerless to exercise power) to realist (carnival as a reinforcement of social stratification). In Trinidad, the role of corporations and organizations like the National Carnival Commission and Pan Trinbago has been recently criticized for how regulation has altered social role in carnival festivities. The issue revolves around consumerism and foreign visitors, as author Burton explains, the festival “mutates from a popular national festivity into an international post-modern extravaganza, the active masquerader of old is giving way to the passive spectator-consumer of today.” In this manner, the opposition and subversion typically associated with Carnival, especially in Trinidad, is not actually occurring in the same manner. The system circumvents those who are trying to subvert authority by “sponsoring it, and thereby neutralizing any real threat to its survival by giving the people’s frustrations a licensed imaginary outlet.”

171 Brown, “Turn Up the Volume!,” 141.
172 Burton, Afro-Creole, 156.
173 Ibid., 208.
174 Ibid., 218.
The Old Yard is a reaction to these changes and, although not attended like the festivities in the capital of Port of Spain, caters to individuals who cherish the elements of play involved in the history of Carnival in Trinidad. The classic masquerade characters, from jab jabs to Dame Lorraine, harken back to a period in Trinidad known as the jamet carnival of the mid to late nineteenth century, when carnival was a “world of topsy turvy, of heteroglot exuberance, of ceaseless overrunning and excess where all is mixed, hybrid, ritually degraded and defiled.”\footnote{Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, \textit{The Politics and Poetics of Transgression} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 8.} Events like the Old Yard stand in contrast to typical festivities in Port of Spain that feature scantily clad bodies of both genders processing through the streets with massive semis of speakers and copious amounts of alcohol.

\textbf{birdsong Steel Orchestra}

An example of the world-wide reach of steelpan, as well as the principle of community involvement, is the recent work of birdsong Steel Orchestra. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, the steelpan can be found on every continent except Antarctica and, as such, connects people from various backgrounds, ages, and nationalities. Through the vision of the leaders of the birdsong organization, players from around the world have been hosted in preparations for Panorama to experience first-hand what Trinis know about the steelpan. I went to Trinidad from January 19 to February 15, 2013, in order to perform research and to compete in the 2013 Panorama competition. I was one of a number of foreign pan players who came to Trinidad to perform with birdsong Steel Orchestra of Tunapuna.
Our arranger that year was Andy Narell, an American that has been involved with steelpan as a performer, composer, arranger and proponent for over forty years. Andy’s story has been well documented by other pan scholars and his paths cross with most every prominent steelpan figure, including his father bringing Ellie Mannette to New York City.\textsuperscript{176} Housing arrangements were handled through birdsong in cooperation with Narell. American, Canadian, Swiss and French players were housed in apartments owned by the University of West Indies and coordinated by Professor Clement Imbert. We lived together, rehearsed together, traveled to the capital and beaches together, and interacted with the people of Tunapuna. We were conveniently located along Eastern Main Road, which provided direct access to the capital via Maxi (fixed route vans). Players came from throughout the region and birdsong provided Maxi transportation home as we often finished rehearsal around 1 a.m.

Although Trinidad is perceived as a dangerous place, especially for foreigners, I never felt in danger during my stay.\textsuperscript{177} I had heard horror stories of muggings and such, but following suggestions from locals about keeping a low profile, especially with my recording equipment, I felt safe and comfortable. Furthermore, the members of birdsong and its associated community supporters were always aware of our presence and looked out for us. Even in the craziness of Carnival festivities, I could count on familiar faces to welcome me or suggest travel paths that would keep me safe. There are areas of the

\textsuperscript{176} Andrew Martin, “Pan-America: Calypso, Exotica and the Development of Steelpan in the United States” (PhD diss, University of Minnesota, 2011), 299-376.

\textsuperscript{177} Johnny Coomansingh, “Commodification and Distribution of the Steelpan as a Conflicted Tourism Resource” (PhD diss., Kansas State University, 2005).
capital city that Trinis know to avoid, including the epicenter of the steelpan, Laventille. Yet, during processions associated with Carnival Tuesday, a friend and I walked along with the BP Renegades Steel Orchestra float through the lower section of Laventille and back to the All Stars Panyard, site of the old Hell Yard. As someone with more experience on the island, he noted our location and that Carnival was basically the one time where this would be possible for us as Americans without running into difficulty. As I asked questions of some of the leaders of birdsong about my attempts to visit various locations on the island, there was always concern about when I would return and that I had transportation plans to return me to Tunapuna safely.

birdsong is the name of the steel orchestra as well as the organization that sponsors it. Originally founded by students from the nearby University of the West Indies, birdsong is a community organization that sponsors the birdsong Academy, a no-fee training facility designed to foster music literacy. The intentional lower case “b” of birdsong reflects the grassroots nature of the organization as a vehicle for community empowerment, aiming “to transform the Steelband into a music institution that leverages its social capital to promote the development of our members, the Steelband movement and the community.”

Gerry Sagar shares:

So we like pan but birdsong was also a vehicle to become involved in pan. One of the things about birdsong -- we always maintain a common ‘b’ -- it was never a capital B, which was symbolic of the grassroots movement, the commonality. We

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didn’t place ourselves above anybody in our relationship with working-class people in the community.\footnote{Kim Johnson, \textit{The Illustrated Story of Pan} (Port of Spain: University of Trinidad and Tobago, 2011), 203.}

The Academy run by birdsong follows the curriculum of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (United Kingdom) and students take leveled exams as they progress through the program.\footnote{“About ABRSM” \textit{Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music}. Accessed December 12, 2015, tt.abrsm.org/en/about-abrsm} birdsong Academy has a beginning steelpan ensemble, typically directed by one of the older students. In addition, there is an advanced steel band and a stage side\footnote{Stage side is the name given to a core group of players typically associated with a larger steelband that performs throughout the year. These players form the nucleus of a larger ensemble for events like Panorama and are typically the leaders of the ensemble. The concept of stage side is in practice in diasporic communities like Brooklyn and Toronto.} that performs throughout the community and even abroad. Currently, birdsong Academy has a Saturday Programme (Figure 15), Afterschool Programme and Vacation Programme.\footnote{“birdsong Model” \textit{birdsong}. Accessed November 15, 2015, www.birdsongtt.org/academy/birdsong-model} As part of its programs, birdsong offers guitar classes and lessons and ensembles in most woodwind, brass, percussion and string instruments. The Academy often combines steelpan with the more “traditional” ensembles usually associated with music training programs.

birdsong serves as a community improvement engine through coordination of programs designed to provide employment for neighbors of the panyard and others living in difficult situations due to ravages of poverty that pervade the islands of Trinidad & Tobago. birdsong provides jobs for neighborhood residents as well as those without homes through community beautification projects and organizations affiliated with the
national government. These arms of the organization include bEnt, providing “income
generation and employment for 62 individuals in the community through a Community-
Based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme contract” and bAGI, “a
community based social enterprise created in 2012 with a focus on Food-crops crop
production based in Orange Grove.”

Figure 15 - birdsong Academy woodwind class – Tunapuna, Trinidad - photo by author
(2013).

birdsong exemplifies preservation and cultural maintenance that was previously
discussed in relation to the Old Yard Carnival celebration. The members of the board of

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directors are committed to providing opportunities for young people and community members to learn and be transformed by their engagement with the steelpan. Graduates of the Academy regularly study music at the University of the West Indies and the University of Trinidad & Tobago or perform throughout Trinidad in a variety of venues. In the face of corporate sponsorship and territorialness in the realm of the steelpan, birdsong continues its mission of “pan for the people,” refusing sponsorship and the attached strings of corporate money.

The birdsong panyard (Figure 16), located on the corner of St. Vincent and Connell Streets, is in the heart of Tunapuna and is surrounded by residences and businesses. The open air rehearsal space, as well as a building for rehearsals in the elements, was a comfortable home away from home during my time. It was a safe haven that was a common meeting place for neighborhood residents as well. Seeing members of our steel orchestra during the day, either meeting someone at the panyard or working in uniform, gave me a deeper appreciation of the role of the steelpan in the specific community of Tunapuna.
birdsong meant something more than music here. The realities of an island nation and its issues with employment were somewhat alleviated by a place that began as a location for making music. Unemployment is a major issue in Trinidad and the effects of widespread unemployment have contributed to issues of crime and other social ills. By providing a location for people of all ages (especially young people) to make music together, the reach of the organization has extended to offering opportunities for those in the community (or the steel orchestra) to provide for themselves and their families.
Rehearsals

The birdsong Steel Orchestra, an ensemble of up to 120 members, was fluid as well as disciplined in terms of attendance at rehearsals. The foreign players were in the country with the sole purpose of performing so were often at the panyard during the day as well as prior to the start of rehearsals. Without daily demands of school or employment, these players could focus on just the music. For other members of birdsong, rehearsal came after a full day of responsibilities. Rehearsals would start organically, essentially as soon as there were enough players who had set up their pans and we were ready to start working. Players would continue to show up as the rehearsal progressed. Each rehearsal meant moving large racks into position around the panyard and retrieving pans from their storage location. As players made their way to the panyard from surrounding areas, individual practice started as darkness descended. Typically between 8 and 9 pm, there was a signal from our arranger, Andy Narell, striking the side of a pan with a drumstick.\(^\text{184}\) He would then provide instructions on the section we were to work on and the rehearsal would begin.

Rehearsal technique in Trinidad is very similar to the process of learning music and dance in Ghana, in the sense that it is most commonly done through repetition and rote imitation. Many players in Trinidad do not read musical scores, but can play incredibly difficult melodies and patterns from memory with a distinct modicum of precision that I believe is rare among training musicians in the United States. Individual parts are taught to a section leader and those leaders than pass on the material to other

\(^{184}\) Observation notes, Trinidad, January 2013.
players in the section who watch, listen and imitate until they have “learned” the section being taught.\textsuperscript{185} The foreign players who were coming in just prior to the beginning of the competition were provided with a musical score and midi recording created by arranger Andy Narell with the understanding that the tune would be learned/memorized prior to arriving. This approach allowed players to fit in with the local players who had been rehearsing since November.

The Last Word

“The Last Word,” the tune composed by Andy Narell and arranged for the 2013 Panorama competition, developed, according to Narell, as a conversation between a man and a woman where usually the man has the “last word which is, ‘yes, dear’.”\textsuperscript{186} Some people in Trinidad felt that “The Last Word” was Narell trying to have the last word in terms of Panorama arrangements and characteristics. In 2013, Narell returned to Trinidad for Panorama after a successful contract with San Fernando's Skiffle in his arrangement of “Coffee Street” in 1999 and “Appreciation” in 2000. He cites a continued interest in arranging for Panorama but also his concerns with the stagnation of the musicality of the arrangements themselves.\textsuperscript{187} There is an ongoing tension between what “the people want” in Panorama and musical creativity and development. Andy wants to push the boundaries of what is inherent in the music, yet audiences and judges seem to want more of the same.\textsuperscript{188}

\textsuperscript{185} Observation notes, Trinidad, January 2013.
\textsuperscript{186} “Andy Narell to Arrange for birdsong in 2013 Panorama,” \textit{Daily Express} (Port of Spain, Trinidad), December 23, 2012.
\textsuperscript{187} Andy Narell, interview with author, February 16, 2016.
He started teaching “The Last Word” to members of birdsong in November 2012 and sent transcriptions to those of us coming from abroad in a few versions (as he composed and revised) as well as mp3 recordings from which to work. Foreign players arrived in mid-January 2013 and began joining in rehearsals. Through the course of a few weeks, the players from outside Trinidad began to be incorporated into the birdsong community. We travelled with birdsong members and management to the beach, on hikes and participated in the buildup to Panorama, including the unveiling of the t-shirt design for semifinals, a competition which appeared to be a tradition among the organization.189

“The Last Word” was a piece that Andy Narell wrote as an instrumental work to be performed by a jazz combo that he then rearranged for full steel orchestra. In rehearsals, he spent a good deal of time focusing on the engine room - drumset, irons, congas, shak-shaks190, etc. - in order to establish the groove that he wanted for our performance. In message boards leading up to our preliminary and semifinals performance as well as after, many people commented on how the piece wasn’t fit for Panorama.191 Commenters and reviewers mentioned its beauty and innovative chord structure but yearned for more excitement, brighter tempo and distinctive panorama elements, e.g. extended jam sections and chromatic runs. As a player and now as a listener removed from the experience, I reveled in the progressiveness of the tune as well as its connections to what has come before. The jam sections (that most definitely did exist) grooved harder and harder each rehearsal and I felt our semifinal performance was

189 Observation notes, Trinidad, January 2013.
190 Shak-shaks are large maracas that are indigenous to nearby Venezuela and are an accompaniment instrument in parang music, a mobile guitar based genre typically performed around Christmas in Trinidad.
our best of the season. On the stage at the big yard,\textsuperscript{192} the excitement among performers and the audience during our performance was palpable.

The piece follows the typical form of many Panorama tunes, with a verse and chorus, followed by variations and a jam section or two. After a brief introduction setting the tonal center of the piece in F major, the chorus begins with a long, arching melody played in tenor, double tenor and double seconds.\textsuperscript{193} Underneath the melody is a braided comping\textsuperscript{194} rhythm performed by double second, guitar and cello over a ground bass line that is primarily on the major beats. This melody is repeated and followed by a recurring rhythmic motive starting with an eighth note pickup to the downbeat that is played by all members of the orchestra. After a repeat of the chorus with minor variations in pitch and harmonic accompaniment, the verse is presented, again by tenor, double tenor and double second. A series of chords “skip” down in pitch, then begin to climb back up as the verse continues. The piece then moves into a few jam sections before the chorus returns in the low pans (guitar and cello) after a key change to G Major.

The comping pattern that underlies most of the piece is a series of chords played on every offbeat (Figure 18). There are some common accompaniment patterns, calypso

\textsuperscript{192} The “big yard” is the name given to the performance space at the Queen’s Park Savannah, a large metro park in the capital of Port of Spain. Grandstands are set up on either side of the stage and a long, paved path (“de track”) leads to a ramp up to the stage. As the competition continues, steelbands literally push their racks in position down the track, up on to the stage, and then down the opposite side to waiting trucks for transport of the pans.

\textsuperscript{193} The voices of the steel orchestra are: tenor (1 pan), double tenor (2 pans), double second (2 pans), double guitar (2 pans), triple guitar (3 pans), triple cello (3 pans), four cello (4 pans), quadraphonic (4 pans), tenor bass (4 pans), and bass (6, 9, or 12 pan varieties). In simplistic terms, the more pans a player has, the larger they are and the lower the pitches available, since a lower note needs a larger playing surface.

\textsuperscript{194} Comping is the process of playing two of the notes of a given chord on the various voices of steelpan. These rhythmic patterns usually share a common or interlocking rhythm and sometimes are referred to as strumming, like the similar process on guitar.
and soca (Figure 17), for harmonic steelpans but this pattern, one that shows up in a number of Narell’s pieces, can be difficult to maintain for the duration of the piece. By reimagining the “downbeat,” a player is left with an easy succession of notes that continually pushes the tune forward and braids with lower pan coming patterns, lining up with them and then encircling them on the final beat of the measure.

![Figure 17 - Calypso pattern (left) and Soca pattern (right).](image)

My experience performing this pattern at increasing speeds was quite reminiscent of a kagan\(^{195}\) pattern among the Ewe of southeastern Ghana, where the player consistently plays the up beats in 6/8 time.\(^{196}\) In both cases, it is easy to rush or drag the pattern so that it is on the beat. In teaching people to play these patterns, it is often more efficient to imagine the initial entrance of the pattern as the downbeat. It takes a rhythmic sense and comfort to adjust the pulse away from the dancers and/or the rest of the ensemble. Yet, it is one that in my experience is more difficult for Western trained musicians to master than those steeped in the tradition.

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\(^{195}\) Kagan is the name of the smallest drum in the Ewe drum orchestra and played with two sticks while the drum is slight tilted away from the player.

Figure 18 - Excerpt of “The Last Word” (2013) by Andy Narell, showing offbeat comping pattern in Double Second 2 and Double Guitar.

The comping patterns in Triple Guitar, Quad and Cello above are the traditional soca comping pattern (Figure 17 Right) that is reminiscent of the cutter pattern of the Gasparillo Tamboo Bamboo Specialists at the Old Yard Celebration, the stick part of the Mannette Tamboo Bamboo transcription as well as patterns from the Kukyekukyeku Bamboo Orchestra discussed in Chapter Two.

Exodus Steel Orchestra

When birdsong didn’t advance past the semifinals of the Panorama competition, I went with a few friends from birdsong to the Exodus panyard to inquire as to whether or
not we could perform with them for the Finals two weeks later. We were originally sent to the captain of the band, Julie Williams, who connected us with one of the veteran tenor players, Chioma Richards. One thing I noticed about Exodus was the leadership roles that were held by women. In contrast to the gendered history of the steelpan, everyone knew that Julie was in charge and the respect offered her was obvious throughout my time in the Exodus yard.\(^{197}\) We were told if we could learn the tune, we could play with Exodus.

There wasn’t a musical score to learn from – I do not know whether the piece only existed within the mind of arranger Pelham Goddard or if that was what told to us as a matter of principle: we would need to learn it quickly and prove ourselves. This approach to musical learning struck me as similar to my learning of Ghanaian traditional music with Dr. Paschal Yao Younge. Although I would often transcribe patterns in order to remember them and have them for future playing/teaching, Paschal, although trained and able to provide transcriptions, would not do so and would even discourage us from trying to notate the patterns. We were to learn how they fit with the bell and the dance, not how they “look on paper”. Furthermore, the limits of Western notation are often unable to capture the subtle changes in timbre, stroke and even rhythm that doesn’t always fit into established rhythmic paradigms.

Our process of learning was to witness Chioma play the first half of the piece, “Gold,” arranged by Pelham Goddard, attempt to play along with her, and then she allowed us to record her playing the piece. We were then told to use that recording to go learn the piece on our own and come back to practice and demonstrate our learning. A

\(^{197}\) Observation notes, Trinidad, February 2013.
few of us then used music notation software to transcribe what we were playing to help in the acquisition process, since we needed to learn the piece in days instead of months.

Exodus was a band that, as an organization, appeared to cater to an older demographic than birdsong. Its members ranged in age from teenagers to men and women in their 60s and 70s. Although there was a lot of energy in the panyard, it was an extremely disciplined space and one where we were welcomed and expected to live up to the standard. Exodus was founded in 1981 by Amin Mohammed as an offshoot of Gay Flamingoes, when on May 3, 1981, Amin and several others walked away, thereby creating an exodus. It is currently run by Amin’s brother, Ainsworth. Mr. Mohammed is a legendary figure in pan circles, and his reputation as a the leader of a steel band with rigorous standards of respect and courtesy extended even to the kindness of providing us Americans with a ride back to our apartment after a particularly late rehearsal.

Exodus, as a large band that is located outside of the capital city proper, gained notoriety in 1992 and again in 2002, 2003 and 2004 as the only band from outside of Port of Spain to win Panorama since 1980. I only had one experience in the two weeks we practiced with Exodus where we broke off into sections and had to play in small groups so the section leaders could hear if there were any weak links. Every run through, though, there was a good deal of group listening going on, with various members reacting to my ability either to play correctly, or not. During breaks, I could ask for clarification, but essentially once the rehearsal started, it was an intense workout of repetition towards perfection.

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199 Observation notes, Trinidad, February 2013.
My performance with Exodus at the 2013 Panorama finals in Queen’s Park Savannah in Port of Spain was an experience like none I have had before, even the semifinals with birdsong two weeks earlier. The process was quite similar: we congregated in a place where our pans would be delivered near the Savannah and rehearse and then push our pans to the stage. Our location was a parking lot to the south of the Queen’s Park Savannah (Figure 19). We met at the panyard in the late afternoon to ride a few maxi taxis, organized by Exodus to our meeting place in Port of Spain. The excitement was tangible even on the ride into the city, but it was definitely tempered with an awareness of what this meant to all of the members of the storied group.

Figure 19 - Exodus staging area south of Queen’s Park Savannah, Port of Spain, Trinidad photo by author (2013).
After unpacking and setting up our pans, we rehearsed a few times and then began our “push” to the stage. This process can take hours as the carts that are holding the pans for the hundred some players need to be pushed by people power (Figure 20) to get them down the street to the entrance to the “track,” a paved road to the southeast of the Grandstand. Bands enter the space surrounded by fans and listeners, travel north for approximately 100 yards and then turn to travel west to the grandstand. The entire time a band is moving its pans, a signal is given and the band plays its piece for other bands to hear and for supporters to enjoy. This time is somewhat flexible in nature as members are able to take the time between performances to move around and see other bands rehearsing.

It is often the only opportunity to hear bands as once the process toward the Grandstand begins, there is little opportunity to do so (Figure 21). Furthermore, once a band is finished, the process is reversed as semi-trucks and cases are awaiting the bands on the west side of the Grandstand to return the pans to their respective panyards. We enjoyed roti\textsuperscript{200} with one of the iron\textsuperscript{201} players, Leo, and then returned to the east side of the Grandstand to watch the preparations for the final band, Fonclaire. After the final performance, we returned to the parking lot where Exodus had gathered and limed\textsuperscript{202} with players and supporters until the results were announced via radio. Exodus had placed

\textsuperscript{200} Roti is an Indian flatbread that is typically filled with a chickpea paste/stew called channa and a choice of meat.

\textsuperscript{201} Iron is the name given to brake drums that are used as a rhythmic glue because striking them with metal beaters can be heard above all the steelpans and other percussion (Figure 1.18).

\textsuperscript{202} Lime is a Trini colloquial term for relaxing or hanging out.
second in the semifinals, but finished fourth in the finals so there was a fair amount of
disappointment.

Figure 20 - Example of community members “pushing the racks” at Panorama Finals,
Queen’s Park Savannah - photo by author (2013).
Performing our piece on the stage at the Savannah with new friends under the bright lights, well after midnight, with family and friends watching online\textsuperscript{203} in the United States was an experience I will never forget. Pan enthusiasts all over the world are able to virtually experience Panorama competitions, through a live webstream, through recordings posted on social media and through commercially available DVDs. Access to

\textsuperscript{203} Thanks to the realities of technology, I had been able to stream rehearsals to my family in Ohio, Wisconsin, South Dakota and Virginia via Skype on my cell phone. Panorama semi-finals and finals are regularly broadcast on national television and radio stations. In 2013, a company called Carnival.tv offered a live stream of the Finals that my friends and family were able to watch in the United States. The online audiences are typically fans of the instrument who are not able to make the trip to Trinidad. Even though professional recordings are made and sold, within hours of the competition, performances are now posted on YouTube for additional viewings.
Panorama performances was previously limited to recordings but presently is facilitated through sites like YouTube and When Steel Talks. As I reflected, I had played with Exodus for less than two weeks, but the community that developed in the many hours we practiced together extended into other Carnival festivities when I would see those players in Port of Spain. The panyard was quiet for my remaining days in Trinidad, but the memories made there and the musical experience gained there, both by myself and with my fellow band members was transformative, inspiring, humbling and profound.

**African Elements in Trinidad’s Carnival**

Much of the research on Carnival in Trinidad documents the influence of European settlers and their Carnival festivities as the impetus for current Carnival celebrations. In the collected work *Ah Come Back Home: Perspectives on the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival*, a number of scholars point to the aspects and history of Carnival that they see as African in origin. Olaogun Narmer Adeyinka notes the connections between the Wosirian Festival of the Nile Valley and Trinidad’s Carnival like social inversion and commingling of all social classes, processional dancing in a public space - principally the street - to the accompaniment of intensely rhythmic expressions which induce a communion, a contact with transcendence (the “momento pleno”), and the dramatic reenactment of the shaping events of the civilization.²⁰⁴

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The elements of social inversion, processions through the streets, and the reenactments of pivotal historical events like Canboulay connect Carnival in Trinidad historically and culturally with the continent of Africa.

One of the elements of Carnival, Canboulay, began, according to Errol Hill as celebrations of Emancipation on August 1st, where previously enslaved Africans would dance, drum and sing while marching in torchlight processions. “The torches were symbolic both of their past bondage and their newly won freedom, which they proclaimed by vigorous participation in a festival that they had been excluded from.”

The elements of subversion and resistance are a common theme throughout the development of musical expression among the African population of Trinidad. In the face of attempts to control their expression, Trinis both overtly challenged as well subvertly reconstituted their rhythms on different mediums.

These connections with African culture are also articulated by Richard Burton in his book *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition and Play in the Caribbean*. The steelpan’s roots among kalinda stickfighters and the chantwells that accompanied them exhibit a history of competition that help explain the competitive nature of steelpan in Trinidad. Building upon the work of Roger Abraham’s seminal work on verbal culture in the West Indies, *The Man-Of-Words in the West Indies: Performance and the Emergence of Creole Culture*, Burton notes that aggression and competition can be found throughout the history of Trinidad and act not only as a form of ritual but as a psychological response to

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the social and economic conditions that mark Trinidad and the larger Caribbean. These physical manifestations in contested violence offset, according to Burton, the reality that “even with the outlet of stickfighting, life in the yards of Port of Spain was perpetually dangerous and tense, with it, inter- and intracommunity violence of truly serious kind would surely have erupted much more frequently than it did.”

Abrahams argues that Carnival and its associated events are examples of a “pattern of competitive interaction” and that examples of violence between kalinda groups, tamboo bamboo groups and steelbands are continuing examples of this characteristic of Trini society. Burton notes that a vital component of these competitions, no matter how large or small, is that they take place in front of an audience. And, although there are arguments about what kind of music belongs in Panorama, many will agree that how a band performs is of utmost importance, echoing Burton “what is important here is not matter but manner, not what is signified but the signifiers themselves.”

Burton points out that the creative wordplay of the chantwell and then the calypsonian were, especially as the primary language of song became English, an attempt at “emulating his speech in order to appropriate the power it was believed to contain.” Steelbands continued this tradition in their appropriation of European tunes and styles performed in calypso rhythm, a practice that began to be referred to as a “bomb” tune.

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207 Burton, Afro-Creole, 177.
209 Burton, Afro-Creole, 169.
210 Ibid., 170.
211 Ibid., 171.
212 Dudley, Music from Behind, 113.
Especially by mainstream audiences (and continuing to the present day), steelbands are marginalized by the establishment when compared to the refined world of piano and orchestral performance. As a performer trained in both traditions, I dispute these claims and am empowered by the attempts of Trini musicians to show their versatility and skill by learning recognizable melodies on their terms and presenting them in a way that is meaningful to them. When steelbands were dismissed because they didn’t have a conductor, many would put someone in front of the ensemble to “conduct”, but that person would become part of the performance, sometimes using a ridiculously long baton and not necessarily maintaining precision, mostly because it was already being accomplished by members of the engine room.

Trinis have shown a history of circumventing governmental control of their cultural expression. The competition of stickfighters, a form of cultural expression that existed in West Africa and was reformulated in Trinidad, continued through the early years of the steelpan and the physical confrontation of stickfighters morphed into the verbal and musical competition of calypsonians and steelbands in Panorama. Stickfighting, along with drumming and torch processions, was banned by the Peace Preservation Ordinance of 1884.213 In its place, much like the musician moved their rhythms to a different medium, the stickfighters, known as batonniers, took over the caiso, which prior to 1884 was a song style primarily sung by women, as a substitute weapon and “the physical violence of the stickfight was to become transformed into the

213 Cowley, Carnival, 100.
verbal violence of the ‘single tone’ (four-line) *picong* and ‘double tone’ (eight-line) *Sans Humanite* calypsoes.”  

Continuing this line of reasoning, Panorama competitions, especially in the late 1960s and early 1970s served a similar purpose as the battlefield that once involved physical violence moved to the Savannah stage, where previous confrontations would continue to be waged, but in musical terms instead of physical.  

Gordon Rohlehr even describes steelbands as “social organizations as similar in form and function to the legendary stick-fighting bands of the nineteenth century.” The irony of modern Trinidad is that panyards are, more often than not, safer locations in a dangerous environment. The organizations that were once ostracized for their associated violence are now safe havens and places where violence is not accepted.  

Conclusion  

Trinidad is an island whose difficult social history played a role in the forging of a distinctive musical instrument and tradition. The rhythmic and social preferences of Trinis helped shaped the development of the steelpan, an instrument whose roots lie in the skin drum and tamboo bamboo traditions that came before it. Rhythms that were once performed on skin drums were transferred to bamboo stalks. These rhythms were then transferred to metal instruments and eventually steelpans. The rivalries and violence that began among groups of kalinda fighters, accompanied by tamboo bamboo, carried over into the early steelbands. Although there has been development and expansion of melodic

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215 Johnson, *From Tin Pan to TASPO*, Location 70, Kindle edition.  
and harmonic ideas on the steelpan, the rhythmic framework still often centers on the basic rhythmic principles of the calypso and soca accompaniment patterns (Figure 17) above which scalar patterns, chromatic runs and coordinated hits provided musical excitement in competitions such as my example of Panorama in 2013.

My experiences during Panorama with the groups birdsong and Exodus, both as a performer and occasional listener, reinforce my perceived connections to traditional music in Ghana. Each new resource, scholar, interview, rehearsal and performance strengthened my resolve that these cultures were connected musically and performatively. The ideas of community and multigenerational performance that are typical of steelpan groups in Trinidad are similar to what I experienced in Ghana. The melodic inspiration for steelbands, calypso, continues an African tradition of social commentary through music; so steelbands bring these melodies, and by extension their lyrics as audiences sing along, to a wider audience during Carnival.

These rhythmic connections, researched in Trinidad as elements that developed and prospered locally, have their genesis in transnational travel, both forced and voluntary, between Trinidad and West Africa. In the next chapter, Ghana is offered as a case study for understanding the roots of the steelpan in the environment where some of the early Trinis came from. These connections and discussions of groups of people migrating back and forth help to account for the rhythmic similarities and the continued musical influence and collaboration that is occurring, both overtly and covertly.
CHAPTER 2: BAMBOO SHOOTS: BAMBOO ORCHESTRAS AND MUSICAL CONFLUENCE IN GHANA

This chapter focuses on Ghana with a consideration of historical and contemporary connections of the steelpan that exist between Trinidad and Ghana. I begin by examining the ways that calypso and highlife influenced each other. Highlife is the generic name for popular music that developed during the early twentieth century primarily in Ghana, but artists performed highlife throughout West Africa. It is an urban genre that incorporates indigenous rhythms, instruments and songs with western instruments (e.g. guitar and accordion) and eventually brass instruments into a new style that affected subsequent African popular genres.\(^{217}\) Highlife is significant for this dissertation because of its similarities with and mutual influence of calypso in Trinidad. Next, I discuss bamboo ensembles in Ghana and their connections with tamboo bamboo\(^{218}\) in Trinidad. Finally, I look at performance and pedagogy in Ghana and its similarities with the corresponding fields in Trinidad, connections which fuse scholarship and performance.

Musical creativity is not a static process. Although I have training and experience as an orchestral musician, my encounters with music that exist “outside” of written notation are also intellectually stimulating and transformative as a musician. I can transcribe the rhythms, melodies and harmonies but there are moments that are more


\(^{218}\) As discussed at length in chapter one, tamboo bamboo is the name given to ensembles of stamped and struck bamboo tubes in Trinidad that first accompanied kalinda stickfighting and then served as the predecessor of steelpan ensembles. The ensemble includes different length and thickness of bamboo tubes called foule, cutter and boom as well as a bottle and spoon timeline.
difficult to describe, which include interaction with other players and/or the audience, mental transcendence, and awareness of resultant patterns. The musical connections I describe provide a vocabulary for me to explain and teach steelpan or traditional Ghanaian music to wider audiences. Scholarship typically focuses on field recordings and transcriptions, while this dissertation offers a more integrated approach to scholarship and performance.

I am changed by my musical experiences when they involve a human interaction beyond the notes on a page or in the minds of the performers. My encounters with steelpan in Trinidad and traditional music in Ghana build a sense of community that surpasses language and culture. I am linked to people from radically different backgrounds and life experiences because of our shared experience putting together rhythms, melodies, harmonies and dance. Although I acknowledge banal or non-transformative rehearsals and performances, the moments that exist beyond the realm of words have occurred in a state of mutual convergence of experience.

Our performances make us a community, both imagined and experienced. I am empowered by witnessing the groups in Trinidad and Ghana that expand this community beyond the sonic realm. These performances link musicians with their immediate surroundings both through rehearsals and concerts and through public works, neighborhood engagement and empowerment organized by the ensemble membership.

Traditional Ghanaian performance is an interdisciplinary event where the dance is not separated from the music, the song is not separated from the drumming, and the clothing is not separated from the dance. In my analysis, were I to separate the elements
of performance into isolated areas, I would be imposing a foreign structure onto
Ghanaian artistic creativity. I have learned from my studies that if one really wants to
understand and experience the event, s/he should learn the dance and the music. Although
my training is as a percussionist, the dances that I understand most are those for which I
know the dance movements. The standard among the performers that I have worked with
is that one knows all the parts that fit together in the sonic puzzle. Consider a violinist
learning every part in the orchestra for a given work: is it possible? If not, why not?

I can notate the rhythms in multiple settings to show they are identical but most
performers/teachers do not think about rhythm that way. Outside rhythmic paradigms
muddle the issue. Interpreting the rhythms is significant to me because I am trying to
explain the rhythms to others as fellow musicians or as students of these art forms.
Because of my experiences and training, I can explain rhythms both as a student of the
Western art music tradition and the traditions that exist in Trinidad and Ghana. I believe
it is important to respect the traditional teaching methods as viable and valuable for
learning on indigenous terms. My own future pedagogical practices are then guided by
my awareness of and my respect for those that taught me, as well as an understanding of
how people learn in various environments.

Trinidad’s steelpan and Ghana’s highlife developed and were performed
concurrently between the 1940s and 1960s and their musical styles influenced one
another.219 Both countries were moving toward independence from Great Britain and had

219 See Felix I.R. Blake, The Trinidad and Tobago Steelpan: History and Evolution (Port of Spain: Self-
published, 1995); Owusu Brempong, “Akan Highlife in Ghana: Songs of Cultural Transition” (PhD diss,
Indiana University, 1986); Collins, “Jazz Feedback to Africa,” 176-193; Dudley, Music from Behind the
Bridge; Sonny Oti, Highlife Music in West Africa: Down Memory Lane (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 2009);
similar exposure to recorded music from Europe and the United States. Early pan people not only played European and calypso tunes, but they also heard popular highlife music and vice versa. In the upcoming sections, I emphasize the various connections to steelpan through musical examples across and within highlife and calypso, Adaha brass band music, bamboo ensembles, and performance ethics.

Spheres of Influence: Calypso and Highlife

The development years of the steelpan in Trinidad & Tobago (1940s-1960s) correlate with the peak of highlife music in Ghana. The name highlife originates from the common performance venue among African elite who were living the “highlife” with the British colonial population. Yebuah Mensah, leader of one of the early highlife bands, The Accra Rhythmic Orchestra, claims “Highlife started as a catch name for the indigenous songs played at these clubs by early dance bands...the people outside called it the High Life as they did not reach the class of couples going inside.”

Even though highlife was a primarily urban genre during its early years, highlife groups would perform throughout the country and region. Highlife groups were even used by the government of Kwame Nkrumah to bolster Ghanaian pride and instill a sense of community through music.

Although it was not confined to Ghana and Trinidad alone, the use of local music in celebrations of independence was a significant symbolic action as populations rejected

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220 Adaha is a processional, brass-based marching music that developed in Ghana in the late 1800s – early 1900s.  
221 Collins and Richards, “Popular Music in West Africa,” 27.  
colonialism in their political and economic systems as well as in their cultural displays. In Trinidad, the steelpan has a complicated history with the national government that began with the first government of Eric Williams. The patronage of Eric Williams and the People’s National Movement was important in the first recognizable permutations of the steelband, as politicians highlighted a locally created artform while at the same time consolidating their political power and improving the image of the instrument as well as those who played it. In Ghana, especially in the capital of Accra, highlife music was used by Nkrumah’s Convention People’s Party to “entertain and excite the assembled crowd. In this setting of what Thomas Turino has called “musical nationalism,”…highlife stood as a symbol of the colony’s future rather than its past.” Political leaders understood the cultural capital and power of incorporating local (and popular) musicians to help spread their message and develop a national identity distinct from their colonial past. Even though the legacy of colonialism still lives in the influences it has on the lives of the people and the musicians, these acts of independence are connected by their defiant statements of camaraderie through music.

As discussed in Chapter One, calypso is a genre of music that heavily influenced the development of the steelpan. Scholars and performers have several theories about the origin of calypso, but most agree that it flourished around Carnival and gained prominence as an urban art form. Calypso, or kaiso, developed out of the same

stickfighting tradition that gave rise to tamboo bamboo, which in turn developed into the steelpan. As the melodies and chord progressions are typically recycled, the focus of the calypso is the lyrics, often a “vehicle of social and even political comment.”

One of the many documented examples of calypso lyrics with a political slant is a calypso by Duke of Normandy called *There Should be a Representative Government* from 1925. Normandy was singing about Captain Arthur Andrew Cipriani, mayor of Port of Spain and founder of the Trinidad Labour Party, and his bid for Parliament.

There should be a representative Government
In this colony
There should be a representative Government
In this colony
Gaston Johnson is for the law
And Mayor Rust is against the poor
So let the Captain represent in the House of Parliament
Everyone and all.

In this vein, the calypso serves a purpose seen in the ridicule songs that are common throughout the continent of Africa. The Asante of Ghana, after their submission to British rule in 1900, would “welcome” the British Governor with particular drum songs,

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227 Cipriani was a captain in the British West India Regiment, a military force that fostered travel between the two areas of focus of this dissertation, Ghana and Trinidad.
typically reserved for important leaders. The drums were actually repeating an old war song, “slowly but surely we will kill Adinkra.” Asante, like many tonal languages throughout Africa, can be used to communicate even through rhythms that sound like the lyrics of the example war song. In so doing, local populations understood that the drummers implied the British in using “Adinkra,” yet the colonial representatives merely experienced an honorable performance.\textsuperscript{230}

The examples of language coded in drum language mimics other similar indirect confrontation practices among the Akan, an umbrella ethnic classification of which the Asante are a subgroup. “The phenomenon of innuendo or indirect critique finds expression in what the Akan call akutia, a strategic verbal assault in which speakers in face-to-face confrontations avoid eye contact with their targets and make insinuations without mentioning names.”\textsuperscript{231} Ruth Finnegan argues that songs of ridicule can be a way of exerting pressure on others, whether equals or superiors; of expressing often indirectly or in a limited and conventional manner, what could not be said directly, or through a different medium, or on just any occasion; of upholding or suggesting certain values and interests that cannot be expressed in other ways, particularly when there is no direct access to political activity.\textsuperscript{232}

These acts of resistance through music are not isolated to the countries highlighted in this dissertation, but serve to provide further routes of influence as the music in question speaks to its listeners on multiple levels.

\textsuperscript{231} Yanka, “Nana Ampadu,” 60.
The connections between calypso in Trinidad and highlife music in Ghana can be categorized as both direct and indirect. The categorization does not suggest a hierarchy. Rather, making this heuristic distinction allows me to show the wide range of connections between musical performances in the two countries of study and carve out examples to illustrate the web of influence over time. By direct connections, I mean musicians literally working with each other, people travelling between countries and influencing musical traditions, and musical ensembles performing abroad. Indirect examples of influence include musicians and audiences hearing each other's music and incorporating it into their own, and people who are influenced similarly by reading scholarship and having shared experiences (e.g., The first presidents of Trinidad and Ghana both studied in the United States and England and were influenced by Trinidadian Pan-Africanist C.L.R. James, who introduced them to each other in 1943).233

West India Regiment

Most scholarly research about the history of the steelpan documents the influences that descendants of enslaved Africans had, but the more nuanced examples of migration back and forth between West Africa and the Caribbean are not as prominent.234 I argue that the musical connections that are apparent are examples of consistent influence and interaction that the West India Regiment helped provide rather than examples of some inherent “Africanness” reformulated in Trinidad. From its inception in 1795 to its disbandment in 1927, members of the West India Regiment travelled back and

234 Cowley, Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso, 231.
forth from West Africa, bringing with them aesthetic preferences and musical ideas manifested on both sides of the ocean.

The West India Regiment was a force made up of “free” black citizens and purchased slaves of the British colonies in the Caribbean such as Trinidad, Jamaica and Barbados. The regiments were also populated with captured slaves and volunteers from Africa, including the Gold Coast, after slavery was banned by the British in 1807 and a subsequent West African recruiting depot in Sierra Leone opened in 1812. After the British administration of Sierra Leone began in the early nineteenth century, “black West Indian regiments from Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago were transferred to the colony to maintain order.” These soldiers were frequently transferred between Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast as the British presence in the Gold Coast increased throughout the nineteenth century.

In 1817-1818, “[s]ome 350 soldiers of the Third and an undisclosed number of troops from the disbanded Sixth, along with their families, were eventually settled on Crown lands in Trinidad.” This means that a mix of people, including Africans who spent time in the Gold Coast, were settled in Trinidad. The West India Regiment was a

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236 Ellis, *The History of the First West India Regiment*.
238 Brian Dyde, *The Empty Sleeve: The Story of the West India Regiments of the British Army* (St. John’s: Harib Caribbean), 1997
239 Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*, 136.
prominent component of England’s military force in the Gold Coast in the 1860s and 1870s during the time of the Anglo-Asante Wars as Caribbean soldiers did not suffer the same climatic effects and tropical diseases as did British soldiers. Starting in 1873, between 5,000 and 7,000 West Indian soldiers were stationed in Cape Coast and neighboring Elmina.

A major figure in the folklore of the steelpan, Arthur Wybrow Baker, was one of many who travelled between the Gold Coast and Trinidad during the late nineteenth century. Baker “served under Lord Wolsey in the Ashanti Wars [and] as Inspector General of the Gold Coast constabulary.” As the head of Trinidad’s police force, Baker lobbied for regulations about Carnival celebrations, which culminated in the banning of skin drums, torch processions and the assembly of more than ten people. He was directly involved in both the Canboulay Riots of 1881 and the Hosein Massacre of 1884 in San Fernando, Trinidad.

240 Ellis, The History of First West India Regiment, 7.
242 Cowley, Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso, 77.
243 Ibid.
244 Ibid., 80.
245 Crowley, Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso, 85-87.
246 “Like Canboulay, under the cover of darkness, Hosein included parades by different groups carrying torches and hakka sticks through the towns. Of Muslim origin (but shared in Trinidad by people of Hindu descent, as well as a proportion of black creoles) the festival ‘re-enacted the historical events leading to the death of Prophet Mohammed’s grandsons, Hassan and Hussain’.” In Cowley, Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso, 104. Originally allowed to continue Hosein festivities even when similar processions of black populations were controlled, the East Indian population in Trinidad rejected the application of the tenets of the Peace Preservation Ordinance in 1884 in San Fernando. During the procession, “police, under the command of ‘Captain’ Baker, fired a hail of bullets to stop the advance, and this resulted in many deaths.” In Cowley, Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso, 104.
247 Ibid., 104
Baker’s presence in both areas of focus highlights the intertwined histories of the regions and also of a shared history of official attempts at suppression of popular music forms. “The district commissioner of the Central Region passed a series of regulations aimed at regulating its [adaha’s] performance in Cape Coast. The resulting legislation, passed in 1908…did not outlaw the music, but went to great lengths to confine it to particular geographical settings.”\footnote{Plageman, \textit{Highlife Saturday Night}, 58.} Much like in Trinidad before it, these regulations were aimed directly at the black population of the region: “No ‘objectionable’ native tunes or airs are allowed to be played at any time” (emphasis mine).\footnote{Ibid.} Colonial authorities, both in Trinidad and Ghana, played a game of cat and mouse with musicians in the sense that specific populations were not mentioned in regulations, but the individual components were definitely aimed at particular groups of people and most definitely enforced disproportionally.

The soldiers who were part of the regimental brass band, while stationed in Cape Coast, Ghana would march around the community, performing not only European marches and dance tunes, but also Trinidadian calypsos.\footnote{Collins, “Jazz Feedback to Africa,” \textit{American Music}, 5.2: (1987), 177.} In addition to the tunes preferred by the British officers, the West Indian bandsmen used their imported instruments to perform calypsos and other recreational styles they had learned in the Caribbean.\footnote{Plageman, \textit{Highlife Saturday Night}, 46.} These soldiers also formed bands within the communities and taught local youth to play brass instruments and read musical notation.\footnote{Ibid., 179.} The West Indian brass
bands played syncopated brass band music that resonated more with traditional music making than the European music typically performed on brass instruments. Local musicians combined these syncopated songs with indigenous musical practices that developed into a locally created style of music known as Adaha, or Fante for “dance here,” a proto-highlife created in the 1880s. Adaha, a processional, brass-based marching music of Ghanaians, was influenced by West Indian soldiers and is the direct musical interaction of rhythms and musical aesthetics between the two regions.

John Collins claims these indigenized brass band tunes featured the characteristic Afro-Cuban clave pattern, the first part of which is known as tresillo, a syncopated rhythm that is part of the cinquillo-tresillo rhythmic complex (cinquillo (Figure 22 left) meaning five notes, tresillo (Figure 22 right) meaning three notes).

In this chapter, this rhythm illustrated here that defines adaha in Ghana will be connected to a rhythmic pattern that underlies calypso music of Trinidad. The rhythmic pattern known as clave (Figure 23) is also the foundational bell pattern of dances such as Bɔbɔbɔ, Kolomashie, Gome and Kpanlongo in Ghana. The rhythm known as cinquillo is one of the dawuro patterns in Akan fontomfrom court music in Ghana.

Samuel Floyd argues the calypso (and by extension steelpan) exist as part of a “calenda

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254 Plageman, Highlife Saturday Night.
257 Clave is a word that can be used to reference a particular rhythmic ostinato (there are even multiple forms of widely understood “clave”) as well as the instrument that typically plays the rhythm, a set of thick dowels about 8 – 12 inches long and struck together to create a sound that is discernible above a variety of musical textures.
258 Younge, Music and Dance Traditions of Ghana, 329-337.
complex, an array of music-and-dance forms that are related to one another through similar textual, rhythmic and melodic tendencies.”

![Figure 22 - Cinquillo pattern (left) and Tresillo pattern (right).](image)

![Figure 23 - Clave pattern.](image)

The implications of these complex interconnections are examples of sound traffic on both sides of the Atlantic, as elements of West African bell patterns were recreated and altered in the Caribbean only to return to places like Sierra Leone and Ghana through the West India Regiments only to be reincorporated into the music of local populations. In the creative output of members of the West Indian Regiment, recruited both in West Africa and in the Caribbean, rhythmic patterns and folk songs from the Caribbean, crafted in the crucible of influence of enslaved Africans, their descendants and European art music, returned to the Gold Coast and merged with similar rhythmic frameworks still in place.

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It is important to recognize that although scholars have codified rhythm patterns with names such as clave, tresillo and cinquillo, they are still patterns crafted by humans to accomplish something within the construct of musical creativity. Limiting ourselves to an understanding that syncopated rhythms such as the clave and cinquillo-tresillo were “introduced” to Ghana by the West Indian Regiment, even though some of the soldiers may have been West Africans themselves, disempowers local musicians who may have reacted favorably to such rhythms and folk melodies because they reinforced pre-existing preferences with the added element of “foreignness.”

Contemporary Sound Traffic in Popular Music

Direct musical interaction among popular musicians, both literally, in joint performances, and sonically, through recorded music, is both historical and ongoing. It is my contention that these collaborations and connections are the result of a certain resonance in rhythmic framework and performance practice that not only draws specific musicians together, but that also the larger elements of steelpan and Ghanaian music. This resonance is not simply a contemporary occurrence that I have linked but it is one that has been going on for at least 150 years.

In addition to the transoceanic influence of the West India Regiment brass bands, migrations facilitate musical collaboration among people and instruments to create a musical confluence,260 perpetuating a pattern of musical interaction on the coast of West Africa. Some of the earliest agents were sailors from the Kru ethnic group of Liberia and

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Sierra Leone, as well as American and Caribbean sailors, who helped bring guitars and other Western instruments to West Africa, and introduced musical genres such as the merengue and calypso. Highlife, calypso and jazz musicians, especially in London, heard each other, learned from each other and performed together in the early-mid 20th century. Ghanaian musicians also learned from the BBC, which broadcasted calypsos on its Overseas Service “not just to the Caribbean but also to West Africa where they were proving immensely popular.”

In the mid-twentieth century, London was a confluence point for musicians from the Caribbean and West Africa. Predating the circuits of steelpan players, tuners and arrangers, musicians would travel back and forth from Trinidad or the Gold Coast to London and began to record with, learn from and collaborate with each other. Through the work of recording companies like Melodisc, “the cultural interaction of African, Caribbean and British musicians and the interplay of musical styles in the UK gave rise to new and innovative variations of Highlife,” which returned to the Caribbean and West Africa via records.

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263 Collins, “Jazz Feedback to Africa,” 177.


Lord Kitchener (stage name of Aldwyn Roberts), a famous calypsonian from Trinidad, and E.T. Mensah, Ghana’s most famous highlife artist are two of the most prominent musicians who drew inspiration from one another. E.T. Mensah was so inspired to learn from Kitchener that, in 1955, he travelled to London without his band for 3 months. The purpose of his trip was to study the arrangements of Lord Kitchener and fellow Trini Edmundo Ros, who achieved fame as the leader of Latin Jazz groups in London.267

Kitchener wrote Ghana’s unofficial song of independence, “Birth of Ghana,” in 1956 as an homage and holds up Ghana as an example to the rest of the world.268 As the first country in Africa south of the Sahara Desert to declare independence from the British Empire in 1957, Ghana was a symbol to colonies throughout the world, including Trinidad and Tobago. The eminent calypsonian of his time, Trinis would know about Ghana because of Kitchener’s music.

E.T. Mensah and the Tempos’ famous highlife, “All for You,” began as a mento-turned-calypso269 entitled “Sly Mongoose,” a work whose own sound traffic included “stopovers” in Jamaica, Trinidad, New York and London.270 “Sly Mongoose” was the most popular road march, “a melody spontaneously selected by the majority of the bands and sung on the streets,”271 in Trinidad in 1923. The song came to “Trinidad from Jamaica around 1911. It resurfaced and was sung by Houdini in the African Millionaires

267 Feld, Jazz Cosmopolitanism, 202
269 Mento is a folk song form native to Jamaica and a predecessor to reggae, often accompanied by acoustic guitar and rhumba box, which carries the bass line. Mento features topical and humorous lyrics and, as such, is often connected with the Trini calypso.
270 Feld, Jazz Cosmopolitanism, 217-219.
271 Rohlehr, Calypso & Society, 117.
tent in 1921.” It was recorded in New York in 1924 by Lionel Belasco (who holds the copyright) and in 1925 by Sam Manning, both Trini calypsonians. It was recorded in two versions in London in 1929 as “Almer Bou” and “Tin Ka Tin Ka” by the West African Instrumental Quintet from the Gold Coast. Finally, the first recording in West Africa was in 1949 in the Gold Coast, when Arthur Alberts recorded Euphene Cooper singing “All for You Baby.” The story of “All for You” highlights mutual influence (and repeated borrowing) between Trinidad and Ghana. Even as a quintessential Ghanaian highlife, “All for You” features Afro-Cuban percussion instruments, claves and bongos, although the clave pattern is not the common clave rhythmic pattern in figure 23), but the local Sikyi bell pattern (Figure 24) played on claves.

![Figure 24 - Sikyi bell pattern](image)

Guy Warren, also known as Kofi Ghanaba, a jazz drummer who performed extensively in the United States and London, worked in London as a DJ for the BBC and subsequently brought calypso recordings back to Ghana in the 1940s.

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273 Feld, *Jazz Cosmopolitanism*, 218
274 Ibid., 219.
275 Ibid.
276 Born Warren Gamaliel Kpakpo Akwei, he changed his name to Guy Warren in 1943. In 1974, he changed his name to Kofi Ghanaba. In Twi, Kofi is the name of a boy born on a Friday and Ghanaba means
When I came back from London [where Ghanaba played percussion for Kenny
Graham’s Afro-Cubists], I brought the bongos and Cuban percussion for the first
time….Also when I went to London I went to the Caribbean Club somewhere
near Piccadilly, the haunt of a lot of West Indians. It was all calypso every night
and I played these records on a BBC program I had. When I came back I brought
some of these records and we learnt to play them as I knew straight away that the
musical inflections were so highlife-ish.

Ghanaba’s migrations and musical landings mimic that of his bandleader E.T. Mensah
and directly influenced the sonic interplay of Trini and Ghanaian musicians. His own
compositions and recordings show the influence of his years performing in the United
States, Ghana and Great Britain as well as his interest in musical confluence as his
compositions range from an album entitled “Africa Speaks, America Answers” to an
arrangement of Handel’s “Halleluiah Chorus” for atumpan, Akan talking drums.

The musical confluence of musicians from Ghana and Trinidad is not confined to
the isolated cases presented. It is ongoing and fluid, marked by the past examples and
future possibilities of collaboration. The documentary Crossing Over traces the
collaborative work of Trini calypsonian Lancelot Layne and Ghanaian highlife artist Koo
Nimo. Both artists discuss parallels in social structure, performance practice, chords,
song structure, and the role of music when comparing highlife and calypso. The film

“son of Ghana”. Ghanaba was well known for incorporating traditional Ghanaian music into American jazz
as well as fusing traditions through a drumset crafted from traditional Akan atumpan drums. Feld, Jazz
Cosmopolitanism, 57.

Quoted in Collins, “Jazz Feedback to Africa,” 184.

Crossing Over, directed by Christopher Laird (1988, Toronto: Caribbean Tales Worldwide
Distribution), VHS.
follows the artists’ visits to each other’s countries, and documents the artists experiencing music in a variety of settings and cultures, which sonically connects the countries in the viewers’ ears and minds. The established connections of calypso and highlife are on display as each artist is at home improvising in the style of the other. In a final node of musical confluence, Koo Nimo met with Lord Kitchener and sang with him, highlighting once again the mutual influence of highlife and calypso across generations and oceans.

A more contemporary example of direct musical interaction between Trinidad and Ghana is the travels of the NGC279 Couva Joylanders, a steelband from Couva, Trinidad. The Couva Joylanders were in Ghana for the second time in November 2013, performing with famous highlife musician Amakye Dede. After their tour, they left their pans in Ghana in hopes of future visits (Figure 25). Their performances were extremely well received by Ghanaian audiences.280

Quantos, music manager of +233 Jazz Club in Accra, shared that the Joylanders took recordings of Amakye Dede’s music and arranged it for steelpan, a process that, because of musical similarities, was relatively easy for both parties and was well received by the audience at +233.281 Performing Dede’s well known songs like “Odo Da Baabi”, with its infectious rhythmic upbeats that would fit in any steelband tune, and the reggae infused accompaniment of “Iron Boy,” the Couva Joylanders and Amakye Dede

279 NGC is the acronym for the National Gas Company of Trinidad & Tobago. Steelbands have a conflicted history with corporate sponsors, but NGC sponsors a number of steelbands throughout the country and in so doing reaps the benefits of mutual name recognition and publicity at performances and competitions.
delighted local audiences with the steelpan sound. Quantos reflected on the power of the
pan jumbie, “Pan music being so addictive – that’s a lethal combination.”

Figure 25 - Couva Joylanders steelpans at Jon Moore Warehouse in Tema, Ghana
Photo by author (2014).

When the group performed outside on Oxford Street in Osu, audiences came from
surrounding areas, encouraging multiple sets ended only because of darkness in the
performance location. Osu, a shopping area of Accra popular with young people, was a

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perfect outdoor venue as the natural acoustics of tall buildings and narrow streets brought
in audiences to hear the unique sound of the steelpan. According to the Assistant to the
Consular General, Amma Abrokwah, “It was an awesome encounter. People were
thrilled. In Ghana, mostly, we use those pans for kebab grill stands….They couldn’t
believe that sound was coming from the pan.”

Nii Buckie, a musician in Accra, is an example of sound traffic via travel and
musical collaboration that charts the contemporary presence of steelpan in Ghana. He
performs on steelpan at a local hotel a few times a month (Figure 26). Buckie’s
connections with the steelpan started in Germany, where he travelled with a band of
Ghanaians to perform throughout the country on gyil, a xylophone from northern Ghana.
In the course of performing, Buckie met some musicians from the Caribbean who taught
him to play the steelpan. As a result of his performances with the Caribbean artists,
Buckie travelled to Trinidad, had a set of double tenors made for him by Merlin Gill, and
returned to Ghana to collaborate with Ghanaian musicians and share his arrangements of
steelpan standards, as well as Ghanaian standards, on the steelpan.

My own experiences arranging highlife music for steelpan mirror Buckie’s. I am a
student of steelpan who came to highlife and found resonance; he is a student of highlife
who came to steelpan. Our sound traffic weaves and crosses and meets at the Accra
Holiday Inn in June 2015, where an American from Montana sang along to highlife tunes

286 Ibid.
from Ghana performed on steelpans from Trinidad (and his were even from the same builder as some of my own!).

Figure 26 - Nii Buckie and band at Accra Holiday Inn – photo by author (2015).

The final component of musical confluence is an indirect method, the reinterpretation or transformation of music learned or heard by local musicians. Adaha brass band music, the local creation influenced by the regimental brass band of the West India Regiment, is an example of this type of interaction, with musicians fusing what they have heard into a distinct musical style that represents the multiple influences on their musical creativity. Much like E.T. Mensah and his contemporaries, musicians from both
Trinidad and Ghana have undoubtedly influenced each other through recorded music, travel and collaboration. Artists find the elements that speak to them and incorporate those elements into their own work. Whether it is solo phrases in improvisation, chord progressions that were heard or learned, or rhythmic ideas that easily transfer between styles, the historical resonances influence contemporary confluences.

Samini, a popular musician in Ghana has even incorporated the steelpan sound, albeit synthesized, into the musical accompaniment of his song, “Samini.” (Samini, 2006). Incorporating the successful elements of Trini soca artists like dancing directions, Samini’s lyrics include “African carnival party…I wanna let you know, it’s an international music album, and it’s a worldwide decision” as he combines Twi and English lyrics with steelpan sounds of Trinidad for his Ghanaian audiences.

Kukyekukyeku Bamboo Orchestra

In Trinidad, the ensemble that was the precursor of the steelpan is called tamboo bamboo, and appears to have its roots in West Africa. Bamboo stamping tubes are used as musical instruments throughout the world, yet the prevalence of bamboo in tropical areas often correlates with the locations of musical ensembles of bamboo (as does my cracked bamboo in Montana’s dry climate). In most every instance, musicians use various lengths of bamboo to produce different tones.

In Ghana, bamboo stamping tubes are known as pamploi among the Ga (south-central Ghana); kukyekukyeku by the people of Mesomagor; and gye w’ani in

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Nyamebɛkyɛre (Eastern Region, Ghana). In the Caribbean and South America, it was (re)invented as tamboo bamboo in Trinidad, quitiplás in Columbia, Venezuela and Panama and ganbo in Haiti.

Both tamboo bamboo and the Kukyekukyeku Bamboo Orchestra use “voices” determined by the length and diameter of the bamboo tube. In Trinidad, they retain the French names (or Creole equivalents): boom (or buller), foule and cutter. In Mesomagor, the individual instruments are named with vocables, phrases that help players retain rhythms: ampa (It's true), yɛnkɔ ntem (Let's go quickly), ma yɛnkɔ ham (Let's go to farm), and Kokobɔ na akokɔ (forest animal and chicken).

My time in Ghana included study with the leader of the Kukyekukyeku Bamboo Orchestra, Bismark Kwaku Nimo Amoah, in Mesomagor, Western Region, Ghana. Mesomagor is a village 40 km northwest of Cape Coast near the eastern border of Kakum National Park. Mesomagor has a population of about 400 people and most of the residents are involved in farming of cocoa and palm nuts and its byproducts (Figure 27). I studied with both Bismark and one of the elder members of the Orchestra, Samuel Kwabena Ebo Assan.

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Bismark Amoah, the group's leader, performed the music of stamped bamboo tubes with his father, who formed the group in 1971. In discussions about the history of the art form, Bismark makes claims to its existence in the region long before his own introduction to the instrument. However, historical information is scant on the stamping of bamboo tubes in Ghana. Bismark hypothesizes that the proliferation of Western musical training led to the bamboo orchestras dying out in the late 1800s-early 1900s. He told me that the elders of the community loved storytelling and would use the bamboo to accompany their stories.

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293 Ibid.
294 Ibid.
Figure 28 - Members of Kukyekukyeku Bamboo Orchestra who came to Accra for author’s concert at the National Theatre (Bismark Amoah standing on the right) – photo by author (2015).

The Fante, a sub-group of the Akan ethnic group and the primary ethnic group in the Central Region of Ghana, use the words ku-kye-ku-kye-ku to describe the sound of the bamboo. Rhythmically, Kukyekukyeku uses a similar format to tamboo bamboo in Trinidad and Tobago, with three main voices and one player free to improvise. The tubes are stamped on dense blocks of wood that act as resonators and protect the bamboo from cracking or breaking during performances. The major differences in appearance are that the tubes in Mesomagor include “tabs” cut in the top that serve as a handle, as well as the
prevalent use of a player’s hand to cover the hole at the top of the tube to change pitch and timbre when the tube is struck. Although the rhythms tie the ensembles together, the only instruments struck with a stick in the Kukyekukyeku Bamboo Orchestra are a xylophone of bamboo tubes (arranged horizontally) and the double bell.

Performances by the Kukyekukyeku Bamboo Orchestra include dance and song, much like other dance forms throughout the country. Although I was taught parts in isolation, performances are incomplete if just the bamboo is performed. I do not know whether or not this is a consequence of my presence as an American or if this is how members of the group are trained. It appears that children learn by imitating, and a number of village children were at the performance mimicking the dance moves of the group off to the side. Although there was a “location” from which the group performed, I was impressed by the organic nature of the performance. People watched from benches under the tree or from clusters along the periphery of the dancing location.

Performances of the Kukyekukyeku Bamboo Orchestra range in social purpose from accompanying storytelling to providing tourist entertainment in connection with the adjacent Kakum National Park. Much like contemporary tamboo bamboo performances in Trinidad, the KBO preserves a tradition that was revived by Bismark’s father. In discussions with Bismarck, the relative pitch of the various voices is important to performers, but it isn't classified as a specific frequency or note name.\textsuperscript{295} For example, the highest voice, ma yenkɔ ham, is made up of two short pieces of bamboo of differing lengths, yet they were chosen for performance based on the interval created by the

\textsuperscript{295} Bismark Amoah, Interview with author, June 10, 2014.
different lengths and stored together in pairs. The bamboo orchestra serves as entertainment for the village, although I was not in the village for any performances other than the one arranged for me. The major difference between tamboo bamboo in Trinidad and performances of the KBO is that tamboo bamboo was primarily a mobile ensemble (although now it is performed often as a static ensemble with distinction between performers and audience) whereas the KBO is stationary because of the resonator boxes that are necessary to amplify the sound of the bamboo stomping tubes.

The KBO has functioned in different capacities since its founding. Upon its founding, the elders in the village enjoyed storytelling and they used bamboo to sing and dance before going to sleep. Bismark joined the senior group when he was eight years old and was the leader of the group from 1981-87. In 1987, the group folded and Bismark was married. After living in Cape Coast for a number of years selling food and other odd jobs, Bismark heard there was an organization that was engaged in preserving and showcasing traditional music, CILTAD/Agoro.

CILTAD/Agoro is a non-governmental agency founded in 1993, funded primarily by the Royal Danish Embassy in Ghana with additional support from the Central Regional Development Commission and the Cape Coast Municipal Assembly, with an office in the town hall in Cape Coast. As Bismark describes it, he visited the center in Cape Coast and witnessed white men dancing traditional Ghanaian dances.

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297 CILTAD is an acronym for Center for Intercultural Learning and Talent Development and Agoro is the Twi/Fante word for “play,” yet can be used to describe singing, dancing, playing or any other kind of performance used as a method of human expression.
discussed his own experience with the Bamboo Orchestra and, after being repeatedly
turned away, in 1995, he registered Kukyekukyeku Bamboo Orchestra with the
organization.\textsuperscript{300}

In 1995, there were 18 members and the group became affiliated with CEDECOM
(Central Region Development Commission) in marketing Kakum National Park to
tourists, a park created with the intention of conservation as well as bringing tourist
revenue to surrounding villages. Kakum National Park encompasses 360 square
kilometers of protected rainforest that has been managed by the Ghana Heritage
Conservation Trust, supported by USAID/Ghana, since 1994. Kakum National Park has a
well-known canopy walk that was opened in 1995 and offers visitors a view from above
the rainforest that otherwise would not be possible. As part of their agreement with
CILTAD/Agoro, KBO performed every Saturday and on holidays for visitors to the
National Park Visitor Center.\textsuperscript{301} Although the CILTAD/Agoro program is no longer in
existence at Kakum National Park\textsuperscript{302}, Kukyekukyeku still performs within Mesomagor
and throughout the region. Most performers learn through apprenticeship and imitation, a
practice I noticed during my own lessons and among local children.

Voices of the Bamboo Orchestra

In Mesomagor, there are four different bamboo tubes used by the Kukyekukyeku
Bamboo Orchestra. Much like other instrument families, the longer the resonating tube,
the lower the sounding pitch will be. The melodies that are created come from the rhythmic patterns being combined over the range of all the bamboo tubes. The musical examples I outline below are the initial patterns taught to me in Mesomagor. The name of each instrument helps in retaining the rhythm performed; the corresponding syllables are placed under the rhythm in the transcriptions. They form the musical foundation for the performance of a dance titled “Mpanifɔ,” or “Elders, We Greet You as You Sit.” The individual instruments are named using vocables or short phrases that represent rhythms that can be played on the bamboo. Some of these names match previously published information on the KBO by Benjamin Klaus and some are slightly different.  

Ma yɛnkɔ ham, or “Let's go to farm,” is made up of two short tubes of differing length (about one foot in length) that are the highest timbre or voice of bamboo (Figure 29). They are not necessarily the melodic voice, just the highest in pitch. The instruments are both stamped on the blocks and hit together, signified by the “x” in the musical examples (Figure 31). The opening rhythm of the ma yɛnkɔ ham, including the first strike of the tubes together, is a rhythm that has been labeled by musicologists such as Samuel Floyd as part of the cinquillo-tresillo rhythmic complex, or, even more specifically, the calenda complex, a subset of the cinquillo-tresillo complex that was common in the West Indies and has been traced back to West Africa. The cinquillo-tresillo rhythmic complex is a rhythmic framework that “bind[s] together conceptually the black musics of

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304 Cinquillo meaning five notes (Figure 2.10) and tresillo meaning three notes (Figure 2.11).
the entire Caribbean and beyond, in spite of the musical, cultural, and political divergences of the societies from which they spring.³⁰⁶

Figure 29 - Ma yɛnko ham and yɛnkɔ ntem – photo by author (2016).

| 2/4 | d   | d   | d   | d   | 2/4 | d   | d   | d   |

Figure 30 - Cinquillo pattern (left) and Tresillo pattern (right).

| 2/4 | d   | d   | d   | d   | d   | d   | d   | d   |

| 2/4 | d   | d   | d   | d   | d   | d   | d   |

Ma yɛn ko ham

Figure 31 - Basic ma yɛnkɔ ham pattern, transcribed by author.

The first half of the ma yɛnkɔ ham pattern morphs into the tresillo pattern by breaking it down into three sections (two groups of two notes and a singular final note). If

³⁰⁶ Floyd, Black Music, 9.
one is to accent the beginning of each section and gradually remove the second note of the groups of two, the rhythmic location of the pattern emerges as tresillo (Figure 32), a rhythm that developed out of characteristic West African bell patterns.

Figure 32 - Ma yɛnkɔ ham pattern translated to tresillo.

The pattern is also similar to the typical conga pattern in steelpan groups when playing calypso, although the pitches (high/low) are reversed (Figure 33). This pattern is also an accompaniment pattern on the adukurogya in one of the movements of the Akan Fontomfrom court music. Another of the ethnic groups of Ghana, the Ewe, use this rhythm in the Yeve society music during the Adavu movement, played by the kpetsi.307

The resultant pattern of the tubes clicked together is the recognizable bell pattern of the Sikyi dance that is also an element of highlife music. The higher ma yɛnkɔ ham, if taken out of its context, is the familiar soca comping pattern in steelpan literature (Figure 34). Finally, the initial pattern is the resultant pattern created by the bass drum or bass pan (lower bamboo) and comping patterns (higher bamboo) in soca pan charts (Figure 35).

307 Nyamuame, “History, Religion and Performing Yeve,” 200. Kpetsi is a barrel shaped drum that serves as a secondary support and response drum in the Ewe drum orchestra sometimes referred to as kidi or asivivi. “It is one of the difficult drums to master because during the dialogue the kpetsi player must be able to understand the prescribed drum text and be able to effectively respond to the lead drum without hesitation,” Ibid., 188.
Soca is a genre of music that originated in Trinidad & Tobago in the 1970s through the experimentations of Ras Shorty I. Soca combines calypso music with East Indian influences that represent the large East Indian population of Trinidad & Tobago.\textsuperscript{308}

Some argue that soca is a combination of soul music from the United States and calypso, the new genre taking the first two letters from each. Although this makes sense linguistically, it isn’t as supported by the first progenitors of the genre. There is a strong downbeat force that is combined with an antithesis of the downbeat in the repeated comping patterns of the chordal steelpan voices.

Yɛnkɔ ntɛm,³⁰⁹ “Let's go quickly” or “we go quickly,” is a single tube about 2 ½ feet long (Figure 29). It is open on one end and has a tab on the top of the tube. Sound is created by stomping the tube on the wood block with or without your hand over the opening at the top of the tube, which changes the timbre in an open/closed manner. It starts with a pickup to the downbeat and then a syncopated rhythm, one with the hand off the tube and one closed on top of the tube (the strikes with a hand over the opening of the bamboo are notated with an “x” below). The rhythm played is the tresillo rhythm (Figure 36).

³⁰⁹ Yɛnkɔ ntɛm is referred to as “pepempa” by Benjamin Klaus. Both names represent the characteristic three-note rhythmic pattern.
Kokobɔ na akokɔ, or “forest animal and chicken,” is made of two tubes of differing length slightly longer than yɛnkolɛntɛm, roughly encompassing one and two sections of bamboo. This instrument is the most improvisational of the bamboo orchestra and sometimes acts in a capacity similar to the master drummer in a typical Ghanaian drum ensemble. The kokobɔ na akokɔ play a proverb to start each piece that serves as a call to the rest of the ensemble. The two animals described in the name of this instrument do not get along and the instructional proverb (as well as the fact that the two tubes are in constant rhythmic conflict) represents this reality from nature.

The proverb’s text for Mpanifɔ is “Kokobɔ na akokɔ wosaa wɔnda. Eben nsu na abɔ baa dem, bosom po na bɔbɔaa dem” (Figure 38) which translates to “Kokobɔ and chicken do not sleep when they meet. Which river/ocean can you find the stone? Bosom po (a river or sanctuary that holds significance as a site of rituals and priestly rites) has the stone.” Kokobɔ and chicken are two animals that are commonly known to fight. Therefore, in this proverb, they serve as stand-ins for enemies. The wisdom is that when enemies meet, they do not sleep; otherwise, one would exploit their conflict. The second section refers to a space that local populations would know as a spiritually significant site and is used to evoke fear and compel action between adversaries. Kokobɔ na akokɔ, known enemies, are compelled to work together through the proverb.

The rhythmic patterns of the individual tubes may not make sense on their own, but, as the “master drum” of the ensemble, the kokobɔ na akokɔ player (typically Bismark in performances) is free to improvise but also performs signals to which the rest of the ensemble reacts. In this manner, the kokobɔ na akokɔ serves a similar performance
to the atsimevu of the Ewe, lunna of the Dagbani and atumpan of the Akan, calling signals and “talking” through rhythms that are recognizable to players and community members.

Figure 37 - Bismark with kokɔ na akɔ - photo by author (2014).

When this particular pattern was taught to me, it was demonstrated in parts that were continually lengthened until I was able to perform the entire rhythm/proverb. The retention and transmission of this rhythm was aided not through a written notation, but
through demonstration and repetition of the proverb (In the transcription, “ke ke ke ke” are nonsense syllables that act as a filler between parts of the proverb).

Figure 38 - Kokobɔ na akokɔ proverb, transcribed by author.

Ampa,310 “it's true,” is the largest instrument in the orchestra that serves as the bass voice. About three and a half feet in length and with the widest circumference (Figure 41), the playing technique is similar to the yɛnkɔ ntem with a strong presence at the beginning of patterns. The traditional pattern of Ampa is either a strong downbeat presence (Figure 39) or the common syncopated bass line in steelpan calypsos - the tresillo rhythmic archetype (Figure 40) or the tresillo without the last note (again the x designates attacks with the hand over opening of the bamboo).

Figure 39 - Ampa pattern (left) and Ampa variation (right).

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310 Ampa is referred to as pempa by Benjamin Klaus. This may be an alteration by Bismark in his teaching over time or issues in translation.
Figure 40 - Ampa variation (left) and Ampa tresillo variation (right).

Figure 41 - Bismark playing the ampa – photo by author (2014).
The timeline, a common feature among Ghanaian traditional music, is played by a double bell suspended horizontally and a bamboo slit drum (Figure 42). These high pitched instruments serve to “cut” through the patterns of the other drums and allow musicians to listen to and coordinate with one pattern. The bell often plays recognizable bell patterns from traditional Ghanaian dances. Benjamin Klaus claims that the addition of the bell originated with an American environmentalist, Mr. Markum, who came to Mesomagor in December 1995 to elicit KBO in his attempts to teach villagers about the importance of preserving the rainforest ecosystem. 311 The final instrument that Bismark has added to the orchestra is a xylophone made of differing lengths of bamboo arranged horizontally (Figure 42).

Part of my time in Mesomagor was to experience the full group performing on the bamboo, singing and dancing. Even though it was a relatively spontaneous performance because it was done before I left the village in the mid-afternoon, many children and some adults came to watch the performance with me. The children were mimicking the performers, practicing the dance moves to the side of the performers or from other vantage points. It was an introduction to performance dynamics and how skills are passed on. Although members of the orchestra rehearse and learn as a group, the first experiences in the orchestra often occur in situations like those I observed, where young people learned through imitation.

The orchestra not only performs for the audience but it also actively engages with them and encourages audience participation through dancing during their performance. At the end of the performance, children were involved in a round dance that eventually included me and the other adults in attendance. We would follow the motions of one of the children. Then, there was a time for individual expressions in the middle of the circle as others encouraged each other with cheering. Although this is a common occurrence in dance settings throughout the world, this also was a common feature of highlife performances in the mid-twentieth century throughout Ghana.\footnote{Plageman, \textit{Highlife Saturday Night}, 20-21.}
The performance by the KBO was not limited to mere production of rhythms. Each piece was accompanied by a song and dance movements that reflected the topic of the song, sometimes enacting a dramatic story. Throughout Ghana, and the continent in general, artistic creativity is intertwined with drama, drumming, song and dance being used collaboratively by artists.

One of the songs I was taught is a Fante song entitled, “Mpanifoo,” a song that Benjamin Klaus published in 1999 and on CD of traditional music from Cape Coast in 2003.

Mpanifoo ye ma mo a tena ase
Mpanifoo ye ma mo a tena ase
Mpanifoo yen de mayefri de bokoo
Elders, we greet you as you sit
Elders, we come to entertain you
Elders, we come from a place that is cool

Stories and songs instruct young people in the ways of their culture, teach lessons the community wishes its citizens to live by, and share the history of the village and its people. Many of the dances that KBO performs entertain and instruct through dramatic elements of dance. Audience members learn through experiencing the dance drama and by listening to the lyrics of the songs performed. Social commentary is offered by

315 Klaus, “The Kukyekukyeku Bamboo Orchestra,” 29. Klaus translates the repeated phrase as “we come to entertain you” which may be an extension of the greeting as this piece typically occurs at the beginning of a performance, welcoming the audience, or an elaboration of his informant, Isaac Nani Kwesi.
performers and is a common trait in West African performance traditions and continues to be a characteristic of Carnival traditions in Trinidad, especially in the composition and performance of calypsos.

The rhythmic connections between the bamboo in Ghana and steelpan in Trinidad are merely circumstantial but may be an example of cross influence from Adaha brass band music that was popular among the Fante in Cape Coast, a coastal village south of Mesomagor. Bismark spent a considerable amount of time in Cape Coast and could have been influenced, directly or indirectly, by music he would have experienced that he then carried over into his recreation of the Kukyekuyeku Bamboo Orchestra.

In terms of performance practice, the members of the KBO are community members who maintain a community tradition (regardless of its actual invention) and provide entertainment for visitors and the community. In a way, KBO functions like many steelpan organizations in Trinidad. The ensemble provides economic opportunities for community members, especially young members, and engages the creative elements of their brains and personalities. The performers connect with the audience through repertoire that is recognizable and encourages participation through singing, dances that are participatory and that continually blur the lines between performer and spectator. Although I only studied with Bismark and Samuel, my interactions with them and the larger group helped me connect with the community in a deeper manner. Although no longer affiliated with AGORO/CILTDAD, KBO provides opportunities for visitors to venture up to the community, connecting Mesomagor with the larger Ghanaian population as well as foreign visitors.
Nyamebɛkyɛre Bamboo Orchestra

Another ensemble that performs similar music to the Kukyekukyeku Bamboo Orchestra is the Nyamebɛkyɛre Bamboo Orchestra from the village of Nyamebɛkyɛre in the Akwapim North District of the Eastern Region of Ghana. I rely on the resources of Dr. Paschal Yao Younge for these comparisons, as I have a video recording he made of a performance and his research notes from 1998. In Nyamebɛkyɛre, bamboo music is called gye w’ani, “make yourself happy.” Although the instruments and some of the rhythms are the same as in Mesomagor, instead of using wooden blocks as resonating aids, the bamboo is struck on stones, which likely reflects the invention of the ensemble in Nyamebɛkyɛre.

Bamboo music in Nyamebɛkyɛre has its own creation story. It originated when some young men were collecting bamboo for a fireworks display that occurred around Christmas. One of the pieces of bamboo fell into an adjacent river and when they retrieved it, they noticed the bamboo made a very melodious sound when struck against a rock. Their fondness for the sound led them to collect various lengths of bamboo and create the ensemble that became gye w’ani.\textsuperscript{316} The members of this ensemble also use four main voices or timbres and they are similarly named using vocables\textsuperscript{317} or proverbs.

The highest timbre is called ti koro nkɔ agyina, which translates as “two heads are better than one” or literally “one head does not go to consultation.” The ti koro nkɔ agyina is made of two short pieces of bamboo that are struck together or struck on a stone.

\textsuperscript{317} Vocables are nonsense syllables that are used to transmit drum language from teacher to student. They often represent the sounds created on instruments through different techniques such as dampening, striking with a hand or striking with a stick.
like ma yënkɔ ham in Mesomagor. The rhythmic pattern played by ti koro nkɔ agyina in one of the pieces is the same as the one played on Ma yënkɔ ham in Mesomagor (Figure 31).

The next largest bamboo is called dayke asem, “because of tomorrow”. It is a tube that is slightly longer than ti koro nkɔ agyina, and is similar to yënkɔ ntem in Mesomagor. The rhythm played on dakye asem is typically the same as the yenkɔ ntem (Figure 36). Again, the phrase used to remember and transmit the rhythm for this voice is three syllables like the pattern.

Larger than the dayke asem is the dondo, the Akan name for a talking drum whose pitch is changed by squeezing underneath one’s arm the strings that connect the drum heads. This voice, at least in the performance recorded by Dr. Younge, appears to have the freedom to “talk” and improvise. This corresponds to the kokobɔ na akokɔ in Mesomagor and the cutter in Trinidad.

The lowest voice in the Nyamebɛkyɛre Bamboo Orchestra is “nni bonɛ akyi,” “do not follow wicked things,” or literally, “do not have wickedness behind.” It forms the foundation over which the other parts interact. Its primary pattern is a syncopated rhythm that is a common bass line in steelpan music and is the same as the ampa in Mesomagor (Figure 39). This is the only bamboo that has a handle in Nyamebɛkyɛre, whereas in Mesomagor, only the ma yenkɔ ham does not have a handle. The handle does not appear to affect the sound or playing of the bamboo, but it does differentiate the instruments from their counterparts in Trinidad.
The accompaniment instruments for gye w’ani are a slit bell, or adawura,\textsuperscript{318} and bamboo clappers that are typically used by the singers to play ostinato patterns that reinforce or support the timeline, played by the adawura.\textsuperscript{319} These supporting patterns are also typically what is taken up by spectators through hand clapping as they engage with the performance.

Much like the corresponding ensemble in Mesomagor, the Nyamebekeyere Bamboo Orchestra performs their music by incorporating songs and dance. This particular performance uses less dramatic dance movements and does not appear to tell a story, but this may be because of the audience. At the end of the performance, visitors that accompanied Dr. Younge, American college students and teachers, were brought up to perform the bamboo patterns as well as to learn a few dance steps, much to the delight of the performers and community members.

BigShots! and the University of Ghana, Legon

Bamboo ensembles do exist in other places in Ghana, but my experience with them is tangential. The University of Ghana, Legon, has an ensemble but my visit during the summer did not correspond with regular meetings of the ensemble. I met briefly with Oh! Nii Sowah from the Dance Department learned a few basic patterns of dance he had created for students. He referred to the ensemble as “ko-ti-nko,” the syllables representing the sounds of two small tubes (“ko” being the low pitch and “ti” being the high pitch). The rhythm I learned was related to the ma yênkɔ ham from Mesomagor, especially in its use of the previously discussed cinquillo pattern.

\textsuperscript{318} Younge, \textit{Music and Dance Traditions of Ghana}, 424.
A group of former University of Ghana students called BigShots! is another ensemble that performs and has recorded bamboo music. A classmate at Ohio University, Kwame Atoapoma Amanfo Ofori, shared a video of a performance that BigShots! had presented in Accra, where the popular ensemble used rhythms similar to what is being taught at the University of Ghana. The bamboo groups connected with the University of Ghana use three main voices, a set of two bamboo tubes that are struck on the ground and then together, a longer single tube that is struck on the ground with and without a hand covering the opening, and a large bass tube that is also played with and without covering the opening. These ensembles bear resemblance to both Kukyekukyeku and Nyamebeyere Bamboo Orchestras in both their instrument construction and some rhythmic patterns, but I was not able to confirm any widespread connection between the ensembles. This may be, among many possibilities, a result of each leader trying to maintain individuality, an element of competition, or actual unawareness of each other.

Traditional Performance Ethic in Ghana

Among the various ethnic groups in Ghana, creative performance is often a multi-disciplinary event. The interactive experiences in Ghana mimic similar occurrences in Trinidad, where the line between performer and spectator was often blurred, if not outright ignored. Rarely, if ever, are individual artistic genres separated and performed in isolation. Even in more literary areas like storytelling, as the example of the Kukyekukyeku Bamboo Orchestra demonstrates, music and dance play a prominent role in entertainment and cultural transmission. “Like cultural traits, traditional music education is taught through the process of socialization. In most Ghanaian languages
there are no words to represent music, rhythm, or singing as separate activities; music-making is a broad, encompassing activity that is part and parcel of daily life.”

Furthermore, the performance environment is one that encourages, even requires audience participation.

In Africa the notion of participation as a significant gesture of active effort, as a contribution which gives life and meaning, has provided a central theme of religious intuition and practice…[e]ven when spectators are not openly involved in the proceedings, their presence is never passive…[t]heir presence at an event, in faith and gesture, implies an engagement of minds and bodies to endow their social forms with life.

The members of the community understand that everyone will participate in his/her own way. Community participation informs a successful performance. In Mesomagor, the audience was organic, growing as the music continued and the sound spread through the village. Throughout the performance, young people were dancing along and mimicking the bamboo players. A “successful” end was an organic procession of performers and audience members followed by words of thanks and appreciation.

All of the ensembles discussed in this chapter can be viewed as progeny of the vision of early leaders of the country of Ghana who, like many newly independent countries in Africa in the 1950s and 1960s, saw the creative arts as a means to empower and exert their independence from colonial governments. The foremost example in Ghana

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320 Younge, Music and Dance Traditions of Ghana, 10.
is the Ghana Dance Ensemble, a group affiliated with the National Theatre in the capital city of Accra. The Ghana Dance Ensemble was created in 1962, as a politico-cultural project of Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana. It was established as a part of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana, Legon, under the direction of Professor J.H. Kwabena Nketia. Initially, the Ensemble was trained and developed by the late Professor Mawere Opoku, whose arrangements of traditional dances have remained a core part of the ensemble’s repertoire.

Bamboo musicians in Ghana are practicing the taking of something from the past and making it resonate with a contemporary audience, whether that is Mesomagor or former students of the University of Ghana, Legon. The work of early Ghanaian leaders is still in place as there are cultural groups throughout the country that continue to maintain traditions as well as develop new ones. Bamboo music, as an ensemble that was (re)created by individuals like Bismark’s father, serves as a way to maintain community, especially in rural areas, as urbanization beckons young people from throughout the country.

Conclusion

There are rich and complex interactions between Ghana and Trinidad that are both historical and contemporary. The direct and indirect connections of highlife and calypso, bamboo ensembles and the performance ethic tie the two regions together. Although there currently isn’t a significant presence of the steelpan in Ghana, these connections serve as entry points for further expansion and collaboration. The initial appearance of the steelpan was likely with Winston “Spree” Simon in 1957, but Consular General
Hilton John Mitchell believes that most of the current Trini population in Ghana migrated after that visit, so don’t have knowledge of Simon’s visit.\textsuperscript{322} Atsu Atsiatorme, former director of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, asserts that pan’s initial appearance in Ghana was hindered by its lack of tonal variety.\textsuperscript{323} Early pans were limited by what people had figured out in terms of note placement and chromatic diversity. In a country of tonal languages and extensive drum vocabulary, Atsiatorme doubts that Ghanaian audiences could connect with the new instrument and its limited melodic content.\textsuperscript{324} Introducing more steelpan Ghana would also mean battling the proliferation of imported instruments such as the guitar and brass instruments that have a longer history among all ages of Ghanaian musicians.

The musical connections and transnational travel of people, both forced and voluntary, underlie the similarities that have been discussed in this chapter. As the steelpan has travelled from Trinidad & Tobago, its sound traffic has generated some feedback in Ghana, returning to the land that provided some of the musical framework for its invention among young people in the early twentieth century in Trinidad. Even though the steelpan presence in Ghana has not hardened like the United States, Toronto or London, the interactions discussed in this chapter suggest a continued traffic in people and musical ideas that could encourage steelpan to catch on with more Ghanaians.

Through bamboo ensembles, the genres of highlife and calypso, and a shared

\textsuperscript{322} Hilton John Mitchell, interview with author, Tema, Ghana, June 2, 2014.
\textsuperscript{323} Atsu Atsiatorme, interview with author, Accra, Ghana, June 2, 2014.
\textsuperscript{324} Ibid.
performance ethic, the further expansion of steelpan into Ghana may see fewer roadblocks as the pan diaspora expands.
CHAPTER 3: STEELPAN ROUTES: THE PAN DIASPORA

The steelpan as an instrument and a movement are concepts that have physically moved from their genesis in Trinidad. The instrument has moved both literally and conceptually in the minds of tuners, arrangers, players and supporters. The migration of the steelpan is the focus of this chapter. I trace the routes of the steelpan and its proponents from the mid-twentieth century to the present day. These routes create a web of sound traffic that highlights the interconnectedness of people and locations involved in steelpan. As people develop ties to Trinidad and the culture of steelpan, the small island nation exerts influence on the musical cultures of other nations, both large and small. Furthermore, these routes are multidirectional, as steelpan players, tuners, arrangers and enthusiasts have traveled both from Trinidad to various points in the world as well from diverse locations to Trinidad in order to experience the instrument in its homeland. Discussions of diaspora are prominent in this chapter, as the steelpan movement serves as both an example and a challenge to conventional understandings of diaspora.

The concept of diaspora is one that is borrowed from the field of cultural studies for the purpose of this dissertation. Returning to James Clifford’s definition of diaspora, the steelpan itself serves as the marker or identifier that defines the “distinctive community.” This community exists in different levels of intensity in various parts of the world, yet all are connected by the instrument, its distinctive sound, its history and ability to bring people together. The less desirable elements of diaspora like dispersion,

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isolation and disconnection from one’s place of origin are both applicable and challenged when looking at the steelpan diaspora.

The pivotal feature of diasporas for this dissertation is the flexible yet consistent intertwining of both roots and routes. “Diaspora discourse articulates, or bends together, both roots and routes to construct what Gilroy describes as alternate public spheres, forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference.”326 The entanglement that is also a feature of sound traffic foregrounded in this dissertation mirrors the lived tension of separation and living in a location while remembering or longing for another.327

Often diasporic population are dispersed from their indigenous lands, but the Caribbean is a space that is largely populated by people with no indigenous connections to the land. The Caribbean is a region originally inhabited by Caribs and Arawaks, who were wiped out through disease and conquest.328 Trinidad, like much of the Caribbean, was populated by people from somewhere else as it emerged from a colonial backwater to a regional oil producer.329 As a settler society whose subjected population was “settled” as well, Trinidad is an example of the murky contemporary definition of diaspora, where travel and technology foster a sense of community that defies national borders. “Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.”330

327 Ibid.
329 Ibid.
The steelpan, before its acceptance by mainstream Trini society, was an instrument of the disenfranchised and outcast young population of the capital, Port of Spain. Members of the early steelpan movement were also the primary population that migrated out of Trinidad in the aftermath of World War II. The search for employment, both by men and women, saw new West Indian communities develop in major metropolitan areas of the United States, Canada and England. As the communities developed, a major component of cultural restoration was the establishment of steelbands and Carnival festivities that included steelpan competitions and performance venues. Three hubs of steelpan activity outside of Trinidad that most resemble the locus that is their inspiration are Brooklyn, Toronto and London.

As part of Carnival festivities in all three locations, steelbands compete in a Panorama competition that helps facilitate a circuit of players, arrangers and tuners. The London Panorama takes place in mid-July, Toronto’s Pan Alive in early August and Brooklyn’s Panorama on the Saturday before Labor Day. Although steelpan was a component of all three festivals at their outset, separate organized competitions came later, Brooklyn in 1973, London in 1978 and Toronto in 1997. In addition to arranging for multiple steel orchestras in Trinidad’s Panorama, top arrangers such as Duvonne Stewart and Len “Boogsie” Sharpe arrange for ensembles in London, Brooklyn and Toronto. Tuners from Trinidad and the United States regularly travel to all locations and

331 See Archer, “The Brooklyn Carnival: A Site for Diasporic Consolidation,” 72-78; Carlyle Hutchinson, “The Brain Drain and Underdevelopment: A Study of Migration from Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago to Canada (MA thesis, McMaster University, 1977); Gordon Michael Charles, “The Effects of Underdevelopment on Migration from Trinidad and Tobago to the United States” (PhD diss, Howard University, 1984).
join local tuners as preparations for the competitions ensue. These circuits reflect a similar migration of masquerade organizers, designers and performers that travel from Carnival to Carnival celebrating the traditions that developed in Trinidad.  

Migration to New York City, Toronto and London was concentrated at different times but often coincided with Trinis seeking employment opportunities. The West Indian population in London was bolstered by the Windrush Generation, named after the British cruiseship that ferried 492 passengers from the various British West Indian islands to London in 1948. Passengers on the *Empire Windrush* included prominent Trini calypsonians Lord Kitchener, Lord Beginner, Lord Woodbine and Mona Baptiste. Immigration to Toronto, primarily by women, was fostered by the West Indian Domestic Scheme from 1955-1960. There were two waves of immigration to New York City, first from 1900-1920 and then after changes to United States immigration policies in 1965. Over 500,000 West Indians have moved to New York City since 1965. West Indians are now the largest immigrant group in New York City, making up 8% of the population. Although they faced similar challenges to West Indian immigrants in London and Toronto, those in New York City created “migration machines: sending networks that articulated with particular receiving networks in which new migrants could find jobs, housing, sociability.”

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Steelbands are found on every continent except Antarctica. The most concentrated areas of steelpan performance are the three previously mentioned areas of significant West Indian populations – Toronto, Brooklyn and London. In the United States, the steelpan is dispersed throughout the country as part of a two-tiered system that has introduced the instrument to a wide variety of populations. My experience with the instrument straddles these tiers, as a student and teacher in educational settings and as a performer in Brooklyn. The experience in each environment is distinct but they do inform each other, especially after my experiences in Trinidad and Brooklyn. In Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia, steelpan groups exist as community ensembles, professional organizations and as part of educational institutions. Some locations hold smaller Panorama-type competitions and festivals in locations like Nigeria, South Africa, Japan and Switzerland.

In some cases, the introduction of the steelpan to a region can be traced primarily to one individual or group. Sterling Betancourt, one of the members of TASPO, and a pivotal figure in the development of steelpan in London, is also credited with starting the first steelpan in Switzerland in the early 1960s. Winston “Spree” Simon travelled to Ghana and Nigeria in the late 1950s, and groups such as Dixieland and Trinidad All Stars toured multiple countries in Africa. American jazz musician and pannist, Andy Narell, developed a following in South Africa through dissemination of his recordings.

337 Pilgrim, “Steelband in Trinidad and Tobago,” 430.
339 Andy Narell, interview with author, St. Augustine, Trinidad, February 16, 2013.
Presently there is a competition of marimba ensembles and steelpan groups in South Africa and a Panorama in Nigeria. Many of the collegiate steelpan programs in the United States can be traced to the influence of Ellie Mannette, Thomas Siwe, Larry Snider, Liam Teague, Cliff Alexis and G. Allan O’Connor.340

Steelpan Diaspora

I rely on the work of ethnomusicologist Ken Archer who argues “the steelband, individually and collectively, can be posited as a metaphor for diaspora.”341 Not only are performers dispersed throughout the world, but they are often isolated from other steelpanists as the instrument has not been accepted as a mainstream instrument like the piano, string, brass or woodwind instruments. Even in educational settings where there are sometimes multiple ensembles, the number of steelpan players is often dwarfed by members of other music ensembles. Players and directors challenge for legitimacy and acceptance as an instrumental ensemble capable of performing respectable music. The steelpan’s “history and development incorporates the dispersal, emergence of a cultural identity abroad based on origin, and a disadvantageous social condition in which steelbands suffer as victims of adverse, often antagonistic, environments.”342

One of the ongoing challenges for steelbands in Brooklyn is the securing of a space to practice and store instruments and the large racks necessary for performance at Panorama. Although many of the bands feature stage sides (smaller groups made up of a core membership), larger spaces are necessary during the summer for the expanded

340 Tiffe, “Tropicalism and the Struggle for Legitimacy,” 82-104.
341 Archer, “The Brooklyn Carnival,” 120.
342 Ibid., 128.
personnel of the steelbands. Panorama preparations often include late night rehearsals and large assemblies of people that often upset neighbors and involve the New York Police Department. Over the past few years, the plight of even the most prominent steelbands has become the subject of articles and news stories. As the gentrification of areas of Brooklyn formerly populated by West Indians continues, developers and individuals with more financial resources are purchasing/developing the formerly empty lots that were prime locations for short term Panorama preparations.

During my time rehearsing with Harmony Steel Orchestra in September 2012, our panyard was an enclosed parking lot for surrounding apartments on Erasmus Street at the southern end of Lloyd Street (Figure 43). There was enough room on the east side of the lot for a storage trailer, our canopies and carts and a small bar run by supporters of the steelband. Each year, these types of locations can and do change as organizers struggle to cover rising costs and deal with complaints by new neighbors and financially powerful interests who may not have the same connection to the steelpan as previous populations. These experiences create and concentrate feelings of literal and psychological dispersion as ensembles that developed out a of a community movement are forced to create new memories or incorporate these negative experiences into their community mindset.

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In late August of 2012, I joined the Harmony Music Makers Steel Orchestra, led by Michael Joseph for the Brooklyn Panorama. My connection with this ensemble was through fellow pan players who had performed with the group in 2011. I was connected with Michael by Anthony Hailey, a percussionist who, like me, completed graduate work at West Virginia University. Hailey, the director of Mosaic Steel Orchestra in Norfolk, Virginia, had brought a number of his high school students to perform with Harmony the previous year and gave me the contact information of Joseph and arranger Marc Brooks.
As an illustration of the connected steelpan community, I had seen Marc perform when I completed research at the Panorama Caribbean Music Fest in Virginia Beach, Virginia, in May 2011. He is a member of Steel Sensation, a small ensemble that was one of the featured groups at the festival. Their drummer, Ian Japsi, was actually the drummer for our performance in the Brooklyn Panorama. I performed alongside Ian’s son, Tristan, who has continued to perform in both the Brooklyn and Trinidad Panorama competitions. Facilitated by technology, I have been able to watch, either live or via YouTube, Tristan’s performances, and communicate via social media. The Japsis are related to one of the most famous steelband arrangers of the last twenty years, Jit Samaroo. Jit’s son Amrit, an arranger himself for Supernovas Steel Orchestra, 2nd place finisher in the large band category of Trinidad’s 2016 Panorama, is also a member of Steel Sensation.

My preparations for Panorama were facilitated through technology as well. Thanks to Anthony advocating on my behalf, Marc emailed me a tenor (single melodic pan) part to practice prior to my arrival for rehearsals. The members of Harmony had been practicing throughout the summer, but I arrived the Wednesday before Panorama, meaning I only had three rehearsals with the group before performing with them on Saturday, September 1st, 2012.

I drove from Columbus, Ohio, to Brooklyn, New York, on Wednesday, August 29th, 2012, bringing my tenor pan with me. While enroute, I phoned Michael Joseph and asked about parking in or near the panyard. He told me to ask for him when I arrived. I had the address of the panyard and as I got closer to Brooklyn, my excitement and nervousness grew. I was travelling to a major metropolitan area, I had set up a couple of
housing options with friends in New Jersey as well as the Brunswick area of Brooklyn, but I didn’t know anyone in Harmony. Anthony wasn’t able to travel to Brooklyn in 2012; a few of his students were coming from Virginia, but were performing with a different band. As I followed the GPS directions to the Harmony panyard location, I pulled into an empty lot where there was a man guarding the entrance. When I mentioned Michael’s name and said I had my pan, he had me pull forward and park right in the panyard. I do not know how much of my access was based on the reputation of my friend Anthony or other friends who had played for Harmony, but I enjoyed relative ease going in and out of the panyard while I was practicing.

Upon arriving, I was introduced to Michael Joseph and welcomed to Harmony. Joseph showed me around the panyard, including where to store the case for my pan. The panyard was relatively empty as rehearsal was not scheduled to start until later in the evening. A final component of community occurred as Harmony’s pan tuner arrived because the pans were not being used during the day, and it was an acquaintance of mine from graduate school in Morgantown, West Virginia: Billy Sheeder. My path intersected with Billy again in January 2013 during my research in Trinidad.

As I waited for the rehearsal to start, I acquainted myself with the immediate area surrounding the panyard, visiting a roti shop (Figure 44) to purchase Trini food as the panyard was in the West Indian section of Brooklyn. I continued to meet members of the Harmony community and performers as they began to arrive, meeting the arranger Marc Brooks just before rehearsal started. As a new face, I was easily recognizable, but the members seemed used to people from outside Brooklyn coming into play and I often just
had mention the names of my friends that had played with Harmony in the past and I was met with a smile of acceptance.

Figure 44 - Trini business near the Harmony panyard, Brooklyn, NY – photo by author (2012).

The arrangement of “Vibes,” Harmony’s selection for the Panorama competition, was unfinished when I received it via email, as arrangements are often created and completed in the yard, as arrangers craft and revise their ideas with players in the buildup to the competition. Although I had most of the material in my version, there were elements added and subtracted in the three days I rehearsed with the group. The other
tenor players were invaluable resources as they demonstrated sections that I didn’t have music for and allowed me to record melodies to practice on my own prior to the next rehearsal.

The first rehearsal was a blur as I attempted to blend into an ensemble of talented players that had been working together for quite some time. One element of cognitive dissonance for me was the layout of the pan I was playing as compared to those of the other tenor players. Although both were set up on a circle of fifths pattern, I was playing on a C tenor and others were playing on D tenors. My lowest note was a middle C (or C4) while the lowest note of the other tenors was D4 (Figure 45). Most of the notes are located in similar positions on the pan, but C5 and C#5 lie in the outer ring of D Tenor but the second ring of a C Tenor. When learning through imitation, I had to remember to translate those notes on the spot to a slightly different location on my pan. This type of challenge is relatively common with steelpans, as there isn’t a definitive universal standard for note placement. Although most individual voices are more or less the same, many times the placement of pitches is either rotated slightly from tuner to tuner or in some cases on completely different drums. So, although a player could be used to playing double seconds or triple guitar, playing on someone else’s pan is not as easy as playing on someone else’s trumpet.
My days were spent either practicing at the panyard or at a friend’s house in New Jersey. I used my recordings from the previous night’s rehearsal to fill out the printed part I had received via email and practiced as much as I could in order to perform at the same level as players who had been rehearsing together for weeks. I was one of only a few players that had sheet music at the rehearsal and often lighting (or lack thereof) precluded the use of music. The tradition in steelbands is often to learn through repetition and imitation, with the arranger teaching section leaders who are then responsible to make sure the rest of the section is playing the right notes, rhythms and phrasing. Although sticking (which hand to use on which note) is not always uniform, I did have discussions with fellow tenor players about the most efficient stickings in order to maintain the intended phrasing.

One interesting concept that I learned in Brooklyn that came back up in Trinidad was the idea of “skating.” Skating is what players would call the technique of a player who didn’t really know the arrangement; their mallets would be skating inside the pan,
not sure of where they were going. In fact, the phrase that was often yelled, sometimes at me, was “No skating!” As a player who has enjoyed relative ease in playing most musical compositions and consider myself an experienced musician, it was humbling to have my abilities questioned during a rehearsal. Yet, it was never incorrect and caused me to push myself more towards perfection. As you work towards perfection, skating is an inevitable stage in moving your sticks to where they should be, but just a little slower or less efficient than they need to be in order to accurately perform the music as composed.

Our rehearsals would begin organically, as they did in Trinidad, as people would arrive from their various obligations throughout the evening. Players were coming from all over New York City, mostly via public transportation, so there were waves of arrivals throughout the evening. Harmony that year was made up of players who were connected with the orchestra throughout the year, but also with members of the New York Pan Stars, a smaller stage side group that was led by our arranger, Marc Brooks. Many of the tenor players that I connected with and learned from during my time in Brooklyn were members of the Pan Stars and accepted me into their close knit community as a fellow pan enthusiast. Most of the players in Harmony were teenagers or young adults, but as the competition approached the size of the group expanded to include adults, especially in the engine room.

In addition, one of the larger steelbands in Brooklyn, CASYM (Caribbean American Sports & Cultural Youth Movement), was not participating in the Panorama

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because of disputes over the prize money from their victory in 2011. Therefore, a number of Brooklyn bands, sometimes even multiple bands by the same players, had reinforcements in the talented players from CASYM. The players that were performing with multiple bands had to divide their rehearsal time between bands, so we would see them come and go. In this manner, talented players act as the “crackshot” players discussed in Chapter One.

Each night during rehearsal, much like my experience in Trinidad, there would be individuals connected with Michael Joseph and Harmony that would be selling food and drinks to band members and community members who came to watch preparations and lime. Through these sales and the proceeds from a party a few days before Panorama (that ended our rehearsal early but was not apparently communicated to our arranger), Harmony was able cover the costs of the space as well as other expenses like uniforms, tuning and decorations of the carts that would hold all the pans for our performance.

The people that I met through Michael Joseph were often friends of his from Trinidad or community members that had a direct connection with the island and used this space to connect with other Trinis. Often these supporters would be the same people I saw during the day making preparations to the canopies in terms of painting, welding and repairing so that they would be ready for Saturday night’s performance (Figure 46). Again, similar to my experience in Trinidad, it appeared that the supporters had a diverse collection of skills that allowed Michael to say that something needed to be done and it would be done, no matter what resources were necessary. Welding equipment, scrap
metal, paint, decorative streamers, etc. were all fair game to just show up at the panyard and be incorporated by those with the necessary skills into the Panorama set.

Figure 46 - Harmony supporter painting racks and pans for Panorama – photo by author (2012).

On Saturday, September 1st, 2012, we met near the Brooklyn Museum. The ten steelbands competing that evening were lined up along President Street just to the east of the museum (Figure 47). As the competition time approached, bands would push their carts down President Street, across Washington Avenue and into the rear parking lot of the Brooklyn Museum where the stage, craft and food vendors were set up for the
competition. As each band performed, the next band would move their equipment to the north side of the stage and wait their turn to move their carts and pans onto the stage.

![Figure 47 - Preparations for Panorama on President Street – photo by author (2012).](image)

Just like in Trinidad, while bands were setting up, the song on which the band’s arrangement is based was played over loudspeakers for the audience. Then, when the band and the judges were ready, the band’s name, leader or captain, arranger and tuner would be announced and the band would begin. Once we moved our pans to each subsequent holding location, we were able to walk around and listen to the bands before us as well as get food and drink.
The physical moving of the carts, especially as a member of the ensemble is something that I hadn’t experienced in my pan playing up to this point. I had moved a lot of pans in my life, but all of our performances were on stages where the equipment was set up, we performed and then equipment was taken down. The use of carts was new to me and, as I would find out in Trinidad, not only made the movement of large numbers of pans easier, it created an acoustic effect for both the audience and performer that is hard to recreate in an open air or auditorium performance. It allows players to be closer together, feel the energy of a large numbers of pans making music together and in many cases, physically moves them on elevated surfaces as they are dancing and playing. As a pannist trying to recreate that in other locations without the necessary welding knowledge or resources that seem to be a part of Trini life, as well as that of West Indians in Brooklyn, I look forward to the day when I can provide that for the players that I teach. It is a different experience than most pannists in educational settings receive and ties players to the history and community of pan in a way that cannot be replicated when pans are set up on individual stands like a band, choir or orchestra.

Pan in the United States

In the United States, steelpan exists simultaneously in two related but separate spheres. The most widely dispersed setting is as part of educational institutions, ranging from elementary to collegiate ensembles. These ensembles function most often as part of an established music curriculum, often led by music faculty. Members are connected with the school music program in some capacity as instrumentalists or vocalists looking for an additional outlet for their musical interest.
The other setting where steelpan thrives is as a community ensemble connected with populations who have ties to Trinidad. These ensembles are often led by pan enthusiasts, tuners or performers from Trinidad and are clustered in areas of significant West Indian populations like Brooklyn and Washington, D.C. The distinctive sound of Trini pan groups – intense and powerful – is recreated in the United States through these ensembles. In contrast to educational ensembles, which often reflect the training (and nuance of art music training in the United States), these ensembles provide the soundtrack for West Indian celebrations in the United States. Ensembles with ties to Trini culture often have established ties with tuners to keep their instruments in tune throughout the year. Ensembles in the educational tier are many times miles from a tuner and have to schedule periodic tunings as regular maintenance. Therefore, the approach to playing is different and performers are taught to use a delicate touch on the pans. Pans are tuned through physical hammering of the individual notes and overplaying can do similar work.

Scholars such as Janine Tiffe and Andrew Martin have documented the spread of the steelpan in the United States and the development of the “American sound,” which is a result both of pan construction in the United States and “preference of a smooth tone by Americans, which is drawn from strong cultural ties to western classical music.”345 As more and more students are experiencing steelpan in the United States learning from non-Trini teachers, the possibility remains that the distinctive sound of the steelpan will

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345 Martin, “Pan America,” 412.
“change” in the mind of listeners much as the instrument changed through experimentation and refinement of sound through the 60s and 70s in Trinidad.

The dissemination of the steelpan was, prior to more readily available recordings of the pan, a physical occurrence, as players and builders literally took their pans to locales outside of Trinidad. Although it is still a rare sight in many places in the United States, there are more and more young people who not only have experienced the sound of steelpans through recordings and the internet, they have physically played pans at some point because of opportunities in their communities or school systems. As a player and educator, I understand the role I play in how my students and audiences experience the steelpan. If the only pieces I programmed for our concerts were “island tunes” or calypso favorites, our audiences would not know the vast variety of possibilities for the instrument. If I only programmed original tunes for pan (mostly composed by American pannists who have access to publishing companies), our audiences would not understand the history of the instrument or the distinctive Trini sound. All of these possibilities lie in the hands of the director of an ensemble, and, depending on her/his training, could be outside the realm of their understanding.

Due to the work of a few individuals, there are “schools” of pan and their family trees, often merging and crossing through a player’s career. Much of the early steelpan in educational settings can be traced back to U.S. Navy Steel Band, Howard University, West Virginia University, the University of Illinois, the University of Akron and Northern Illinois University. My work with the steelpan began in earnest at West

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346 Tiffé, “Tropicalism.”
Virginia University, one of the hubs of steelpan activity in the United States. Thanks to the work of Dr. Phil Faini, who brought Ellie Mannette to Morgantown, West Virginia, there is a significant family tree of pannists with ties to Ellie and WVU. Although my time in Morgantown was limited to two years of study, I worked with Ellie both on campus and at his workshop and maintained a relationship with Mannette Steel Drums and Mannette Musical Instruments as well as attended a summer workshop sponsored by Mannette Steel Drums.

Another hub is Dekalb, Illinois, home of Northern Illinois University and one of two full-time faculty positions in steelpan, held by Liam Teague. NIU also has on staff renowned Trini tuner Cliff Alexis. The city of Chicago has developed a significant steelpan scene due to its proximity to NIU, including a business devoted to steelpan music and equipment (The Steelpan Store), a publishing company (Pan Press) and a number of professional steelpan groups.

The final hub, only a few hours from Morgantown, is Akron, Ohio, home of the University of Akron Steelband and Panyard, a manufacturer of pans and pan music publisher. Although they weren’t necessarily the first collegiate programs (Akron was one of the first), graduates and affiliates of these programs have established their own programs throughout the country.

Descendants of these programs typically remain loyal to their ancestors, maintaining ties with those with similar connections and, if not avoiding, not fostering connections with other programs. In a way, it is similar to the “my band” philosophy in Trinidad. Janine Tiffe contends that the novelty of the steelpan in educational settings
“may be a reason why steel bands in the U.S. often remain isolated even when geographically close, because having connections to other bands makes their own programs less unique, and ultimately reduces the special identity of each individual involved with that band.”347

Although the steelpan usually resides in the percussion department of an institution, one does not need to be a percussionist to play pan. Yet, if one’s experience on pan happens without similar experience in percussion, what kind of insight can a director give her/his drummer or engine room players? If a director didn’t have access to all the voices of a steel orchestra in their collegiate training, how helpful can he/she be to her bass player? Conversely, as a band director, I was responsible for understanding the nuances of all the instruments in my ensemble and, if I didn’t know what to do or how to fix something, I would ask.

The same is possible for steelpan directors. Even if a pan director has not been to Trinidad, she/he has incredible access to recordings and videos of performances from the island, both historical and contemporary. The difficulties faced by a steelpan director are no different than those of a choir, band or orchestra director, yet in terms of training and experience, the opportunities to learn and develop comfort with the demands of steel orchestra are typically limited to ensemble performance as opposed to pedagogy, literature and technique.

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Pandemonium! Steel Orchestra

Pandemonium! Steel Orchestra was founded in the spring of 2004 at Redwood Valley High School in Redwood Falls, Minnesota. Redwood Falls is a community of over 5000 people in southwestern Minnesota where agriculture, the school system, and Daktronics are the major employers. Redwood Falls is about as far away from the streets of Trinidad as one can get, but for five years in the early 2000s, it was the center of steelpan performance in Minnesota. I taught instrumental music in Redwood Falls from August 2003 - June 2009 and was inspired by the community and its support for steelpan. In the span of five years, the high school of around 500 students sustained an ensemble that grew to 25 students and the community sponsored over $40,000 in instrument purchases through donations, both independent of and connected with performances of the group.

Steelpans are expensive and the major inhibitor in many locations is the intense cost of acquiring instruments. Once they are purchased and constructed, maintenance is just as straightforward as with other musical instruments, except that many times a tuner has to be brought in from another part of the country. In our case, we had our pans tuned once a year, but would schedule the tuning when a Midwest trip was possible from Mannette Musical Instruments, the builder of most of our instruments. Since the pans range are all built from 55-gallon steel barrels, it is cost prohibitive to send them out to be tuned, so a necessary component of tuning are the travel costs to get a tuner to the pans. Southwestern Minnesota is essentially isolated from the rest of the steelpan world as the closest pan tuner is in Illinois. Furthermore, these repair costs were not always consistent
with established business office procedures as we had a band instrument repair shop in town and it was often difficult for school officials to understand the need for a specific repair person who had to be brought in from out of state.

The first exposure of Redwood Falls to the steelpan was a choir concert led by my colleague Bill Krinke. As an introduction to the steelpan sound, Bill’s Concert Choir performed Glenn McClure’s “Kyrie” from his “Caribbean Mass: St. Francis in the Americas,” which I accompanied on double second pans. The performance was a rousing success and created interest when I began to offer classes and workshops in Redwood Falls. After the choir concert, I began playing for community groups such as the Rotary Club to fundraise for the purchase of the initial pans for Redwood Valley High School: a tenor, a set of double seconds and a set of triple guitars. All were purchased from and built by Gill’s Panshop in Curepe, Trinidad. While I was in Trinidad, I stayed in an apartment just a few blocks from Merlin Gill’s shop.

I started by offering a summer workshop whose initial participation was so large that the classes needed to be split because there were more participants than instruments. The initial summer workshop was facilitated by my own tenor and double second pans, the three voices purchased through donations, as well as a number of pans that were borrowed from D.C. Everest Middle School in Schofield, WI. The retired band director, a colleague of my mother-in-law, had purchased some pans prior to his retirement but they weren’t being used. At the end of the week, participants presented an outdoor public concert at the local public library for families and local residents (Figure 48). One of our early supporters shared a story from her youth of hearing steelpans in a building in New
York City and going to determine the source of the distinct sound. Steelpans in Redwood Falls had brought her back to a chance encounter from her youth with one of the biggest figures of steelpan in the United States, Ellie Mannette.

After our first concert in April 2005, I sent in a recording to our state music educators’ association and the Music Educators National Conference (now National Association for Music Education) to perform at the 2006 Minnesota Music Educators Association Mid-Winter Clinic and the 2006 MENC National Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah. We were selected through audition to perform at both events and these performances led to many contacts and performance opportunities throughout Minnesota and the Midwest.

Over the course of the next five years, I continued to recruit and provide opportunities for more and more students to perform. The vast majority of the participants were members of the school’s band program, but one student expressed interest and joined the group even though he was no longer in band (I had taught him in middle school). His involvement was significant as he had a great ear, but wasn’t comfortable reading music, especially at the level of difficulty the group was reading at the time he joined. Much of his learning was accomplished through imitation and working with fellow tenor players. Ironically, he learned in the manner most similar to how people learn pan in Trinidad.
Figure 48 - Community Steelpan Workshop Performance, Redwood Falls, MN – photo by author (2007).

As part of the program, we covered the expenses of the activity through donations from public performances. We performed for fairs, community festivals and celebrations, parades, rodeos, family reunions and organization holiday parties and meetings. I would be contacted by someone interested in our group and we would ask for our transportation to be covered and some sort of donation to our program. Through these performances and the Redwood Area Education Foundation, who took us on as a special project, we raised over $40,000 to purchase steelpans and cases as well as cover the costs of the program once we had the pans.
In 2007, we competed in the Panorama Caribbean Music Fest in Virginia Beach, Virginia. I had performed as part of the West Virginia University Steelband at the inaugural event in 2003 and had intended to provide it as an opportunity for my students from the moment I started the program in Redwood Falls. The Panorama Caribbean Music Fest is an event sponsored by the Virginia Arts Festival, which also sponsors a middle school and high school program called the Rhythm Project in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia, of which steelpan is a primary component.

Anthony Hailey, the person who was pivotal in connecting me with the Harmony Music Makers in Brooklyn, was the director of this program and festival in 2007. We flew from Minnesota to Newport News, Virginia with our tenors, double tenors, double seconds, guitar pans and drumset, and borrowed the larger pans from the Rhythm Project. Although there is the possibility that pans will have a different layout depending on their builder, because of our shared connections with Mannette Musical Instruments, my players were able to perform on pans made by the same company which therefore had the same layouts (Figure 49).
Part of this experience was a mass steel band festival the day before the competition. My students were able to work with international clinicians, meet and play with pan players from all over the country (Figure 50), and perform and listen to steelpan groups on the Virginia Beach boardwalk. In addition, the evenings of the festival featured CASYM Steel Orchestra from Brooklyn and my students were able to watch an ensemble of my former classmates from West Virginia University called the Dave Longfellow Ensemble. This experience, exposing the students of Redwood Falls to various levels of steelbands was empowering and humbling. It showed them even higher levels of
performance that were possible on the instrument as well as how much they had
accomplished in a short period of time. It connected them with the virtuosity of the
Brooklyn Pan scene though CASYM as well as what was happening in some of the other
hubs of pan in Virginia, Maryland, Ohio and the northeast.

The experience of the members of Pandemonium! Steel Orchestra unfortunately
also mimics the experiences of students all over the United States. Many times,
steelbands are so isolated that students have a two to four year experience that ends as
soon as they move on to a higher level of school where a steelband does not exist. Community ensembles exist, but they are not as prevalent as educational ensembles. Even in Morgantown, West Virginia, home of Mannette Musical Instruments, there is a program at one of the middle schools, the Westwood Panhandlers, but not at either of the high schools. Only a few of my students from Redwood Falls chose schools that even had steelpan as an option at the university level, and as far as I know, only one student continued to play in college. They all spent a considerable amount of time rehearsing and performing, but without opportunities and other demands on their time, they were not able to continue playing pan. At one of our performances in Minneapolis, Minnesota, a few of the founding members of Pandemonium! performed with us again and it was extremely fulfilling to see them behind their pans again.

In many educational settings, steelpan is being taught to students with radically different backgrounds than those playing in Trinidad or even West Indian communities in London, Toronto and Brooklyn. None of my students in Redwood Falls had ever been to Trinidad and many of them first saw a steelpan in rehearsal or at the choir concert when I introduced it to the community. The offerings of the music department were common to many schools of similar size in Minnesota, limited to choral and instrumental music.

Although possibly out of their comfort zone, the students that were part of Pandemonium! were taught about the history of the steelpan, the history of Trinidad & Tobago, the major figures in the steelpan world and the performance ethic of performing on steelpan. They were shown video recordings of Panorama competitions, listened to many recordings and some even tried their hand at arranging for the ensemble. In both
instances, my students, at essentially the same age as the early pan pioneers, took pieces recognizable to local audiences, Scott Joplin’s “The Entertainer”\textsuperscript{348} and Edvard Grieg’s “In the Hall of the Mountain King,”\textsuperscript{349} and arranged parts of the piece in bomb style,\textsuperscript{350} where Trinis would take pieces from the world of art music and perform them with calypso rhythm and accompaniment.

One thing that is not common among performance in band or choir is the engagement and interaction with the audience through dancing that is such a prominent feature of steelpan performance throughout the world. When I teach steelpan to people, dancing while playing is often something that needs to be rehearsed, as antithetical as that may sound. It’s not necessarily a natural response while playing, considering the refined nature of much public musical performance.

In order to counter the conventional belief about the steelpan as an instrument from Jamaica or just a novelty instrument of the islands, members of Pandemonium! were given historical and cultural information in concordance with rehearsals and performances. The theory of tropicalism, a conglomerate of Hawaiian shirts, warm weather and island tunes has hampered the spread of steelpan in the United States.\textsuperscript{351} Members of Pandemonium! consistently respectfully corrected misconceptions they heard and spoke to friends, family and audiences about the instruments that they spent so much time learning about. It was especially empowering to hear students talk about the

\textsuperscript{348} Arranged by Collin Boots, Pandemonium! member from 2005-2009.
\textsuperscript{349} Arranged by Tyler Josephson, Pandemonium! member from 2005-2008.
\textsuperscript{351} Tiffe, “Tropicalism,” 6.
history of the instrument as a creation of young people like them, challenging conventional norms and the supremacy of refined musical study.

The style of steelpan instruction varies in the United States, especially since the instrument exists in both educational institutions and community organizations. The tradition in Trinidad is for instruction using the rote method, where individual parts are taught through demonstration and repetition. By not relying on a printed musical score, many ensembles that utilize this method have an extensive repertoire of tunes that are memorized by all players, allowing them to move from piece to piece without delay or the need for music stands. Furthermore, it allows and encourages interaction among performers and between performers and the audience as the focus of the players is not on notation. Like popular musicians, these pannists can perform in most any lighting situation as they often rely on muscle memory to perform pieces in their repertoire.

I incorporated rote teaching into Pandemonium’s rehearsals in order to allow my students to experience learning as is done in Trinidad, but most of the learning was done using printed charts. I had students who were experienced in reading music from their time in the school’s instrumental music program so the most important thing was teaching them technique on the pans and the layout of notes. Learning by rote involves a good deal of waiting as individual parts are demonstrated to each section and students, through repetition, pick up more and more notes, rhythms and phrasing. The rote teaching method was the primary method I used with middle school students and beginning pan players. Once they had some facility on the pans, though, we quickly moved to written charts to increase our repertoire and skill level on the pans.
One of the stories that Ellie Mannette often shares about his vision for the steelpan is that it can perform multiple genres of music. He had grown up listening to orchestral music on the radio and the string sound guided his experimentation with tuning and harmonics in the mid-twentieth century. In order to demonstrate this versatility and to honor Ellie’s concept of pan sound, I intentionally programmed a piece from the orchestral or choral repertoire on each concert. Often, the works of Bach or Mozart were some of the favorites of the audience as they were familiar with the “island” sound but not that steelpans could be used to perform orchestral music.

One component of pan education outside of Trinidad is that, for many pannists, the instrument is the only connection they have with the island. My students in Redwood Falls, as well as the vast majority of our audience members, were primarily white, so they have little experience with oppression and violence based on a choice of musical creativity. Although the students were introduced to the violent past of the pan and its creation myths, the concept of challenging an oppressive system through their music is one that is often completely foreign to them. Our audiences knew about the instrument because of the internet, recordings, media and vacations in the Caribbean. Once they started coming to our concerts, we could stare more information about the instrument and its genesis among disenfranchised young people in Trinidad.

In urban areas of the United States, the steelpan has been used as a tool of community enhancement and intervention to counter the often harmful elements of urban life: poverty, drugs and violence. These community outreach programs, of which CASYM is one, focus on providing cultural training on the steelpan as a method of
intervening in the lives of young people and given them an outlet for their creativity and a
place to spend their time. One of the most prominent American pannists, Andy Narell,
was introduced to the steelpan by the work of his social worker father, Murray, who
incorporated pans into his work with street gangs on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in
the 1950s. Murray was also instrumental in bringing Ellie Mannette to the United States.

Providing a creative outlet for young people as a substitute for other more
dangerous parts of life is an interesting turn of play in the United States. For years, the
pan was a symbol of violent, vagabond lifestyle of urban Port of Spain. “Respectable”
families in Trinidad would not allow their children to become involved in the art form
because of the severely negative reputation of the steelpan and its players. Conversely, in
educational settings in the United States, many of the performers come from radically
different backgrounds of the original panmen and are supported in their endeavors rather
than ridiculed or ostracized. In Redwood Falls, I consistently heard from parents,
community members and school board members that they were happy to support our
activities because it meant the students involved were not participating in other illegal or
dangerous behaviors chosen by their classmates.

Performance of Music of Other Cultures

Although those of us involved in the educational tier of steelpan performance are
doing so with a specific love of the instrument and its sound, what does it mean that our
students have no cultural connection with the roots of the instrument? Is this a form of
cultural theft? Performing music from a culture other than your own is not a new
phenomenon, but the action of cultural theft is not either. Do communities or cultures
maintain ownership of a performance practice? As the steelpan continues to migrate
around the world, these questions are raised, especially as steelpan artists, often outside
of Trinidad, enjoy financial and commercial success on an instrument whose heartbeat
still reverberates from Trinidad.

One approach to these questions comes from the field of Popular Music Studies.
Throughout this dissertation, I have provided cultural context for the musical practices I
am studying. Although each of the performances could be analyzed from a compositional
standpoint, these pieces don’t function as sonic creations severed from their Cultural
context. Building on the work of Marina Peterson and Jesse Shipley, it is important to
consider that “expressive practices must be understood in relation to how practitioners
foreground them from their specific contexts of production, circulation and reception.”

Much of my training has continued to be via written scores that are then committed to
memory as opposed to the commonly practiced organic composition style of many
Panorama charts. As much as I respect the tradition, my impatience leads me to want to
learn charts “faster” than if someone were to be teaching it to me by rote.

Transmission of Musical Knowledge

Previous studies on the steelpan have documented, especially in the United States,
the permeable nature of musical dissemination, both notational and rote methods. The
tradition in Trinidad, as noted in Chapter 2, is still primarily through rote transmission.
The arranger teaches selected members of the ensemble by demonstrating, speaking or
singing the lines and the player learns through repetition. The process is continued as the

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352 Marina Peterson and Jesse Shipley, “Introduction: Audio Work: Labor, Value and the Making of
section leader teaches members of the section and players pick up more and more notes, rhythms and phrasing. As a trained musician, I correlate this style with many popular musicians, who although incredibly talented on their individual instrument, claim they “do not read music” and speak of this lack of ability as a shameful reality. Doing so neglects the incredible skills they have developed with their ears, fostering almost immediate adaptations during a performance and the freedom to consistently create original music.

In both Trinidad and Brooklyn, I was met with awe when I would take out my score to use in rehearsal or review during breaks. My consistent reply was one of gratitude for the compliment but an equally immediate recognition of the incredible skill of my fellow players who performed equally well (often much better) without the crutch of written notation. It is even more remarkable to consider how an individual without the frameworks of notation and rhythmic patterns is able to make sense of the contrapuntal masterpieces that are Panorama arrangements.

Return to Diaspora

The steelpan is a diasporic instrument. It simultaneously serves as a metaphor for diaspora and its proponents feel the effects of separation and longing that characterize the diasporic community. The instrument has travelled with and independent of people throughout the world and is gaining footing in various locales among a variety of populations. It brings people together in a community, creates a safe space for multigenerational performance, and elicits feelings of nostalgia and tropicalism in performers and audiences alike. The sound of the steelpan creates imagery in listeners
that defy the instrument’s violent past. Performers often have to seek out opportunities to play the instrument when their time in an institutional ensemble is over.

Performers often make a pilgrimage to Trinidad to experience the instrument in its homeland. In so doing, these artists are weaving their own experiences into the web of sound traffic of the steelpan. Pannists can be as little as a few miles to over a thousand miles or even across oceans from the nearest technician. The instrument has made its presence known on six of the seven continents and continues to spread its reach, taking root in some areas but not all. There is a Panorama competition thanks to the work of Chief Bowie Sonny Bowie in Nigeria, but close neighbor Ghana only has a single set of pans in storage in a shipping company in Tema and musician Nii Buckie currently performing on steelpans. There are a number of successful steelpan programs in Switzerland, but tuners are brought in from the UK or the United States.

Conclusion

As asserted in Chapter Two, there are a number of rhythmic connections as well as musical connections that tie Ghana and Trinidad together. Musicians and leaders have attempted to foster continued collaboration but the realities of instrument construction and maintenance have hindered a large presence of steelpan in Ghana. In the places where pan has “hardened” throughout the world, there are either financial resources to maintain a steelband or the instrument has been accepted into an academic institution that funds the maintenance of instruments and acquisition of music. In Nigeria, Chief Bowie Sonny Bowie builds pans and had single handedly supported the art form. In South Africa, the popularity of Andy Narell has seen the pan accepted into educational
institutions and supported through festivals and competitions. West Indian communities in New York, Toronto and London support pan through festivals and networks facilitating builders, arrangers and performers. Neither these networks nor financial resources exist in Ghana to support an adoption of the steelpan.

The elements of diaspora continue to support and hinder the spread of pan throughout the world. Pannists are “connected” through social media and opportunities to perform together at events like the International Panorama and Conference held in August 2015 as well as Panorama competitions throughout the world. Pannists in isolated groups throughout the country, even those successful, in their own right, may not have the financial resources to leave work or school and travel for the extended periods of time necessary for an elite level of performance. Many pannists never get a chance to hear live performances of other steelpan groups and thus do not feel a part of the extensive community that has developed around the steelpan.

Even though Trinidad is still the center of steelpan life, builders, tuners, performers and arrangers from the United States and Europe continue to make a name for themselves in the competition arena. In addition to a number of Brooklyn’s finest pan players regularly performing in Trinidad’s Panorama, arrangers such as Marc Brooks, Odie Franklin and Kendall Williams are being hired for the event as well. Transnational travel to perform and collaborate will continue as pannists seek more opportunities to hone their art form.

The steelpan is an instrument that, in spite of its violent history as an instrument of the ostracized poor youth of Trinidad, has challenged conventional norms of musical
study in the United States. Through alternating periods of challenging and utilizing tropicalism to further its influence, pan men and women have worked to legitimize the instrument as worthy of study and performance. Through continued study and development of repertoire, pedagogy and study, the steelpan sits on the cusp of acceptance as an instrument worthy of study throughout the world. Individuals and organizations continue to support the refinement of sound and provide opportunities for audiences to experience the distinctive sound of an instrument crafted originally from discarded oil barrels.
CONCLUSION

The steelpan ultimately begins as molten steel in the early stages of its construction. Then, through the work of both steel barrel manufacturers and steelpan builders and tuners, it becomes an instrument capable of a wide variety of musical genres. As a metaphor for the diaspora, the study of steelpan challenges conventional music education paradigms in the United States but offers an experience with music that may reach more students than traditional methods. Andrew Martin contends that “neither Trinidadians nor Americans have thus far exhausted the infinite potential of the instrument and the future of steelpan in America is very positive.” As compared to other instruments, the steelpan has a very short existence and Martin’s assertions are viable considering what still can be accomplished on the pan in terms of composition and performance.

Scholars have argued that the roots of the steelpan lie in the musical creativity of Africans brought to Trinidad from throughout Africa. As it developed out of the skin drum tradition that was then transferred to stalks of bamboo, the steelpan simultaneously maintains connections with its historical roots as well as progresses towards new horizons. Connections with the past are contemporarily celebrated as historical recreations and much of the current creative focus is on composition and performance. Panorama continues to be the strongest concentration of players, arrangers and tuners, whether it occurs in Trinidad, Brooklyn, Toronto, Miami, Notting Hill or even Lagos.

353 Martin, “Pan America,” 453.
In Trinidad, steelpan continues to be a popular pastime for multiple generations and has shaken off the violent past that hampered its early years. Performances are clustered around Carnival, when band numbers swell to accommodate the desire to win Panorama. Performances of tamboo bamboo are much less prevalent now and are primarily part of historical re-enactments. The transition from tamboo bamboo to steelpan was fluid and uneven but now, due to demands for volume and timbral consistency, rarely are the ensembles combined. The rhythms that made up a tamboo bamboo performance continue to form the foundation for strumming patterns and engine room accompaniment patterns in steelbands in both Panorama and smaller performance settings. Young performers in Trinidad are eager to advance the instrument in terms of compositional ideas and performance practice, so the limited melodic and harmonic potential of stalks of bamboo leave the ensemble in the realm of history.

Panorama in Trinidad continues to draw more and more foreign participants, especially through the work of arrangers like Andy Narell and the welcoming panyards of groups such as birdsong and Skiffle. As the instrument expands its reach, those with the financial resources to travel to Trinidad will likely continue to do so as the experience is unlike any other location when it comes to pan. Currently, these possibilities only lie in the hands of more affluent performers from North America, Europe and Asia. It remains to be seen whether these opportunities will be possible for pannists whose socioeconomic

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354 Kenyon Williams, “...By Which All Others are Judged: An Analytical Look at the Arranging Styles of Four Panorama Arrangers, With and Original Composition for Steel Drum Ensemble (DMA diss, University of Kentucky, 2003).
status mirrors the early pan men and women without the financial support of government entities or corporations.

Bamboo stamping tubes form a direct connection between Ghana and Trinidad, yet the ensembles and practitioners do not acknowledge awareness of one another. Even though both developed simultaneously, there was a continuous transference of musical ideas through the literal travel of individuals between the two spaces as well as via recorded music. Films such as Crossing Over and Repercussions: An African Odyssey document the musical connections between West Africa and Trinidad. Rhythms and technique connect the two regions, but in Trinidad, tamboo bamboo was primarily a mobile art whereas in Ghana, it is often performed in a stationary setting. Tamboo bamboo was a largely urban artform in Trinidad, where paved streets assisted in the timbral sound of bamboo, whereas in Ghana, rocks and solid wood resonating boxes are used.

The steelpan has travelled with tuners, builders, performers and enthusiasts throughout the world. In the United States, steelpan exists in a two-tiered system of West Indian population centers and educational institutions. As a result, there are two distinct “sounds” in the United States, one on display in West Indian celebrations in locales like Brooklyn, Miami and Washington, D.C. and one in performance venues at public schools and universities. Ideas of tropicalism such as Hawaiian shirts, reggae music and

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356 Kukyekukyeku Bamboo Orchestra, field notes by author, 2014.
357 See Martin, “Pan America” and Tiffe, “Tropicalism.”
calypso have both facilitated and hampered the spread of steelpan in the United States and its acceptance as a viable instrument of musical study.  

Dispersion, isolation, community and longing are part of the steelpan experience, as the instrument helps to bring people together from across the world, yet also creates a feeling of immense isolation because of the availability of instruments and tuners. The community is created by a love for the instrument and its distinctive sound and many performers and scholars alike have commented on the “pan jumbie,” a mysterious spirit that, once it infects a human, draws them in to its entrancing sound. Steelpan ensembles exist on every inhabited continent, yet the roots of the steelpan in Africa are not reflected in the dispersion of the instrument there. Whether it is through the popularity of calypso and the exotica movement as argued by Tiffe and Martin, or through the encounters with steelpan as a result of more international travel by Americans and Europeans, the steelpan has solidified its presence in some locales more than others.

The steelpan is a diasporic instrument. Its roots in Trinidad & Tobago are still acknowledged, yet it has its own developing history in the other countries and continents where performers are sharing the art form. People affiliated with the pan are connected yet isolated, long for a “return” to Trinidad yet want to see Panorama rise out of stagnation, and acknowledge the ties with Africa yet argue the steelpan is a uniquely Trinidadian invention. The steelpan is accepted yet rejected by the academy, recognized as a novelty by audiences who support it yet challenge performers who want to expand

358 Tiffe, “Tropicalism.”
the repertoire with original works for pan, and is praised by audiences until they cannot financially sustain it.

My research took me to Ghana and the bamboo ensembles and historical connections between the two countries. Possibilities for future research include the role of Nigerian music in the formation of the steelpan and its contemporary success in Nigeria. Furthermore, much remains to be determined about the American arrangers who grew up in the Brooklyn pan scene that are now making their presence known in Trinidad and abroad. In addition, the expanding educational resources expended on steelpan in the United States may usher in increased participation in competitions abroad or merely the expansion of domestic competitions and festivals. International travel is still a luxury and may continue to afford opportunities for widespread performance only to those with greater financial resources.

The steelpan is an instrument both similar to other instruments and unique in its ability to bring people together. It is both a solo instrument and an inherently ensemble instrument. Many of the voices are cumbersome to transport as well as practice. Space is needed for storage and rehearsal and these logistical realities will continue to hamper its spread. The piano has enjoyed hundreds of years of study and acceptance as an instrument for study and performance. Could the same occur for the steelpan? It is not likely in the same way, as the sonic possibilities with ten fingers will always be larger than two (or sometimes four) mallets. But the elements of musical study: rhythmic, melodic and harmonic that are possible on the piano are all possible on the steelpan, both
individually and in the realm of ensemble playing. If instruments are put in the “hands” of more people, the growth and acceptance of the steelpan could be a reality.
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