A CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF AFRO-CARIBBEAN RHYTHM, STRUMMING, AND MOVEMENT FOR THE NORTH AMERICAN SCHOOL STEELBAND

D.M.A. DOCUMENT

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ABSTRACT

The African derived music of the Caribbean in the steel band and its emergence in the North American school steel band program continues to expand the World Music experience in music education. The cultural and pedagogical understanding in the rhythm, strumming, and movement in this music culture is an essential educational component for students and teachers in the North American schools. The study of rhythm as communication, inspiration, and creation of Afro-Caribbean music helps to inform the performance practice of the steel band rhythm section or “engine room,” improve their strumming and movement, and invite students and teachers to think and rethink their approach to the overall steel band music education.
Dedicated to my Wife, Merry Moses, and our Children
Austin, Jasmine, Aminta and Montoya.
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DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Bele:** A Creolized version of the *contredanse* in Trinidad, Martinique, and Grenada, often performed in fancy dress. (from the French *bel aire*).

**Calypso:** Type of song sung for about one hundred years in the vernacular of Trinidad and Tobago. A Creolized genre, with traces of early French musical forms and of African stick-fight drumming and singing, among other influences. The calypso is associated with Carnival time, and is sung in the streets or on stage. In the early days, calypso tents featured competitive singing by so-called calypsonians, many of whom became celebrated. The modern calypsonian evolved from the earlier *chantwell* and *mait kaiso*. This is a highly topical genre noted for its economy of words, its satire and wit, and its rhythmic syncopation. Early calypsos were usually written in “minor modes”; later calypsos are usually in “major modes.”

**Carnival:** Pre-Lenten processional festival celebrated particularly in Trinidad and Tobago but also in Haiti; Cuba; Martinique; Guadeloupe; Antigua; Bahia, Brazil; Barranquilla, Columbia; and elsewhere. The festival dates back to the plantation era in Trinidad.

**Chantwell:** In Trinidad the old Creole term for a singer. The chantwell would lead work songs, dance songs, and stick-fight songs.

**Conga:** A single-headed drum used in Cuban dance music.

**Engine Room:** A combination of drumset, iron, scratcher, conga, and cowbell playing refined interlocking rhythms as the foundation for a steelband.

**Feel:** The emotional and motion phrasing of our response.

**Groove:** The momentum of the patterns in motion.

**Kalenda:** Trinidadian stick-fight, and stick-fight song.

**Pan:** In Trinidad and elsewhere, a single instrument in a steel-band ensemble. Great skill is required to build, tune, and blend a pan.
Panorama: National competition in steel-band performance at the annual Trinidadian Carnival.

Parang: A Trinidadian Christmas-season song and dance genre, of Venezuelan derivation (from Spanish, *parranda*—“spree, party”).

Shack Shack: Maracas. Two hand held gourds with beads in the interior that are used as rhythmic accompaniment.

Soca: A new kind of “party” calypso that developed in Trinidad during the late 1970s, noted by a heavy downbeat, full dance-band arrangements, and an emphasis on shorter, singable texts. Soca was popularized by Lord Shorty.

Steel band: A type of ensemble that developed during the 1940s in Trinidad, subsequent to the tamboo-bamboo ensembles. Steel bands emerged from the barracks yards and aggressively represented individual neighborhoods. The instruments are metal, notably shallower or deeper segments of oil barrels, and each size has a name. The steel band is a permanent fixture of Trinidadian Carnival. During the Trinidadian independence struggle, it was elevated to the level of national symbol, and it now has a broad international diffusion.

Strumming: Patterns of rhythmic accompaniment that support the melodic phrasing.

Tamboo-bamboo: Bamboo “drum” band popular in Trinidadian Carnival ensembles of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its development was prompted by the colonial government’s decision, in the late nineteenth century, to ban drumming (on membranophones). Lengths of bamboo were used as percussion and concussion instruments. Bottles, spoons, and other household implements were also used.

Time-line: a pulse in a steady tempo without stresses on certain beats.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As research and scholarship in the Caribbean music culture and specifically the steel band increases, theories and performance practices assume a position that view this music as just music, or music for music’s sake. The socio-therapeutic significance of the people’s expression in rhythm is often missed. The literature that is developing in this area of study continues to maintain the emphasis of focusing on the created things instead of the creators— the people. This approach in learning and teaching encourages the assumption and perpetuates the idea that the scholar or researcher is the actual voice of the culture instead of a symbol of the substance being studied. The study of any music is the study of a people and their way of representing their experiences, using as a medium the element of sound and in our case sound in rhythm.

I do not propose to address all of the expressions of Afro-Caribbean musical experiences for the North American school steel band students and teachers, but simply to inform others of this art form from a perspective by which it derives its essence, which is the African derived rhythmic root. The cultural analysis of rhythm, strumming, and movement in the steel band can serve the educational and pedagogical needs of the percussionist, and students at large, in this ensemble in a way that conveys multiple benefits. The work being done in the study of the steel band is worthy of praise and adds
greatly to the academic calendar, yet in all our efforts there are limits to be addressed. In this case, it is the rhythm in North American school steel band programs. This work is intended to look at rhythm, strumming, and movement in performance practice in the steel band calypso style, and to provide the North American school steel band with guidance in this music style.

It is also my intent in this paper to look more closely at this most powerful phenomena “rhythm,” as it relates to the steel band as a whole and the rhythm section known as the “engine room” which is the driving force behind the movement. For the purpose of our study we will be considering the African derived rhythms that found their way into the Caribbean musical culture, remaining the most vital and potent force in Caribbean popular music, specifically in the steel band. This then is why the learning and teaching of rhythm according to the oral tradition used in the Trinidad and Tobago steel band pedagogy could be a useful model for the North American school steel band rhythm section or “engine room” studies. It is important that the students and teachers in the North American school steel band studying the Trinidad Calypso tradition grasp the significance of the importance of the rhythm that defines this entire genre. Often times the written history of the steel band makes only passing reference to its most vital component, the African derived rhythm, and its use throughout the ensemble that gives it its distinctive and unique quality in world music. As researchers continue to add to the literature of the steel band and/or pan literary heritage, I believe that the way in which the rhythm and strumming in the North American school steel band is performed on these instruments must be a subject of pedagogical concern. The instrument will continue to emerge as a significant contribution to world music and, as poetry uses rhythm to
emphasize a meaning, so the rhythm studies as applied to the steel band will add more musical meaning to the North American steel band experience.
CHAPTER 2

A HISTORY OF PEOPLE, RHYTHM, AND PAN

The history of the pan as it is known in Trinidad and Tobago, and the ensemble of pans called steel band, is actually the history of a people whose social, political, economic, and socio-religious cultural traditions are woven and symbolized in their musical expression. One of the most significant influences upon the development of the steel band was and continues to be the African experience. The Afro-Caribbean hand drumming and miscellaneous percussion instruments that accompanied the songs and dances were foundational in establishing the performance practices brought by African slaves and developed in the Caribbean and particularly Trinidad. The people of African descent and their rhythms remain the common denominator in the musical expression of the steel band. The melodic and harmonic structure reflects both the African and European heritage in common use. The African rhythms were integral to the development of the many styles of other cultures musical influences such as the Spanish, French, East Indian, European, and American musical cultures which were also integral to the Caribbean soundscape. Though the steel band traditionally performs calypso and classical music, it is in the rhythmic inheritance that the music is most felt. The practice of utilizing make-shift instruments so as to accompany songs, festivals, social activities, and religious practices was common to people, and specifically the economically
depressed, whose only means of expressing their creativity was in their song, dance and music.

However, the rhythms themselves are not within the objects but are within the musical aesthetics of the people of the African Diaspora and their Caribbean descendents. How they thought of and demonstrated their experiences in sound remains dominated by rhythms that are the unifying force of their musical practices.

In discussing the music of Trinidad in the literature I have reviewed, the emphasis is usually placed on the instruments, the steel drum, competitions, and the context in which these activities take place such as Carnival. However, the actual performance practice of their music in rhythm is not reflected in depth, but only mentioned in passing comments. It has been said that rhythm is a unifying force. This is not only as it relates to music but in terms of human socialization within the Caribbean music culture. The coming together of people in a musical experience that harmonizes their movement has always been of significance in this culture.

There are many and varied definitions of rhythm. For example, *Grove’s Music Dictionary* reads:

Rhythm
(from Gk. rhythmos; Lat. rhythmus; Fr. rythme; Ger. Rhythmus; 16th-, 17th-century Eng. rithme).

Generically, a ‘movement marked by the regulated succession of strong or weak elements’ (*Oxford English Dictionary*). In etymological discussions of the term there is a tension between rhythm as continuously ‘flowing’ and rhythm as periodically punctuated movement. In musical contexts the term is even harder to pin down. Fassler remarks: ‘There is no accurate simple definition of the term “rhythm” (or “rhythmics”) and no consistent historical tradition to explain its significance’ (B1987, p.166 n.10). Sachs is even more pessimistic: ‘What is rhythm? The answer, I am afraid, is, so far, just – a word: a word without generally
accepted meaning. Everybody believes himself entitled to usurp it for an arbitrary definition of his own.

The Oxford Dictionary of Music: Rhythm (in the full sense of the word) covers everything pertaining to the time aspect of mus. as distinct from the aspect of pitch, i.e. it incl. the effects of beats, accents, measures, grouping of notes into beats, grouping of beats into measures, grouping of measures into phrases, etc. When all these factors are judiciously treated by the performer (with due regularity yet with artistic purpose—an effect of forward movement—and not mere machine-like accuracy) we feel and say that the performer possesses ‘a sense of rhythm’. There may be ‘free’ or ‘strict’ rhythm.¹

My personal definition of rhythm is: A multidimensional experience in sound, movement, and emotion that inspires creativity in culture.

I would like to examine the definition of rhythm as music used by African scholars:

Fela Sowande states “The organization of raw materials of sound into formal and structural patterns that are meaningful and generally accepted to that society in which the organization has taken place; patterns that relate directly to the World View and the Life experiences of that society are viewed as a homogeneous whole and are accepted as such by that society.” ²

Also Kofi Agawu states: The rhythms of the Northern Ewe society are those rhythms that are produced and consumed by the members of that society in the normal course of their lives. This potential infinite set of rhythms includes every thing from the cosmic periodicity of seasonal changes to the localized rhythms of the drum music. The “rhythms of society” in this broad sense are not necessarily the rhythms of music.³

These definitions have a common thread and come closest to the performance practices of the Caribbean people who are engaged in this art form.

I would like to examine the Afro-Caribbean hand drumming, or rhythmic experience, which undergirds the performance practices of the Tamboo-Bamboo, Steel Band, Parang, Calypso, Soca and other genres of musical practice that have made this music locally relevant and globally appealing. There are many and varied types of drumming that occur in the Caribbean. Two of the most prominent types are Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean drumming. For our purposes we will focus on the African derived performance practice in hand drumming and its influence on the steel band rhythms.

It has been said that all of percussion is actually drumming, even when one is performing on melodic instruments. However, not everyone performs directly on hand drum, but everyone participates in the rhythms which are not confined to the instrument being played but to the people and their movement in the steel band. To get a true sense of this experience one only has to observe the performance of a steel band or a hand drumming performance and pay attention to the participants’ movement. This movement of rhythmic expression is not “taught but caught.” Therefore, it is not considered an area of specific learning for those within that music culture. However, when this music is performed outside the musical culture as calypso rhythm that requires rhythmic stability and synchronization, then there is a need that it be taught so as to give a convincing performance. This then is where the learning and teaching essentials of studying and applying the rhythmic content of music performed in this idiom of steel band rhythms is most important. My hope is that students of the steel band rhythm studies program, who have not been exposed to this music culture from an experiential orientation with an emphasis on the rhythm, will benefit.
This also applies to students of Caribbean heritage who studied music according to the formal music tradition or written music tradition but were not reared in the pan yards or hand drumming communities. Though they are closer to the music culture, if their training emphasis in music education was more according to the written tradition, they too can benefit from this study in rhythm.

Learning and teaching rhythm in the Caribbean music culture must be approached from the perspective of movement, because the music performed is not just the sound but is a multi-dimensional expression of song, dance (movement), and drumming. Though much of the music performed in the steel band is instrumental, songs, dance, movement and drumming informs the music. We will now look at movement as the context in which all of the rhythmic activities occur.
CHAPTER THREE

A PEOPLE’S MOVEMENT AND MEANING IN RHYTHM

For our purposes we will examine movement in the body as foundational to the fullest expression of the intended rhythm. The great Duke Ellington and Irvin Mills wrote a composition called, “It don’t mean a thing if it ain’t got that swing.” There is much evidence to support this statement. Our saying would be, “It can’t be Calypso if it ain’t got that flow.” These sayings point us to the movement of the music more so than the technical demands. Movement interpretation in rhythm is an important pedagogical skill in grasping the essence of the Afro-Caribbean sensitivities in sound.

This understanding of the way rhythm is expressed in the Afro-Caribbean music culture will enlighten the North American school steel band student and teacher in their studies of rhythm and strumming. In my experience rhythm does not come first, movement does. Oftentimes students and teachers outside of this tradition begin their movement after they have learned the rhythm from written notation. This split perspective is one of the obstacles to experiencing the feel or groove in a manner that is musically convincing. During my experience with this tradition, whether performing on congas, cow bell, scratcher, iron, or drum set, the movement is being expressed long
before any instrument is played. This is such an integral part of the learning and teaching process in Afro-Caribbean rhythm. Often non-instrumentalists demonstrate some of the most groove-felt expressions in their participation. The calypso percussionist or drum set drummer gains much of his cues from observing the movement of the non-instrumentalist. This practice can be traced to the Afro-Caribbean singing and hand drumming tradition where the drummers and dancers reciprocate each other’s rhythmic expression. I cannot over emphasize the importance of students learning rhythm in community. An awareness of movement, rhythm, and their sonic expression captures the essence of the feel or groove that is in line with our objective. The idea of trying to groove can be an obstacle. In my observation grooving is a by-product of movement not the cause. This then is why the teaching and learning of rhythm according to the oral tradition used in the Trinidad steel band pedagogy could be a useful model for the North American school steel band and rhythm section or “engine room” in steel band studies. We have already established that the North American school steel band is grasping the melody and harmony of calypso impressively.

This brings us to the importance of the awareness of movement in the learning and teaching of the calypso rhythm. Students of steel band rhythm studies must be introduced to the rhythms that undergird the ensemble’s foundation. As mentioned earlier, and provided in this document, listening to Afro-Caribbean drumming is a good place to begin.

To those who already read music there will be a tendency to visualize the rhythm. However, it will be to your benefit to stretch your ear and your awareness of movement by simply responding to the emphasis of the most recognizable movement. Sound is in
constant motion. Listening to the rhythm is key. I remember as a boy in the hills of Laventille going to bed at night hearing the drums in the distance and also hearing the Desperados steel band practicing until the early hours of the morning, especially around Carnival season and just before international tour. The musical selections for touring included music from the Baroque, Classical, and Romantic Eras, many Show tunes, Broadway musicals, and American popular music. Much of this music was learned with the rhythm section or “engine room” providing the accompaniment. The Classical compositions were even at times accompanied by a calypso rhythm section. It is important for the student of steel band rhythm studies to understand the essential context in which this instrument is performed, because it brings them closest to the authentic rhythmic foundation that gives the steel band its unique and distinctive expression in global music. I also heard the hand drummers performing such styles of drumming as the Shango, Bongo, Kalenda, Bele, Pique, and the Calypso which fall under the synchronized drumming category. All had singing and dancing occurring at the same time. Many of the drummers were singers and dancers and practicing was intense and regular. Because of the circumstances under which the slave economy brought Africans into the Caribbean, learning and teaching among the lower class slaves was exclusively oral and so the invention, innovation, creation, and construction of a musical culture for survival in this new world was shaped by those who were the active creators. These creators have given meaning to the rest of the people through their musical voice. The young learned songs that were West African in character mixed with French, Spanish, and English songs. They were all learned in rhythm, which became more important than whether or not the words were correct or accurate. The correct rhythmic feel is more important than
the words. This is partly because the rhythm allows for more people to participate because of its unifying force in movements. When one listens to recordings of the earliest steel band rhythms you can hear the dominance of the rhythm regardless of the tune being performed. This is not because the earlier pioneers were not musically literate, but that within the context of their musical intent the rhythm made it the music they intended to compose and perform.

As the steel band continued to evolve composers and arrangers began to add melodic and harmonic complexities to the already rich rhythmic fabric. This rhythmic fabric remains the dominant musical element in the steel band musical genre, particularly the calypso, to this day. In many cases steel bands outside of the Caribbean tended to grasp the melodic and harmonic aspects of the music with greater ease than they grasp the rhythmic. This, of course, is expected because of the cultural orientation of the Euro-American musical tradition that emphasizes melodic and harmonic construction rather than complex rhythmic expressions.

My intent is to help students in the North American steel band, who are studying this art form outside of its music culture, to grasp some of the rhythmic ideas so as to authenticate the calypso rhythm and enrich their world music experience. Students removed from this cultural experience often desire to close the rhythmic gap in performance.
In the Afro-Caribbean hand drumming tradition there were three drums played to accompany singers and dancers. They were the cutter, tenor, and the bass hand drum.

![Figure 1](image1.png)

These drums were all hand made, mostly by the drummers. The drums were made from kegs that held salt meat and they were covered with goat skins. There were also drums made out of grugru stumps. They were very heavy and carried a very high tonality and functioned as a lead drum. The Hand drummers I grew up learning from were taught strictly according to the oral tradition, directly and indirectly. They were Andrew Beddoe, an Orisha master Drummer, Carlton Francis, aka Mimp, Shaba, Granadian John, Lance, and Masmo Henry. These were the hand drummers that performed with the Laventille Best Village group but who were drumming long before this event was established. Many of the songs and rhythms were influenced by the African drumming tradition that emphasized the Yoruba rhythm patterns brought by the
African people who came through the slave trade. Sticks were used to perform on some of these drums. The congas were incorporated into this tradition and played with a very different technique than the home made drums. Along with the drums there were the miscellaneous percussion instruments such as the bottle, spoon, maracas, kaqua (like a clave), quiro or scratcher, the iron, and later the cowbell. Many of the early rhythm players that later performed in the steel band came from this kind of rhythmic background and cultural orientation, particularly from Laventille.

As for myself, the first time I performed at the Panorama competition with Desperados my instrument was the cowbell in the rhythm section or “engine room.” In those days I was elated to be performing, yet not understanding the significance of my contribution. I went through many miscellaneous instruments until I eventually became the drum set drummer in Desperados steel band, and also drummer for a young boys steel band called The Frank Clark Kids.

This knowledge of individual instruments and their function in the rhythm section deeply influenced the way I heard and performed on the drum set and other instruments. It also heightens one’s awareness of the many and varied strumming patterns in the steel band and their relationship to the rhythm section or “engine room.” The key to these rhythms is their unity and the cohesion they create which drives the overall steel band performance. In the learning and teaching of the calypso steel band tradition in schools and universities, colleges, etc., outside of the Caribbean, students must be encouraged to develop good rhythmic interpretation on miscellaneous percussion instruments.

The purpose of this training is to acclimate themselves to the strong rhythmic orientation of the steel band with its emphasis on movement and relationship among all
parts. There are general assumptions about rhythms as the vital component in the
Trinidadian Panorama steel band, but in our study we will deal specifically with
individual rhythms that constitute the whole since we have a pedagogical emphasis in this
paper.
CHAPTER 4

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING
IN THE ORAL/AURAL TRADITION

The oral tradition dominates the learning and teaching of the hand drumming and steel band rhythm performance practice. This music is taught in terms of the rhythm that is not as formal as when applied to melody and harmony which has a more direct and formal approach.

In considering the calypso rhythm let us look at some perspectives in learning and teaching in the oral/aural tradition. From singing to miscellaneous percussion instruments, to tamboo-bamboo, hand drumming, and to the steel band instruction, the pedagogy is rooted in the oral/aural tradition. As one author has rightly observed when he said:

“The distinctions between written and oral traditions of music have been overstressed. Behind all notational systems rest a dynamic oral tradition of performance, subject to change in time and space. This is true of all (written or oral) musical traditions, including that of Western music. This oral tradition of performance represents one of the most essential sources for the study of cultural values, communication, and meaning.”

Composers and arrangers in the Afro-Caribbean steel band rhythm tradition conceive and construct their work in the oral/aural tradition and convey them based on

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the expression of perceptive listening, and the members in the group receive this information in the same manner--through perceptive listening. What also occurs during this creative process is that the composer, arranger, members and audience are involved in the entire process of composition for they follow the composer’s or arranger’s intent from the first note all the way to the completion of the work. This approach gives everyone a sense of ownership in the composition and a level of intimacy with the composer and composition that creates an actual musical community. The composer does most of his creative work not in isolation from the larger body, but in the presence of all who admire the skill and ability of the composer and experience the process of the development, with the bonus being the end product. During this process every sense of receptivity is engaged. Sight is also used, not to read notes but to imitate interpretation of the composer’s intent from watching his manner of expression in conveying his intent. The composer or arranger becomes the music that is read and so the final composition truly is a reflection of the member’s grasp of the musical sensitivities of the composer or arranger. This is one of the major advantages of the oral emphasis.

The learning and teaching in the oral tradition allows for the learner to be involved in learning from the initial stage and at every phase of the development which the composer goes through, versus just learning from a finished product without experiencing the process. This way of learning and teaching is not expedient to those coming from a cultural orientation whose main concern is with efficiency versus development.

The Trinidadian music culture is more than a musical experience. It is a communal and social experience that manifests itself in musical expression. Therefore,
when one visits this culture whose main aim is just the music, they often do not comprehend the larger significance of this process (musical socialization). The discipline and practice that is required to function within the oral tradition is a testament to the commitment and devotion of those involved in this music culture. They do what they do because it is an integral part of their own personhood not just for economic advantage. The levels of seriousness and contribution of the steel band member is not often recognized by those on the outside and to some extent those on the inside of the culture. In actuality, they are serious musicians and their work and activities are as valuable as all other World Music ensembles as a resource for research, education, and performance practice.

Another dimension of the learning and teaching process in the oral/aural tradition is the demand made on the memory of the composer, arranger and the performers. Since everything is received orally/aurally, the success or failure of the entire composition is based on the ability not just to merely hear and forget, but to hear and practice, which is one of the highest levels of participation and involvement in any musical community. In the steel band tradition, this learning style has achieved great success whether learning calypso or classical music. It also maintains the integrity of the communal struggle to produce great music. Learning according to the oral tradition causes one to be engaged more holistically in the music. It, also, allows for greater levels of skill development because in order to be involved one must internalize and negotiate all of the many adjustments necessary so as to comprehend and contribute to the whole. Everyone is going through this process at the same time, making the learning more exciting and even
creating a competitive atmosphere. The competition is not so much against each other as much as each other against the composer’s intent to challenge their musicianship.

The interplay of composer and/or arranger and the listening community tends to be an invaluable asset in the producing of music in the steel band tradition. Often times the composer will ask respected devotees, even from the audience, for their input regarding certain musical decisions. Also, in this manner of learning the composer receives immediate feedback from the audience and uses that to either rearrange, edit, or do what will receive a more favorable response from the listening community. However, the respect for the composer is such that he is neither expected to seek the opinion of the people regarding his creativity nor is he governed by any muttering of the band members or audience.

Another aspect of learning and teaching in an oral tradition is the emphasis on repetition. To those outside this music culture and those who miss the musical intent this process seems odious and a painful waste of time. Their response is understandable because of the emphasis on efficiency versus development of the full capacity of the music being performed. To repeat a section of music or rhythms for extended periods of time does not seem rational to the uninitiated. However, those who are members of this musical experience realize that you actually do not experience the same thing every time you repeat a part. Every repeat added has a new dimension of expression to its character.

I remember playing the same rhythm for hours and hearing many and varied levels of nuances and relationships between my part and the whole. This goes on to the point where you do not hear your individual part anymore, but only the master rhythm. This level of rhythmic experience allows for all of the strands of movements and
activities to be coherent not only to the performers but to everyone who can hear it, creating again this communal music community which is known as the steel band.

The individual rhythms being played seem simple and so are the instruments on which they are played, until one tries to add his contribution to the larger rhythmic whole. Then time and timbre interpretation becomes an issue. This is one of the fundamental struggles of the North American steel band or bands outside of the Caribbean or specifically Trinidadian music culture. The elementary, high school, college, and university steel band in academic institutions tend to lose much of the benefit of the oral/aural tradition in learning and teaching in the study of rhythm and its impact and effect upon the whole musical experience.

Continuing on the benefits of the oral tradition is the liberty available to the composer and arranger to create, innovate, explore, and experiment without the limitations of having to confine the composition to what was done the night before. This practice is quite common. I have seen composers and arrangers just before going on stage to compete in Panorama change a section of music. To the credit of the musicians, they carry this change out with flawless execution on stage without notation. The composer’s, arranger’s, and musician’s ability to test the limits of their skill is an important part of learning and teaching in the oral tradition. When the composer or arranger chooses to make such changes, the unshakable stability of the rhythm section or “engine room” is vital to the success of the music addition. This is because the rhythm aids in the memorization of the new material and for the rhythm players the new section also adds a new rhythmic dimension to their already existing part. This again enriches the entire experience for all.
Another benefit of learning and teaching in the oral tradition in the steel band rhythm culture is the personal challenge created by the whole. To the individual there is a sense that one is expected to know and contribute to the whole without excessive instruction, because one is expected to observe, imitate, and participate. Those who are the best at this usually get to perform the most. This challenge heightens the individual initiative, observational, participatory, and imitative skills because within the learning process one is grasping more than just the musical note; he is grasping the movements, the tonality, the anticipation, and the character of the music in rhythm.

When discussing the hand drumming in Trinidad one is immediately confronted with the incredible challenge of synchronistic expression of an art form that is of African descent in character and Afro-Caribbean in manifestation. Folklore drumming, singing, and dancing, as stated earlier, were only the instruments to be used. The rhythm and its place and purpose remain the definitive quality of the music culture’s character as manifested in the calypso steel band rhythm tradition. Audio file examples of some of the earlier hand drum traditions of Trinidad are listed below.

*Drums of Trinidad* as published/copyrighted-Smithsonian Folkway Recording C-1095. These are representative of the Afro-Trinidadian hand drumming tradition.

Originally Issued As C1045 side one

1. Calypso in drums 6:14
2. Drumology 3:43
3. Primitif 4:45

Originally Issued As C1045. Side two

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5 Drums of Trinidad, Smithsonian Folkway Recording C-1095.
4. Nation 3:33
5. Koromanti 2:00
6. Manding 3:48
7. Halicord 2:25
8. Congo 4:24
9. Calinda 3:26

Practically every strand of Caribbean folk culture is rooted in the synchronistic approach, with specific aspects of their mixture being emphasized at different times. Language, art, music, and dance in the Caribbean manifest this characteristic and so hand drumming is among those forms of mixed expression. However, in synchronization there is a common denominator. For our purpose it is the Afro-Caribbean rhythmic sensitivities in their expression. Due to the incredible meshing of African, European, American, Indo-Caribbean, French, and Spanish culture, we find that the hand drumming tradition reflects some of these traits in its performance.
CHAPTER 5

INSIGHT AND EMPHASIS IN
AFRO-CARIBBEAN RHYTHM STUDIES

In my experience performing hand drum, which was my first instrument, I learned by both absorption, assimilation and sometimes by direct verbal recitation of words, the songs being performed by the drummers. We would spend hours listening to the elder drummers and then imitate their singing and movements. There was quite a bit of call and response in the learning and teaching process of the songs. Since the words were in another language I often would not know what the words meant, only how to pronounce that word. As a youngster it was more important to play drums than to understand meaning. What mattered at the time was performing and I could grasp how to pronounce the word and perform immediately. I did not need to know the meaning in order to be able to perform. Someone could know the meaning and not be able to perform, but I could be without the understanding of the meaning, yet still have the rhythmic understanding of the word and perform. However as I’ve grown older I have began to investigate the meaning of some of the songs I was taught. I have yet to decipher all the words, much less the meaning. But the rhythms that accompanied these songs I’ve learned for a lifetime.
In my efforts to convey the rhythmic elements of the steel band rhythm to students outside of that music culture, the difficulty of teaching what was “caught versus taught” has been a challenge. Needless to say, the responsibility to analyze and communicate this process has brought light to the way learning and teaching flows in an oral/aural tradition. It has enriched my own conceptualization of the Caribbean music tradition in general and the calypso rhythm of Trinidad in particular.

So with this frame of rhythmic reference, I am seeking to provide what I perceive to be a much needed insight into the percussion and world music programs that have hand drumming or Afro-Caribbean and steel band rhythm ensembles and also the manner in which one can get the most out of this experience. I have seen the need for a conceptual framework in the learning and teaching of this great music culture that has continued to grow in elementary, high school, college and university World Music programs. This work is part of my contribution to address the limitations regarding the rhythmic development and expression in this musical endeavor.

As melody communicates with distinctive notes from which meaning is associated, so in rhythm distinctiveness of rhythms gives meaning to specific types of movement. The movement is predicated upon the cohesive expression of distinctive rhythms performed simultaneously. Thus the music, which is based on this dominant rhythmic foundation, involves dance, which is an expression of the vibration, and movement created by the rhythm. The steel band rhythm known as calypso is a dance rhythm that integrates music that incorporates all of the melodic and harmonic elements drawn from the African derived and Euro-American musical tradition, and forms the Caribbean music culture in the steel band.
This research is not presented to discuss the steel drum as an instrument or the steel band ensemble as such, but to focus upon the rhythmic foundation upon which the authentic calypso rhythm is performed on these instruments. This involves looking at the rhythmic root, which has its ancestry in the aesthetics of the African derived singing and hand drumming tradition that remains the dominant characteristic in Afro-Caribbean music tradition and in steel band performance practice.

During the composition or arrangement of a calypso, the melodic contour, nuances, and harmonic foundation have a rhythmic character. This is true in all music, but for our purpose as we examine it in the calypso rhythm genre we come closer to the tremendous rhythmic tapestry that is the distinguishing element of the steel band’s rhythm in performance practice. We are seeking to use this as the basis of learning and teaching the rhythm of the steel drums to groups who have a stronger written tradition in their music practice. One of the many essentials of the written tradition is that it cuts down on the amount of time spent grasping the information, but it does not often capture the essence of the movement and motion that so enlivens the steel band rhythm. As students of steel band rhythm studies in academic institutions, it is important to grasp the rhythmic concepts and understand the process by which this groove is established from the bottom up. Their experience with this area of study will be enriched and their rhythmic education will only benefit from such experiences.

This awareness of experiencing the music ensemble’s rhythmic foundation will influence the overall performance practice in rhythm. It will transform some of the many frustrations in rhythmic interpretation or movement interpretation I have witnessed among the willing students who come to this art form to learn, and will bring a
pedagogical benefit to their education. The student seeking to perform on steel drums, like most students in my experience, came to it with the desire to get the notes and to play a song without much consideration for understanding the rhythms, though that is one of the main reasons for their attraction to the steel band. So the shifting of the awareness becomes necessary for beginning students of the steel band or even already established music Professors or Instructors who began a steel band without recognizing the essential rhythmic education. Beside the rhythmic awareness, there is also a perceptual shift that must occur. The way a student hears the rhythm of the pan is an important consideration because in the process of learning we often assume that what we are hearing and what we are doing is the same or very similar. This difficult obstacle added to the false information can bring students to a rather discouraging rhythmic conclusion.

As we continue our discussion in these areas I have included basic rhythm patterns that demonstrate some of the most fundamental sounds in Appendix A. The rhythm on each instrument should be demonstrated in relation to the conga drums playing in a hand-drumming calypso style on the lowest drum. The important thing here is to focus on the feel, groove, movement, or sway of the rhythm. Most of the rhythms caught in the steel band, like many things in life, are experienced before they are explained. So it is my objective to have the student of the steel band experience this rhythm, not by just listening but through listening and movement as we add the instrument to the already developing rhythmic feel. The rhythm is not with the instrument but with the movement of the body--swaying and foot tapping while listening. This is difficult to convey to someone outside the tradition whose experience might have been to receive musical information from a more dominant visual perspective.
There are different kinds of rhythmic interpretation because everyone has rhythm. Our research is focused on students who have experienced rhythm in their culture in one way and are now seeking to learn rhythm in the steel band in another way. When I perform classical snare drum versus when I perform congas or marimba, the rhythmic adjustment is crucial to my musical success in performance. So this understanding of movement or rhythm is the basis for developing specific stylistic expressions which take on a new dimension and gives us another way of comprehending the music, whether oral or written, as we attempt to perform.

The steel band student must be made aware of rhythmic approaches to the calypso style in his/her study of performance practice on the pan or in the steel band. The concepts that we discuss are also transferable not simply to other instruments but to other rhythmic expressions because we are interested here in rhythmic development and not just the instrument on which this is performed. The steel band is one of the most suitable ensembles for students to develop a sense of oral/aural musical interpretation that focuses on rhythm that is dance-like in nature, and unifying in force.

The singing and hand drumming tradition and its rhythmic expression on other instruments usually takes a back seat to the fruits of its influence on the steel band. It is important that the development, progress, and innovation in the steel band be applauded in the chronicle of the steel band music tradition, and I praise the wonderful advances and worldwide sharing of the steel band. However, it must be remembered from whence it came and the performance practices that are inherited from the African derived rhythms that engulf and define the authentic music of Trinidad and Tobago. The melodies and harmonies utilized in steel band compositions and arrangements are brilliant layers of
musical expression. But without the rhythms that distinguish this art form, it is greatly compromised in its expression. Therefore, I think though music is discussed in the way of history, theory, technical studies, culture, and instruments, the quality of the musical substance is what must be given attention when all is said and done. This, then, keeps us rooted within the ever-transforming rhythmic foundation upon which all of the other components are added. This makes musical experimentation, innovation, and improvisation possible within the perpetually transforming music culture of Caribbean music in general, and calypso in particular. The knowledge and understanding of the rhythm remains the only constant in the creative, transforming, evolving, progressing, and absorbing musical expression that the steel band is capable of performing, regardless of the genre.

The student of this music culture must be in tune with the rhythmic realities and not just be able to play a melody or execute a harmonic progression. This ensemble gives rise to the rhythmic significance upon which all of the melodies and harmonies are laid. As in wisdom the concentration of many words into a few amplifies the meaning, so in rhythm the concentration of many rhythms into a few magnifies the music.

As the rise of world music ensembles continues we see that among all of the groups that the steel band is a rapidly growing ensemble in schools and universities throughout North America, Europe, and beyond. As this art form continues to migrate it also continues to absorb musical influences from the global music arena. However, most of the individuals interested in the music and the instrument and many who have used it in diverse ensembles have very little or no connection with its Afro-Caribbean ancestry and so their performance practice reflects this reality. This practice is understandable
because composers often introduce instruments because of their timbre capability, which demands no specific rhythmic input from that instrument’s original function. However, in the case of the steel band rhythm, it is important in the educating of students studying this art form, that rhythm studies become of necessity in performance practices dealing with the rhythms common to the steel band. As one who wishes to perform in the orchestra, concert band, jazz idiom, or chamber music ensemble the student/teacher must be familiar with the rhythms that identify, or at least reflect, the stylistic intent of these genre’s basic character.

For students of the steel band, particularly outside of the music culture of the Caribbean, the study of the rhythm in general and or calypso rhythm in specific must be of special educational emphasis. There are many reasons, but one of the main reasons is that in my teaching experience I have seen steel band student’s frustration with certain aspects of the performance practice of this art form in the area of rhythm. The student will grasp the melody and harmony while being very conscious that they are not grasping the rhythm. If these rhythms are written down they can comprehend the motion but not the emotion. Therefore, they experience a disappointment in expressing the feel. To provide the needed musical wholeness they desire in the genre of “calypso,” we will provide specific guidelines to these students so as to enrich their own learning experience in this musical culture later in our study. As mentioned earlier, African derived singing, hand drumming, and dancing deeply influenced the rhythmic experience of the entire Caribbean popular music, and specifically the steel band rhythm. The hand drumming and miscellaneous percussion instruments, namely the iron, scratcher, cowbell, the
strumming of the instruments, and the drum set follow in the rhythmic heritage of the hand drumming practices.
CHAPTER 6

STRUMMING SENSITIVITIES IN SUPPORT OF SOUND

As one of the founding fathers of pan Neville Jules said regarding strumming.

“ I was the first to make the single guitar pan, which I originally called the quatro pan. I was inspired to make that pan around Christmas-time when a parang band was practicing in a house on Duke Street, between Charlotte and Henry Streets. I stopped and listened to them and paid attention to the guy strumming on the quarto (sic). I decided to make a pan to imitate that sound and call it the quatro pan.6

The strumming techniques used on the steel drum has been influenced by the string instruments of the Spanish experience, mostly from Venezuela. However, the manner of strumming is African derived in expression. The strumming on the cello, double-second, quadraphonic, and double tenor pan and at times the tenor pan is said to have derived from the Spanish influence performance on the quatro, mandolin, and the guitar. There are a variety of strumming techniques. For example,

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6 A. Myrna Nurse, Unheard Voices (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2007), 12.
These are some of the strumming styles from the above-mentioned instruments of the Spanish Diaspora and the hybridity that is so common among the performance practice in many steel bands. An understanding of the strumming practice as they move...
with the chordal structure of a composition is as important to the rhythmic stability of the entire steel band as is the melody it is supporting and/or the types of chords that are used. These rhythms are predicated upon the 12/8 movement felt in the flow of the composition. The movement of groups of threes in the rhythmic flow is the foundation of the groove. When students, who are reading rhythm, look at the 12/8 feel it is often interpreted as a vertical bounce versus a horizontal flow. What I mean is feeling three as triplet rather than as three individual eighth notes. The vertical interpretation restricts the natural flow of the movement while the horizontal releases the natural flow.

These concepts in rhythm are written out for the learner, in a later example, showing triplet movement in conjunction with 2/4 or 4/4 feel. An understanding of the performance practice based on the rhythmic development will greatly enhance the steel band’s overall performance of the calypso rhythm’s musical intent. The necessity of recognizing the role of the rhythm in the learning process of this art form is essential for the student and teacher in the academic world music program as it allows for more expressive opportunities.

The interpretation of rhythm, in the majority of African derived percussion ensemble literature, and the rhythm that is performed in folkloric hand drumming groups are approached differently from the African derived rhythmic experience in the Diaspora. Rhythmic aesthetics are motion/emotion based, the 3/4 classical expression remains closest to the strict interpretation of a pulse while the 12/8 feel remains closer to the movement or feel of the composition.

The importance of rhythmic accompaniment has and will always be one of the timeless essentials of the music of the Caribbean and for our purposes the steel band
rhythm in the North American school steel band. In most cases the rhythm that gives birth to the Afro-Caribbean music and that which provides the foundation and support in many musical expressions seems to be less recognized or acknowledged in discussions in this area of music.

The literature on Afro-Caribbean music in general and the rhythm of the steel band, when discussing the calypso both in its vocal and instrumental capacity, gives much attention to the lyrics, melody, or harmony with just passing mention of the rhythmic accompaniments which actually serve as the organizing and unifying force that propels the art form. It is important to note that two of the earliest fully organized Steel bands were named, “The Trinidad All Stars Percussion Orchestra (TASPO)” and the “Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra.” Notice the word percussion. Clearly the indication is that of a rhythmic ensemble. When examining the rhythmic innovations, experiments, transformations, and synthesis that give character and identity to this genre called calypso we see that rhythm studies deserve inclusion in the discussion of the steel band curriculum and the pedagogical approaches to learning and teaching this music.
CHAPTER 7

REFLECTION ON AFRICAN-DERIVED SINGING AND HAND DRUMMING
AND ITS INFLUENCE ON AFRO-CARIBBEAN PERFORMANCE PRACTICES
IN RHYTHM

My personal experience as a cutter drummer in the Laventille Best Village hand
drumming competition, and as shack shack, box bass, and quatro player in the family
parang band, and also my tenure as miscellaneous percussionist and drum set drummer in
both The Frank Clark Kids and the Desperados Steel Band has given me a unique
perspective. From this vantage point I take this opportunity to share regarding the
importance of the rhythmic accompaniment and the missing link that has been observed
in the North American school steel band rhythm performance practices in schools and
universities in the United States. Added to my background with this music is the
experience as Director of Percussion and World Music Studies at Central State
University. It is my intent to bring to light some of the needed information regarding the
steel band performance practice and specifically its rhythmic component. The steel
drum, though they have excelled melodically and harmoniously, were conceived within
the context of rhythmic expression by those who all were initially responsible for the
instrument’s invention and the surrounding culture from which it originated.
Historically melodies such as nursery rhymes were played with a calypso rhythmic interpretation and this practice continues still, as the steel bands of today are products of the powerful rhythmic heritage. This is significant to those studying the instrument because the genre of calypso or soca without the rhythmic accompaniment would be simply a contradiction. One of the first things young children respond to is rhythm. I remember not knowing the words of a calypso, or only the chorus, or with the steel band not knowing the composition being performed, but often times being able to interpret and move to the rhythm.

The level of rhythmic participation I believe is one of the major musical ironies that confront the North American school steel band players who share in this rich musical culture. These ensembles have contributed so much already, yet still need to grasp the significance of the rhythm on which this art form derives its essence. The nature of the calypso rhythm, as it is internalized by the performer, is felt when performing even on a solo pan or as the cowbell player. As a native participant in the Caribbean music culture the learning of the rhythmic motion remained the central core concept. The tamboo-bamboo with African derived rhythms were performed with bamboo cut at various lengths and diameters, then stomped on the ground or hit with sticks so as to produce the desired rhythms. The resulting rhythms and musical ensembles became known as tamboo bamboo bands and preceded the steel band and yet remain conceptually relevant to it. This rhythmic approach in practice remains the dominant musical accompaniment in the Afro-Caribbean rhythm section or “engine room” in the steel band tradition of the 21st century.
The significance of the iron in the steel band musical tradition is preeminent. This practice of the iron can be compared to the same concept in the Ewe music of Ghana and the bell patterns that established the time line which also is reflected in the clave rhythm patterns in Afro-Cuban music.

The nature and function of the iron pattern in the steel band rhythm section or “engine room” is recognized by the ensemble member as a unifying force, and a definite frame of reference from which rhythmic cues are taken before and during performances. As I stated earlier, the instruments used to express rhythm are not the rhythm in and of themselves. Within this musical culture even when the iron pattern is not being played it is still felt. The internalizing process is essential in the learning and teaching process in steel band rhythm studies in the North American schools steel band education and for groups outside the Caribbean music culture, particularly Trinidad.

This internalized iron pattern holds the entire ensemble together, gives rhythmic coherence and mutual security which influences and affects the listening audience. The unseen, yet present, energy that flows from the iron, constitutes some of the character and identity of the genre being performed, and so its repetitive nature is essential because it serves as a source of dependence upon which the melody, harmony, improvisation, etc., finds the musical foundation in music that is desirable for its expression. The cowbell can and does serve the same function if the iron is not available or when performing in an indoor concert setting.

Rhythm is not added to instruments, instruments are added to rhythm. So much of the learning and teaching that occurs apart from a strictly oral tradition is based on the concept of adding rhythm to instruments which affects the natural flow and groove of the
ensemble. Beginning with the feel before entering will be of great pedagogical benefit. This approach to learning is foundational to the study and practice of steel band rhythms in North American education. As in much of our learning, we can learn the words and the language but not the action and the attitude. So it is necessary that we re-evaluate our approach to the pedagogy in steel band performance practice in rhythm. Composers, arrangers, performers, and communities in the steel band tradition yielded to the rhythmic sensitivities of this art form, which serves as the communal entrance to participate in the music. Learning composition and arrangement in the steel band music culture through oral/aural utilization of the rhythm is the common denominator for all the parts before one begins performing. These parts are opposite in motion but not in function. It is like having a positive and negative on a battery. The entry into this approach for North American educators in steel band rhythm studies is to purchase and listen to the African derived rhythms of the Caribbean so as to grasp, catch, and above all respond in motion to the movement of the rhythms in the music.

Students of this art form can benefit greatly from this approach to learning by oral/aural tradition because it allows one to utilize all of his/her faculties to engage in the musical experience. Two of these faculties are emotion and motion or movement in sound. The rhythm of calypso is both static and flexible and the synthesis of cultural nuances and the rhythm and movement can serve the educational need in rhythm studies that is total body orientation in the expression of rhythm.
CHAPTER 8
EMPHASIZING THE ORAL/AURAL INTENT OF THE
WRITTEN MUSIC TRADITION

Learning calypso according to the written music tradition is an important element in our discussion. Steel bands that fit this category are in an educational system that places greater emphasis on reading music than on the oral/aural tradition. As we look at calypso from the written music tradition we realize that our pedagogy is being approached from observing the end product instead of the process towards the end product. The written music tradition has many advantages and must serve its purpose in the education of students. Some of these advantages are time efficiency, visual representation of sound, and the preservation of concepts for quick recall or reference.

Another advantage is the skill of being able to simply read music. This is important in an academic environment that is based on quarters or semesters and has evaluation systems that require learning outcome strategies. This learning environment is often driven by the economy of time and, more importantly, the economy of money. Therefore, what must be learned musically must fit into this structure. Steel bands in American schools, and to a growing extent the Caribbean, fall under this educational system. The teachers of steel band within this system of music must find the most effective way to accomplish their task of communicating the calypso music culture while
remaining true to its rhythmic tradition. Due to the fact that the written approach gives us an advantage in terms of efficiency of time to grasp, it is important to use the time gained to incorporate techniques of the oral/aural tradition, beginning with the realization that the process of what has been quickly grasped must be gradually experienced so as to develop feel or groove in performance.

A learning approach that will help is to learn fewer tunes that have a higher quality of rhythmic experiences. This can be accomplished by performing fewer tunes for longer periods of time during practice. This is essential for the development of rhythmic stability and sensitivity in performance. The written notation is not the music but a symbol that represents the sounds, so the purpose in performing fewer tunes is that students can practice longer with the intent to enter more fully into the rhythm of this music. This approach to learning and teaching of the calypso is another one of the pedagogical benefits to the college and university steel band’s rhythm education in the American schools.

Another approach is to have students perform calypso rhythms repeatedly and after rigorous sessions analyze the distinctions between the repeated patterns. It is also pedagogically useful to have rhythm studies days, when the whole steel band is taking turns participating in the rhythm section or “engine room.” The relationship of the individual parts, the individual patterns, the individual movements and the total sonic experience reveals many answers during the process of doing that would otherwise be reduced to theories only. This exercise can also address the internal separation students experience with rhythm where they hear it, see it, and feel it, but cannot reproduce it the way they observe it.
Writing down a rhythm in different ways is also helpful for reading and reflecting on the possible ways a student can hear the vibrations and pulse of the rhythm. Comparing and sharing different written exercises of the same rhythm can serve as another way of heightening student’s rhythmic sensitivities and its relational components to other’s perception of that rhythm. Another pedagogical approach is in recognizing the rest in the rhythm and anticipating the pulse but not playing it. This exercise increases the awareness of feel. Play a cowbell pattern, for example and ask students to enter the rhythm from any place except on the downbeat or upbeat and write out as many possible entries as they can come up with. This exercise will cause the performing or not performing opportunities to be based on the student’s creative and/or innovative skill rather than on simply playing though the finished product. Rhythm that is learned during a process versus learned from the end of the process seems to have a greater feel potential. It is important to remember that calypso drumming in and of itself is a highly creolized or mixed style of drumming. Creolization is a major component of Caribbean culture that permeated the language, dances, songs, and every area in the fine and performing arts in the Caribbean and Trinidad in particular.

The iron serves as the timeline while the scratcher and cowbell embellish the accents and superimpose rhythms that reflect the character of the calypso and the creativity of the individual performer. The congas remain close to a solid pattern that is supportive and improvisatory. This kind of performance is rooted in the singing tradition of the drummers who mostly accompany dancers. When strumming patterns on steel drums are added, it gives a dimension to the rhythmic section of the band that extends the
concept of the rhythm section to the whole ensemble, providing the rich rhythmic texture that is essential to the Afro-Caribbean soundscape.

This holistic rhythmic experience is one of the major driving forces in the Trinidadian Calypso music culture and what makes the steel band rhythm of Trinidad so vibrant and engaging to all. This very rhythmic experience is one of the missing links in the North American school’s steel band program and my reason for making a contribution to this field of study.

In my clinics and workshops entitled: *Energizing and Enhancing your Rhythmic Sensitivities: How it is done*, we approach African derived rhythms from their beginning in the Afro-Caribbean recreational singing and drumming tradition. Second, we migrate to the rhythm section or “engine room.” Next, we incorporate the strumming patterns found in the steel band, and lastly we deal with the rhythm of the melody, always being sensitive to the unity of the whole rhythmic experience. This approach to learning and teaching in the context of the rhythm engages the student immediately in the process of learning, being present when the first intent of the teacher’s rhythmic utterance and eventual development of the rhythmic experience is fresh. This is the same practice that composers and arrangers in the steel band tradition utilize so as to achieve the highest musical potential of their ensembles. The rhythm of the melody in calypso has mostly been informed by the rhythm felt in the movement of a dance, or the simple swaying of the singer’s body or tapping of the feet. This way of approaching rhythm in teaching melody through movement is a helpful approach when teaching in the North American school steel band’s rhythm program.
Increasing the student’s awareness in movement and its connection to sound also encourages students to focus on the flow of the rhythm rather than on the accents or contour of the melody. When melody is approached from rhythm, the resulting accents and contours are by-products. As it is my intent to offer the students and teachers an approach to the rhythmic education of the Calypso and or steel band performance practice, I also recognize that the steel band in the North American school system must have their own music culture orientation. Therefore, I suggest that teachers use pieces that reflect the student’s and teacher’s understanding of popular music that can be used to teach and learn the calypso feel or groove, using rhythms from Appendix A.

The developing of the steel band rhythmic potential and the releasing of the energy that is common practice in the steel band rhythm tradition is an important experience for music educators and students of this field of study. The steel band as an educational ensemble has demonstrated its enormous capability as a World Music ensemble and has given the music educator the full range of musical experiences, performing repertoire from most, if not all the eras in music history, right up to the present. Students in programs with steel band experience are exposed to classical music in a way that revitalizes this great tradition while performing the most recent popular music in the global music culture.

Since the rhythm of calypso is synchronistic and flexible it can accommodate much in the way of various styles and rhythms. Therefore, it allows for the inclusion of most of the world music traditional rhythms and some traditional scale systems. The Afro-Caribbean, Indo-Caribbean, Euro-Caribbean and American experience has been captured and fashioned into a World Music experience that has revitalized and
demonstrated the potential in the music that has become known as calypso. In the
process of learning and teaching the steel band calypso rhythm in the North American
school music program, it is important to begin with the known, then go to the unknown in
regard to the student’s experience. A pedagogical approach for teachers that should
experience much success is to teach his or her steel band a popular rhythm and blues song
placing emphasis on the rhythm, using that familiar rhythmic foundation to arrive at the
calypso rhythm.

For example, a basic rhythm and blues pattern that can evolve into the calypso
rhythm would be:

![Figure 3]
This approach allows for the student to maintain some measure of rhythmic orientation, which gives them encouragement, while attempting to learn an unfamiliar rhythm. Against this rhythmic foundation, play just the melody. Then do the same with the strumming, and lastly, perform all together.

The seven strumming patterns mentioned earlier are by no means an exhaustive list but they are representative of the most used patterns in steel band calypso rhythm study. For the student who seeks to learn not just the notes but the feel or movement interpretation of these strumming patterns, it is important to listen to these patterns against the pulse of a 12/8 time signature. The 12/8 represents the movement in time, the 4/4 represents the punctuation in time, and the actual strumming represents the variables.

These concepts can be practiced by all students even without instruments. The purpose of this is to develop the student’s sense of movement in sound. Apart from the bass steel drum, strumming is more communal than other aspects of calypso rhythm studies because all other instruments not involved in performing the melody are usually strumming. By focusing on this activity, the individual students will reap a more rhythmically satisfying learning experience and collectively the entire ensemble will be musically enriched.

In reading steel band literature, listening to recordings, observing performances, talking with teachers with programs, and teaching, there is an obvious need for steel band rhythm studies. My analysis of the culture in rhythm, strumming, and movement in the steel band calypso rhythm studies has heightened my desire to address the frustration of students and teachers in this field of study in general and percussion and world music programs in particular. Though we have been studying specific aspects such as rhythm,
strumming, and movement in the steel band calypso rhythm tradition, it is of necessity that we understand performance as a communal activity. The performance practice of the calypso rhythm in the steel band tradition is to be understood and studied as music performance more so then as music theory or history. The idea of placing performance, or should we say doing, in a lesser light than academic discourse has widened the gap between education and performance in music studies for many students. This schism, however, is lessened greatly as we make a conscious effort to utilize the oral/aural tradition, which is the essence of performance, without minimizing the skill of the written music tradition. The necessity of performance and studying performance while addressing the specific need of the student’s rhythm, strumming, movement and performance practice is paramount. The teacher of this art form must be a performer or one who has performed or is willing to perform with the students. He or she must be rhythmically aware and can bring to the learning and teaching environment a sense of movement in sound that can be imitated.
CHAPTER 9

APPROACHING RHYTHM, STRUMMING, AND MOVEMENT IN
THE NORTH AMERICAN SCHOOL STEEL BAND

The oral/aural tradition is integral to the learning and teaching of rhythm, strumming, and movement in Afro-Caribbean rhythm studies.

We will next consider the oral/aural tradition and the needs of the teachers of steel bands in North American school music programs. One of the most distinguishing features of the North American steel band, in comparison to the Trinidadian Steel band, is the lack of a strong rhythmic root in their performance. The melodic and harmonic development of the steel band has been heard, transcribed, and performed by many North American school groups. Most of these groups give a melodically and harmonically satisfying performance of the great works coming out of the Panorama competition. However, the rhythms that authenticate these works are the least comprehended aspect of the composition. It is in the best educational interest of the teachers and students to be inspired and taught to put forth the effort to learn the rhythmic interpretation upon which the melodic and harmonic progression depends. The entire Afro-Caribbean folk music tradition is rooted in rhythmic communication. It serves as the vehicle by which all the other dimensions of the music are expressed. The student of this field of study must be taught to enter this music from the vantage point of the rhythm. The disconnect from the
rhythmic approach by teachers and students and the lack of trained teachers in the oral/aural tradition are two of the main reason for the rhythmic instability of the North American school steel band performance. Here is an observation made by an American scholar, Kenyon Williams.

“Today, this second generation of North American steel band educators is giving way to a third generation—a generation who, in most instances, has no direct contact with a native Trinidadian or the culture that gave birth to pan. Very few of them compose their own arrangements, preferring instead to teach in the manner of a Western classical music ensemble and utilize works published by established arrangers. Most North American university-trained pannists have never learned an arrangement by rote and have never experienced the thrill of working with an arranger as a composition comes to life for the very first time. The insertion of this extra link in the chain—the link of musical notation—has essentially severed the connection between pannists in North America and pannist in Trinidad.”

This observation reflects some of the concerns and frustrations expressed by many of the students in steel bands who are attempting to learn the rhythms, strumming, and movement associated with the performance practice in the steel band. They find themselves rhythmically unsatisfied even after learning and performing the right notes and chords. This is in no way just an issue with steel band calypso rhythm, but is often a common experience in percussion world music ensembles in North American percussion programs.

My observation is that the lack of a strong or equal treatment of the oral/aural tradition in teaching and learning rhythm is another part of the missing link. In my own Percussion and World Music Program, at Central State University, I have had the opportunity to learn, teach, write, compose, and arrange, utilizing both the oral/aural and

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the written music traditions. In so doing, I have discovered that rhythm taught from the oral/aural tradition as used in the calypso steel band performance practice engages the whole individual and ensemble in a way that fires the musical imagination and rhythmic experiences of the students. I find that as in the Trinidadian steel band rhythmic experience, the excitement of the students working with me in the oral/aural tradition is contagious, making the severed link with the original not as distant an experience in feel, groove, and movement. I feel that pedagogical benefit of this learning experience is to be valued and shared as one of the learning outcomes of this course in calypso rhythm studies. The orientation of the rhythms or grooves sections of the original Trinidad steel band would be a good place to have students concentrate their listening and studies. Most of the composers and arrangers of steel band work within the context of rhythm as the raw material from which they use their intuition to create, improvise, invent, and organize their music and fashion their inspiration. Since these rhythms are foundational to the understanding of the interpretation of movement within this culture, it is beneficial for students to study the value of the cultural significance of the rhythm of this music culture. The value of the rhythm is such that if all else is done well but the rhythm is not, then the work remains musically unsatisfying.

Within the Trinidadian music culture, rhythm serves as a vital force among the people. As mentioned earlier by Kofi Agawu, “Rhythm is as much a part of the social fabric as is the common language of the people.” This inherent sense of rhythm is often taken for granted just as the tamboo-bamboo, hand drumming, steel band, and miscellaneous percussion players were taken for granted. It is encouraging to witness the realization and valuing of the significance of the steel drum and its contribution to world
music. But more important is the people who carry within themselves the cultural DNA from their African-derived heritage in rhythm, and their ability to absorb the many musical expressions found in the Caribbean music culture of Trinidad. The rhythm that inspired the creation of the steel drum is also the same rhythm that orders and communicates the calypso and all other music of the Caribbean that has African derived rhythmic roots. In our efforts to educate ourselves in the rhythm and movement in the calypso rhythm studies, it is to be remembered that our approach is to give parameters in rhythm so as to guide students in creativity, improvisation, innovation, composition and performance practices, and in what I call “process education” rather than “end product education.” Here are some of the comments from major contributors to the concept of rhythm in the steel band.

Neville Jules:

“Rhythm is something that is in me.”  


“Rhythm come as the heart beat.”

Ray Holman:

“Rhythm is central to the steel band.”


Elliott Mannette:

“The steel pan was born out of the trash cans being used to play rhythm. Other sounds by accident were added from the same desire to create rhythmic sounds and the desire for expression of internal rhythm, then later the additions came about.”

“A. Myrna Nurse, *Unheard Voices* (Lincoln, NE) iUniverse, 2007), 348.

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Bertie Marshall:

“Rhythm keep the band together.”

It is possible within a composition to hear the reoccurrence of a jam session or section in which all the instruments are playing a rhythmic pattern while the bass lays down a montuno-like groove at four different times or more depending on the arranger. This section of the music serves as a rallying point for the entire music community and it compels the performers into the gravity of the rhythmic whole.

This momentum is expressed in the movement, which is a by-product and the cause of such rhythmic activity. The North American school steel band pedagogy appears to approach the learning of the Calypso style from the melody first then progress to the chord and lastly the rhythm. This approach keeps the development of the rhythm from coming into the maturity that is essential to this music style. It is possible that after students learn the melody and the chords they conclude that the composition, song, or arrangement is finished. They, or their teachers, might not see or were not taught to see the educational benefit in spending time on strengthening the rhythm, either in the rhythm section or “engine room” or on the strumming sections or, for that matter, the overall band’s rhythmic groove. I believe students should be trained to approach the music rhythmically first since this is the area of greatest frustration for the majority of the students that I have encountered in my experience with the North American steel band. This could be referenced to the experience in the learning of a solo on marimba, steel drum, or any other instrument where one always begins their practices from the beginning and then spends less time on the ending. Beginning with the rhythm sets the

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color, mood, and the ambience of the song to be performed. This rhythm ensures the
timing, tempo, pronunciation, and articulation of the melody and the style in which the
strumming is performed. It is the foundation upon which the entire composition is
established. In other words, it establishes the song.

The learning of the rhythm goes further than the recognizing of patterns, or of the
individual instruments in the rhythm section or “engine room.” It requires an
internalizing of the movement and the matching expression of that movement in sound.
The concept of an inherent rhythm in the calypso rhythm tradition is the key to much of
the groove. Inherent rhythm, in this case, means that which is felt but not played by the
performers. For example, when I perform a rhythm I am often times humming or singing
another rhythm inspired by the need to connect the external rhythm with the internalized
rhythms. This experience utilizes the human body as the center of that rhythmic activity
which informs the music and connects with the other performers and the audience.

The idea of seeing rhythm as a disconnected theory from the bodily experience of
human movement is a major obstacle in the learning and teaching of calypso rhythm.
Students, then, need to be taught the basics of bodily movement in the expression of
rhythm; keeping in mind that the body is a good servant but a poor master. The body
follows better than it leads. The student should not concentrate on the body but on the
movement being expressed. The rhythms being expressed in calypso hand drumming,
steel band strumming, and the melodic articulation of a composition are governed by the
internal/external connection of the body in movement. This becomes the thing that is felt
by the listeners and what attracts the participants. Rhythm is fundamentally a human
activity in time that is expressed in song or movement, on miscellaneous instruments,
whether melodic or harmonic, or rhythmic instruments such as hand drums, tamboo bamboo, steel drums and the rhythm section or “engine room.” As rhythm is essentially movement in sound that begins with movement from the desire to express one’s internal meter, it is important to be aware of this when learning or teaching a composition that requires a heightened sense of rhythmic timing.

The desire to connect with the larger rhythmic expression in a hand drumming, rhythm section or “engine room,” or steel band performance, inspires a great deal of opportunities for learning and teaching. The rhythm must be taken as a pedagogical necessity and used as a frame of reference in the student’s and teacher’s approach to the study of this art form. This is the inspiration for the Trinidad Steel band and must be utilized as the inspiration in the North American school steel band rhythm studies, if the need is to be addressed.

Another area of pedagogy is in the singing of rhythms, while tapping or moving to the sway of the groove. As is said, “If you can’t say it, you can’t play to it.” Lining up one’s verbal rhythmic expression with one’s internal meter and body movement is a result of one’s focus on the already established pulse. The idea is to realize rhythm more so than to create it. The tendency of many students trying to learn this rhythm is to approach their studies from observing the by-product instead of the cause or inspiration. The idea of beginning with a musical conclusion then attempting to arrive at an answer is common in the study of calypso rhythms in the North American steel band rhythm program. This is simply because the students are only given the end product and not the process that is responsible for the rhythmic groove. This can be seen as part of the missing link or the weak rhythmic foundation in these steel bands. In the Trinidadian
music culture, and specifically the calypso rhythm tradition on the steel band, compositions, arrangements, and performance techniques, or performance practices all are informed by the rhythm.

The learning and teaching process in Afro-Caribbean oral tradition and the innovative, experimental, improvisational and exploring of musical activities are also governed by the rhythm. As it is necessary to structure chords in the most musical way in most compositions, so it is with the rhythm. The progression of chords within a composition often takes into consideration the chord that is performed, the chord that precedes, and the chord that follows. This understanding gives a sense of continuity that enhances the overall music. I said that so as to make some of the same applications in the rhythmic progression within the calypso rhythm studies. The present rhythm, the preceded rhythm, and the following rhythm are all connected by the movement upon which they are established.

Another way to say this is that the preceding rhythm is felt, the present rhythm is felt and performed, and the following rhythms are felt, performed, and realized in connection with the ensemble’s overall rhythmic experience. This rippling rhythmic expression moves the audience into participation, and creates a communal experience in rhythm. This represents the calypso rhythm tradition as it relates to the steel band and the impact and effect this genre of music is having on the larger musical stage. The attraction of this music, its rhythm, and the steel drum is a symbolic representation of the inventor’s desire to express the people’s rhythmic communication. The literature written thus far on the subject of the steel drum shows more of the by-product of the rhythmic inspiration than the source. The rhythms that fuel the innovative experience that was
seeking a way to express the internal pulse or rhythm of the people has always been, but has not always been realized.
I remember as a young drum set player for the WITCO Desperados that one of my most anticipated times was at the close of the Carnival festivals on Tuesday nights. At that time the entire steel band stopped performing and it was up to the rhythm section or “engine room” to bring the masses of people home. This was called the last lap. The drum set, congas, scratchers, and cow bells would be on the float, and the iron men would be on foot marching or chipping behind and beside the float while the people followed with steps also called chipping. This experience magnifies the point of this work. In drawing from this experience to contribute to the education of the North American school steel band rhythm from the Trinidadian music culture, I hope students of this art form will benefit. During the last lap the calypso rhythms that accompanied the steel band were improvised at the highest rhythmic levels, being that they were not playing a supporting role. The full weight of this rhythmic improvisation fell to the drum set player. My experience was specific to Desperados steel band rhythm section or “engine room.” In this environment many of the best listening, learning, and realizations of the inspiration of rhythm or movement as the source of creativity occurred. About five or six iron players performed interlocking rhythms that gave the sensation of a well-tuned
engine, thus the coinage “engine room,” is a fitting description of this rhythmic experience. The same type of rhythmic activity would be taking place with the scratcher players. Usually there were about four or five scratcher players. The group leader would cue certain sections of rhythm where some of them would raise their scratcher above their heads while the others stayed low. The iron players would do the same. The cowbells added both rhythm and timbre that seemed to expand the experience in a whole new way. As the drum set player in this music, one has to be highly sensitive to the many rhythms occurring, and to know how to negotiate the best possible phrasing, breaks, fills, and a host of colorful riffs because the people listened for this as we brought them home.

The more I was exposed to the hand drumming rhythm experience, the greater the resource from which to draw when performing in the Calypso rhythm section. The deepening of the rhythmic sound resource must be given priority in the study of this music culture. For students and teachers in the North American school steel band rhythm music program, there is a need to make a conscious effort to study the rhythmic root of this music. As the advantages of technology have made it possible to experience this kind of rhythmic activity, students should be encouraged to take fully the lessons being caught in their listening. This work is in part a means by which you can begin to reap the educational and pedagogical benefit of your studies in the rhythm, strumming and movement in the steel band rhythm tradition. In Appendix B a song is provided to practice so as to address the rhythmic needs of the students of this art form.

This composition serves as a good model of a Trinidadian steel band performance with the emphasis on the rhythm section or “engine room” and the overall steel band. It can be used to engage the student in the process of the rhythms felt, the rhythms
performed, and the rhythms realized. This composition can be found on the Pan in Education CD.

The pedagogical approaches mentioned throughout this research have been used by myself and have been instructive and educational and are presented as a further demonstration of the learning outcome available to students in calypso rhythm studies in the North American school steel band.

The rhythmic frustration of most students and teachers in North American school steel bands will be addressed as our approaches are studied and applied. The experiment regarding the education of the rhythmic sensitivities of students in the North American steel band has been an area of study for myself before and during my studies at Northern Illinois University. I have observed these struggles with North American school steel band students and teachers as faculty with Ray Holman, Cliff Alexis, and Al O’Conner in a summer workshop, and as clinician, guest artist, and composer during my career. As I have been invited to participate over the years this issue continues to reveal the need for a work such as this.

After learning the technical aspects of the steel drum, it is imperative that the students of this art form concentrate on the rhythm, strumming, and movement in relation to the overall music experience. Since music is not so much a talking art as it is a performing art, it is essential that we develop our pedagogy in calypso rhythm studies with our emphasis on processes rather than simply focusing on learning a tune. Giving closer attention to the process as a whole and the product as part of that whole, engages students in the total rhythmic experience. This then results in the heightening of student’s rhythmic sensitivities that are reflected in the music performed by the entire
ensemble. I have had both the disappointment and the encouragement of watching students learning in both the oral/aural and written rhythm tradition, and it appears that the delight of rhythmic realization with the body as the center of response was of greater musical satisfaction. This accomplishment leads students in greater rhythmic possibilities in their performance and connects them with the larger musical expression more than through mere imitation. The North American school steel bands have achieved much since the inclusion as a World Music ensemble. The capability of this ensemble to perform a vast array of musical styles, and the opportunities this gives students to experience music, has all but fulfilled the music education and performance criteria in World Music programs in North American steel band music programs. The opportunity to learn rhythm as more than a beat will give students a broader exploration in this approach to calypso rhythm studies within the rhythm section or “engine room” and the steel band as a whole. As the cornerstone to any building carries the strongest position and the greatest influence upon the strength of the finished product, so it is with the calypso rhythm. If the cornerstone is ignored or simply overlooked this permeates the entire performance practice, and those who wish for a convincing rhythmic experience feel closer but not musically satisfied. Some of the musical disappointment comes from the student’s inability to arrive at the flow of the movement suggested by the rhythm, and also the lack of freedom to add meaningful rhythmic movement to the established groove.
CHAPTER 11

THE DRUM SET DRUMMER IN

THE RHYTHM SECTION OR “ENGINE ROOM”

Something students need to know about calypso drumming is that it is a highly sensitive tonal art form for all performers and particularly the drum set player. Calypso style drum set drumming has the capacity to add small but effective rhythmic figures to the original patterns without destroying the essential feel or groove. As a style of drumming, it is not a slave to authentic patterns as it is to the character and color of the rhythms, and to one’s creative impulses, which are expressed in reference to the overall groove. This function in the steel band falls to the drum set drummer. He must internalize the individual rhythms of the whole steel band while driving the groove as one expression. In my experience as drum set drummer with both The Frank Clark Kids and the Desperados of Trinidad, I learned the essential rhythms being played around me as an observer performer. This informed much of what I did and did not do while performing. Listening to the iron, scratcher, congas, cowbell, the bass steel drum rhythm, the strumming patterns, and the inflections of the melody was very instructive. As an example of the drum set function in the engine room, here is a basic pattern:
From this experience I began to transcend the rhythmic boundaries of the music culture without losing the rhythmic character of the calypso. This is accomplished by playing off the master rhythm, meaning the rhythm that all the other rhythms lead to and reveal. Therefore, the incentive to fuse, create, experiment, and invent leaves the drummer free from the strict conformity of the pulse to energize and enhance the rhythmic sensitivities of the steel band. During this process all of the rhythmic activities are being felt in movement, more so than as an intellectual experience. William Komla Amoaku made reference to this type of rhythmic experience in his analysis when he wrote regarding his experiences as a drummer in Ghana.
“The development of the intellect takes second place to the heightening and refining of the intuition, of sensitivity towards influences which are non-physical in nature, and of the acquisition of that attitude through which he recognizes himself as an extension of the society, which, nevertheless, he epitomizes in himself as an individual.”

Though Amoaku was addressing one of the objectives of learning and teaching in traditional African societies from his own experience, I found that some of his analysis reflected my own experience in the calypso rhythm studies. The intuition as a recipient of rhythm is a major organ in learning and teaching in the oral/aural tradition of the singing, hand drumming, rhythm section or “engine room” and steel band rhythm performance practice. I do not see, however, the intellect as second to the intuition as much as I see it as a dimension of the intellect. In calypso rhythm studies, for students outside this music culture, it is important that they are taught to listen to the rhythmic relationships between all the parts and their tonal dimension. In my experience singing has always been the mother expression that gives birth to every element of musical activity. This is true of African derived rhythms as it is also true of West African rhythms as expressed by Meki Nzewi who said in his article, titled Melo-Rhythmic Essence and Hot Rhythm in Nigerian Folk Music.

“I use the term melo-rhythmic to refer to a rhythmic organization that is melodically conceived and melodically born. This kind of organization should be recognized as having a different orientation than the kind in which the rhythm of the music has more independent derivation and function. In West African folk music the rhythms of the percussion instruments are firmly rooted in the melo-rhythmic essence, not in the abstract depersonalized percussion function typical of Western percussion style.”

To achieve a better result, this exercise of singing while performing should be done while either the entire rhythm section or “engine room” is performing, or during a practice session of the whole steel band. It is important to encourage students to sing their rhythm. Students then are given a rhythmic environment in which to work out their participation. This kind of learning culture comes the closest to the original model found in the traditional steel band of Trinidad, and it keeps student’s motivation high as they anticipate the challenge of finding their way rhythmically. Students must be encouraged to listen to the time line set either by the iron or cow- bell, the hi hat rhythm of the drum set, and also the congas. Having an awareness of the interrelationship of these rhythms is essential to the rhythmic education of the North American school steel band student and teacher. The learning of rhythm as an isolated expression is foreign to the calypso music culture. However, for the sake of analysis we will yield to this practice. The communal approach to the learning of rhythm is what is important in developing the capacity to perform this music well. The study of calypso rhythm in the steel band must be approached as the study of performance because every aspect of rhythm studies must be done during performance. This art form is steeped in a performing tradition, where the composing, learning, teaching, innovation, creativity, experimentation and approaches are all developed during performance.

Musical spontaneity and exploration are highly valued by composers and arrangers who work in rhythm as their inspiration and resource. For example, Kenyon Williams wrote about one of Trinidad’s prima steel band composers and arrangers Len “Boogsie” Sharp:
“As an arranger, Boogsie is known by his contemporaries as an innate genius, a man with no formal musical education, unable to read or notate music, but who can summon fantastically original melodies, harmonies, and forms out of the air at sheer will. In the panyard, Boogsie simply sits at the front of each section, calling out note names and singing rhythms, rarely touching a pan, only moving on once the section as a whole understands what is to be learned that night.”

I have had the privilege of performing as percussionist with Len Boogsie Sharp, and he is truly one of the greatest musicians of the 21st century. He is a consummate musician who has absorbed and internalized melody, harmony, and rhythm in a way that enlivens musical expression. He epitomizes the Afro-Caribbean musician at his best, as a by product of a powerful oral/aural tradition in music. Some others with whom I have worked who have established themselves in the global music community, Robert Greenidge, (Desperados), Ray Holman, and Cliff Alexis, are well versed in the principles of the Caribbean rhythm culture in the steel band. These are just a few of the people students can have as references, teachers, composers, arrangers, performers, and oral historians with respect to Caribbean music studies in general and the rhythm, strumming, and movement in the Trinidad steel band performance practice in particular. All have recorded works which have been published. Their contribution to individual students and teachers would yield the pedagogical benefits of music education in steel band rhythm studies, as many schools continue to incorporate this World Music ensemble into their program. In the learning and teaching of rhythm, strumming, and movement in the North American Steel band, arranging, performing, and compositional approaches ought to be considered from their rhythmic elements, since this is the area of greatest musical frustration for students and teachers. Also, when choosing repertoire the consideration of

rhythm must be a factor. The best resources for the learning of the Caribbean calypso rhythms are rooted in the oral tradition and can be found on video and audio recordings.

Students and teachers using written music notation must focus their intent on internalizing the music. After reading a section of music, the students must practice that section with the rhythm section or “engine room” with the intent to establish the rhythmic flow. The movement of the student in this session is to be a by product of the rhythmic motion. After each section is read then this first practice must be applied again, with the purpose of developing student’s rhythmic sensitivities in this music.

The importance of rhythm in African derived music is the very essence of its existence and survival, and every imitation of this music must take into account this essential element as something to be studied. Therefore, it is pedagogically sound for students in calypso rhythm studies to be encouraged and taught to approach the learning of their music in the steel band with rhythm in mind. Although we use the word rhythm, we are always speaking about a multidimensional experience in sound and movement. Therefore, the excessive analysis of performance is not our goal, but rather the need for the students to learn in performance, to realize in performance, and to represent their learning experience in rhythm, in performance. After the students have experienced this approach he or she can then transcribe, notate, and utilize that medium to experience the rhythm from its visual representation. This will allow the student to see the essential value of this music’s oral legacy, while continuing in the skills of the written music tradition. The North American school steel band program is a reflection of the academic paradigm that places greater emphasis on the written than on the spoken approach to learning and teaching. This is not a new issue as Ong observed
“Oral expression can exist as most has existed without any writing at all, writing never without orality. Yet, despite the oral roots of all verbalization, the scientific and literary study of language and literature has for centuries, until quite recent years, shied away from orality.”

This is a significant insight and it must be considered in the learning and teaching of calypso rhythm studies that are rooted in the oral tradition and are yet part of the academic World Music programs. Many of the directors of World Music programs in colleges and universities are not insiders to the music cultures they are asked to teach. This then makes it imperative that a work such as this be used as an instructional guide in the learning and teaching of calypso rhythm in the study of the steel band rhythm culture. I believe that the steel band is one of the most accessible World Music ensembles in which to use the oral/aural tradition in teaching and learning. In my experiments with the equal use of the oral/aural approaches in composition, arranging, and music theory without written music and the use of notation, the rhythmic sensitivities of my students were undeniably improved.

Learning, according to the oral/aural tradition, develops the intuitive skill of the students allowing for greater levels of rhythmic satisfaction and musical expression. The engaging of students in an immediate experience of movement in sound is one of the most motivating learning outcomes for the teacher. Beginning with this awareness of the importance of rhythm, and observing the rhythm’s influence throughout the composition helps students and teachers to come closest to the experiences they view on videos or have heard on audio recordings. The strengthening of the rhythmic experience in the steel band is our objective. Though the Caribbean is a mixture of many cultural


influences in music, the students studying the rhythms of this region are encouraged to listen to the music whose primary emphasis is on Afro-British, Afro-French, and Afro-Hispanic cultures of the Caribbean. In all of the above mentioned music genres, the African derived rhythms remain the common denominator. Students in the North American steel band must also be encouraged to listen to and view traditional African drumming, and Afro-Caribbean hand drumming. This exploration into the drumming tradition will add a level of rhythmic awareness and will help in the understanding of some of the performance practices in rhythm in the steel band. Many of the rhythms played in the hand drumming groups and the steel band rhythm section or “engine room” are also rooted in improvisation. The more aware one is of the rhythmic soundscape, the more he or she can explore, and experiment, with the groove.

As I mentioned earlier regarding my performing experience at the last lap session and the end of the three day Carnival, the rhythm section or “engine room” would be left to bring the participants home and in this soundscape, improvisation for the drummer was his to explore. The role of the rhythm section or “engine room” in the North American school steel band must be taken seriously, as it informs the rest of the ensemble. Many of the difficulties and frustrations of students with the rhythm or groove must be addressed from the standpoint of the rhythm section or “engine room” and this must be used as the frame of reference of the rhythmic soundscape for all students.
LISTENING TO RHYTHM WITH THE WHOLE BODY

Often times when one reads about listening in the context of the academic music program dealing with ear training, the full body experience is not a major factor. This approach to learning rhythm does not necessarily reflect the manner of movement in rhythm that is expected of African derived music as in the case of the calypso rhythm performer. The whole body experience in the learning and teaching of rhythm is essential in the study of the rhythm section or “engine room” and the overall calypso steel band experience.

Listening, then, is holistic and responsive, and not just a mental acquisition of the meter. The tradition of singing, dancing, and drumming as one unified activity has always been the cradle of rhythmic expression in the Afro-Caribbean music culture. Therefore, even when the rhythm is being performed by a single individual, it still carries within itself the unified feel, or groove of the singing, dancing, and drumming. This concept is another of the greatest missing links in the understanding of rhythm as taught and performed by teachers and students in the North American school steel band. Since rhythm in this tradition is conceived and perceived in a multi-dimensional way, it is important that the students outside of this tradition be taught in a manner consistent with this perception in rhythm, so as to benefit him/her pedagogically. I have found that
learning and teaching in the oral/aural tradition is the most effective avenue for developing the rhythm, strumming, and movement that the student desires to experience in their performance. The ability to comprehend sound, emotion, motion and movement in time and space is most expressive when the ears, meaning all receptors which are the major organ of sound, are connecting with the rhythms. Though the written rhythms and strumming patterns are essential for reading, it must not be the end all of learning and teaching in the rhythm section or “engine room” of the school steel band. Regarding rhythm, the emphasis must be on learning and teaching in the oral/aural tradition, for in this lies the essential ingredient of Afro-Caribbean music in general and rhythm and strumming in the steel band rhythm section or “engine room” in particular. Developing student’s sense of feel, groove, and rhythmic movement must be approached with the same concern for the correct melodic notes and chord harmonization.

This then will raise student’s awareness as instructors make the effort to address their long held frustration in this rhythm practice and challenge their musical abilities in a way that causes them to re-think many of their own assumptions about rhythm. The educational benefits of this approach to the study of rhythm and strumming in the Afro-Caribbean music in general, and the steel band in particular, will far outweigh the rhythmic frustration anticipated by students in the North American school steel band, and those in the rhythm section or “engine room” in particular. I have observed that in the North American school steel band program, teachers and students have a tendency to learn diverse styles of steel band music, so as to develop their rhythmic sensitivities, yet the feel and groove that go with these styles remain undeveloped. I would rather see students do one style that captures the feel and groove, than to not grasp the groove of the
pieces and fall short of their rhythmic education, while still performing many and varied styles. I have been asked on many occasions during a workshop “Where is the beat?” and most often the beat is present but the expresser of it is not. Teaching the student is the aim, and the rhythm is a product. The rhythm must serve as the orienting point of the expression of the individual performer, the group, and the audience when performing Afro-Caribbean music. This rhythmic center is what gives the rest of the musical activities their significance and inspires the expression of the melody, strumming, and movement. The number of rhythm players is not the key to the feel or groove of a composition, but the quality of listening, anticipating, and responding to the whole or master rhythm product by the collective rhythms. Long before one begins to play his cow bell, scratcher, or drum set part he is already experiencing the groove. As a calypso drum set drummer you are called upon to expand the feel or groove without interrupting the many interlocking rhythms already established. The iron or cow bell must be already internalized by the drum set drummer, and this internal hearing of the groove is expressed in the context of the whole rhythmic experience. The rhythms that are sung by the drum set player in the rhythm section or “engine room” while performing, are more crucial to the feel or groove than the rest of what one does. The calypso drum set drummer is not a solo artist as much as an inclusive artist, working in concert with the rhythm section or “engine room.” Students must be encouraged in total listening, meaningful body participation in response to the rhythms, strumming, and movement of the entire steel band experience. Listening to the relationships of the different timbres in the rhythm section or “engine room” and their impact and effect upon the whole is in itself educational, instructive, and engaging in a way that refines one’s contribution in the
ensemble. Rhythm is also timbre, and perception of timbre in one’s rhythm studies helps to refine rhythmic expression. Aural skills can and should be taught and learned in rhythm, also. I remember the section leaders of the various steel drums. After they had learned their parts from the composer or arranger, they began teaching them to their section by verbally reciting the melody and chord in rhythm. This rhythmic approach to conceptualizing musical ideas in the Afro-Caribbean rhythm culture, will guide students outside of this culture into a better understanding of the way this rhythm is felt or experienced. As students continue to draw from the rhythmic resources found in recordings and videos, which have a rich oral tradition in the hand drumming, singing, and dance heritage of the Afro-Caribbean music culture, they will begin to connect more and more with the missing link—the groove. The history of the steel band continues to receive much attention from scholars past and present, and is a welcome contribution to the history of music in the world.

However, for the students in the North American school steel band, this art form must be studied within its rhythmic context otherwise their studies would be incomplete. The opportunity to learn and teach rhythm as a holistic experience is within the pedagogy of the methods used in the oral/aural tradition as demonstrated in the Trinidad steel band rhythm section or “engine room.”

This is a rich legacy that must be utilized by the North American School steel band so as to continue the education of students outside of this Afro-Caribbean world music experience in rhythm. The educational emphasis on the root and the development of the rhythm for the North American student will continue to add to the already
expanding influence of the steel band as a primary World Music ensemble, and to the pedagogical benefits to students studying the Afro-Caribbean music in rhythms in the steel band.
CHAPTER 13

RHYTHM IN THE LEARNING AND TEACHING IN
THE CLASSICAL PAN TRADITION

One of the insights that I wish to make known to the students in the North American school steel band is that the percussionist or drum set player is deeply engaged in the steel drum classical pan performing tradition. My exposure to the melodic and harmonic expressions of music in the Western music tradition closely paralleled my experience in the Afro-Caribbean hand drumming culture. For example, as I cut my teeth as percussionist and drum set player in the Desperados steel band, my duties were in both the calypso and what we called the classical steel band tradition. I remember performing the percussion parts to The Overture of 1812, all learned and taught according to the oral/aural tradition. Mister Raymond Artie Shaw was the conductor. This classical pan tradition is as rooted in the Trinidad and Tobago music culture as the others genres of music on the island. Here are some examples of the compositions and quality of performances of Western Art music that I grew up listening to and performing.

Toccata and fugue, (J. S Bach.)

Wedding Dance, (G. Rossini)

Waltz of the flowers, (L. Delibes)

Finlandia (J. Sibelius)
William Tell Overture (G. Rossini)\textsuperscript{17}

*Pallestra* (F. LeHar)

*Merry Wives of Windsor* (A. Nicolal)\textsuperscript{18}

*Pallestra* and *Merry Wives of Windsor* were arranged by Mr. Raymond “Artie” Shaw and were common compositions heard as a boy growing up in Laventille. During my first international tour, Mr. George “Georgie” Yates, the manager of *Desperados*, and Raymond “Artie” Shaw and I stayed in the same room at Manor Court Hotel in London, England. Mr. Shaw was a brilliant classical and ballad steel band arranger. The band performed both classical and calypso works at the Royal Albert Hall and throughout our tour. I say that to show the quality of the informal music education that informs my approach to rhythm in general and our topic in particular, regarding the rhythm, strumming and movement in the Trinidad steel band tradition and its application in the North American school steel band program. The African-derived music of Trinidad permeates the soundscape in such a way that the learning musician in that environment is in a state of constant informal music education in performance. He covers a rather broad range of musical experiences that are dominated by this rhythmic emphasis in performances. Even in learning the classical compositions rhythm remains the instructive element. As the discussion of rhythm in the Afro-Caribbean music culture continues, you will find that the definition of rhythm moves from action to intent, in which lies the idea of the feel or groove. The intent of the rhythm has to do with the way it is perceived,

\textsuperscript{17} The Despers Steel Orchestra, *Toccata and Fugue, Wedding Dance, Waltz of the Flowers, Finlandia, William Tell Overture*, Laventille Records.

\textsuperscript{18} West Indian Tobacco Desperadoes-The Best of Despers, *Pallestra, Merry Wives of Windsor*, Hildrina Records.
conceptualized, and performed. This requires learning that goes beyond the mere acting out of a meter. This then is why the bodily approach to rhythm in music must be considered in the learning and teaching of rhythm, strumming and movement in the North American school steel band. The intent in establishing a groove is integration with all else that is occurring. Not just the sounds, but the mood, timbre, phrasing, tones, breath, contour, and the emphasis of the whole rhythmic experience. Within this multi-dimensional expression the groove is realized, not as a multi-faceted thing but as a coherent flowing movement. The music, then, is a by-product of a process of learned rhythms, strumming and movement, with the melodic and harmonic ideas easily expressing other areas of the shared rhythmic experiences. As description is often more difficult than demonstration, it is within the student’s best pedagogical interest to be a student of performance in education regarding the Afro-Caribbean rhythm studies. The nature of the steel band allows for the full exploration of melody, harmony, and rhythm in a way that other ensembles cannot because of the rich integration of the Euro-American music concepts into the African derived musical aesthetics in rhythm.

This experience has been an undeniable reality in world music in general, where African derived rhythms are practiced. It must now be studied from this perspective by the North American school steel band students and teachers in particular. This approach will move the study of the calypso rhythm in a direction that more clearly represents the character of this genre and brings students more fully into the rhythmic experience they seek. The steel band does not just represent the integration of cultures in music, it also integrates all of the elementary, intermediate, and advanced concepts and principles of
music. The oral/aural skills can and must be presented in the living experience of the
learning and teaching of this art from.

The steel band is history, theory, and performance practice in music--being
created and experienced in the now. The gap between music history, theory, form and
analysis, and ear training becomes one whole experience not just a listening analysis.
These elements are simply characters in the overall musical drama--they are all present.
However, it is not their individual function that determines the musical education of the
student but their seamless integration, suspended and expanded by the infectious rhythm
section or “engine room”.

The extent of the compartmentalization of musical concepts in the performance
practice in the North American school steel band, and the student’s conceptualizing of
this approach, destabilizes the rhythm and frustrates the individual student’s rhythmic
development. Relational listening is key. If one cannot hear the relationship of
themselves to the whole and the relationship of the whole to themselves, then their
rhythmic experience is often times unsatisfactory. The studies of Afro-Caribbean music
performance, hand drumming, the rhythm section or “engine room” and/or the steel band
performance practice must be studied and taught as rhythmic integration, meaning one
groove. The North American school steel band struggles with hearing multiple grooves
and the aim is to hear the one that is the real or master groove. This experience is
common to African-derived music where the song, dance and rhythm function is one in
feel, groove and expression. One of my earliest compositions for a North American
school steel band was *Kasio*. It was later recorded by the Northern Illinois University
Steel Band with Andy Narell as soloist. This composition was taught according to the
oral/aural tradition as used in Trinidad and so the students experienced the closest thing
to being in Trinidad. I had been the soloist on this work and made much use of the
concepts in learning and teaching that you are now reading. From my original experience
to Andy’s rendition, much of the rhythmic intent remained and Andy’s solo was an
excellent addition to this work. Another of my compositions, *Chantwell*, was recorded
by another University who utilized written notation with very different rhythmic results
regarding the feel and/or groove.

In my experience the longest distance in learning and teaching is between hearing
and doing. This applies in the study of rhythm, strumming, and movement in the steel
band music culture. The major area of struggle and challenge for students and teachers in
their performance practice in North American school steel band rhythm studies, occurs
within the path of going from hearing and/or seeing by sight reading to doing or
experiencing in the same way they hear. There are about eight things that are responsible
for the rhythmic disconnect that I have observed and that students’ experience. They are:
1. Lack of rhythmic awareness.
2. Lack of rhythmic discernment.
3. Practicing with an emphasis contrary to the feel or groove.
4. Not realizing that what you think you are doing and what you are doing is not
   the same.
5. Not paying close attention to rhythmic relationships or interlocking parts.
6. Unaware that space in rhythm is what one is also learning to perform.
7. Not beginning with the movement of the body, long before making a sound.
8. Not singing or humming an internally linking rhythm to the one you are hearing.
These observations are by no means an exhaustive list, but can serve a useful pedagogical purpose in the learning and teaching of rhythm, strumming and movement in the rhythm section or “engine room” of the steel band as a whole. They are also applicable to the Afro-Caribbean hand drumming practice. Approaching the steel band rhythm from the standpoint that anyone can do it, simply because of the ease with which the instrument can produce a sound does not often result in the best musical rendition nor the most satisfying rhythmic performance. It might be instructive to remind teachers and students that those in the steel band tradition of Trinidad are culturally schooled long before they touch a pan to learn. They are already melodically, harmonically, and definitely rhythmically adapted to what they are going to learn in the steel band. The rhythm of the language, the calypso song being played over the air, the constancy of the musical environment, neighborhood steel bands and hand drumming community groups and year round events are all part of the Trinidadian student’s informal education. With this in mind then, teachers and students in the North American school steel band must realize the gap in their formal music education and/or performance approaches so as to better access the musical undertaking of the Afro-Caribbean music culture demands. When they chose to perform a transcription of a Trinidad steel band, especially a Panorama arrangement, they are imitating some of the best musicians in World Music culture. These musicians are talented, disciplined, hard working, and well schooled in the art of the performance practice of the steel band tradition. The excellence of their performance does not derive from what can seem to be just creativity, or talent, but is rooted in approaching music from a disciplined and intelligent oral/aural study that is immediately applied in practice.
REFLECTIONS ON THE PRACTICE OF RHYTHM IN DAILY LIFE

During my time in Desperados, I remember practicing as a way of life, simply because musical activities were not seen as something separate from daily life. It was integral to one’s common duties. However, because of this kind of cultural orientation no one seems to pay any attention to time, in terms of how long we were going to practice and to some extent when we actually were beginning. The practice session was a highly social event and waiting around to get your part was not seen as wasting time but as social time. Not all of it, however, was constructive as can be found in many cultures.

The North American school steel band teachers and students can glean from this approach to the study of the rhythm, strumming and movement in the Trinidad steel band. The discipline and hard work that is necessary to produce music that is representative of the full scope and depth of this art form must be taken into account. The insights that I have just shared can serve as an instructional aid, from the standpoint of letting the students in the North American school band know that their frustration in their rhythmic studies has also to do with the time limitation on their learning. Though reading music can be time efficient it is not always quality proficient, especially when it comes to rhythm, strumming, and movement in the performance of the rhythm section or “engine room” in the North American school steel band program. The steel band’s social context
is highly playful and deeply disciplined. However, to the uninitiated it seems only playful, not realizing that this element of play is one of the ensemble’s strongest appeals and that it is supported by a well-disciplined musical undertaking. Students and teachers then, who are only attracted to playing without giving any serious thought to the study of the rhythm, strumming and movement, find that they can only perform in the steel band as a kind of novelty act. The students themselves often times continue to experience the rhythmic frustration that is the missing link to a more meaningful music experience. I am impressed with the students and teachers who recognize the kind of hard work that is necessary to learn and teach the rhythm, strumming, and movement in the steel band tradition, and choose to study it, and also with those who simply choose to enjoy listening to it being performed.
CHAPTER 15

THE PANORAMA STEEL BAND RHYTHM SECTION OR “ENGINE ROOM”

Most of the North American school steel bands utilize transcriptions of Panorama compositions and arrangements in their study of the steel band music of Trinidad. However, though this has some pedagogical benefit, it does not often times address the fundamental need of the rhythmic education for the individual student, and the overall group. Listening to the Panorama steel band and then trying to reproduce their quality of performance requires a more studied approach in rhythm. The Panorama steel band rhythm section or “engine room” is in and of itself a mosaic of rhythm activities that require a heightened awareness of rhythmic sensitivities. Every performer in the rhythm section or “engine room” understands his part as being a time keeper, within that micro community of other time keepers. This, then, positions each member in the rhythm section or “engine room” on a solid rhythmic pattern in which he makes his contribution to the groove. He has no need to solo because his function is generative, meaning he generates the needed part that completes the rhythmic movement. The discipline to perform as one of the iron, scratcher, cowbell or conga players in the Panorama steel band is demanding, because they are expected to maintain the same rhythmic figure without deviation throughout the performance which lasts about ten to twelve minuets. This discipline is tested more when the steel band takes to the street during the Carnival
parade. For these rhythm players to perform up to five or six hours straight is common. The Panorama steel band is by far the largest steel band performance one can encounter. The precision of the rhythm, strumming, and movement is essential for this massive musical event to be done with the musical integrity and expression that is meaningful. The rhythmic organization in the rhythm section or “engine room” of the Panorama steel band is a complex and highly ordered practice. It is important that the students and teachers in the North American school steel band realize the distinction between this type of steel band performance practice and the non-Panorama steel band performance practice. Though the Panorama steel band is performing at the highest level of competition for steel bands in Trinidad, it is not always the best fit for students and teachers in the North American school steel band to model in their learning and teaching of rhythm. The reason for this is that the North American students and teachers do not have the cultural schooling, the time, nor the same process of conceptualization that are used in the oral tradition to learn and teach these larger more complex compositions. Therefore, the stage pan side or stage side can serve as a better educational model. This will allow for a clear listening experiences and rhythmic grasp.
CHAPTER 16

THE STAGE SIDE STEEL BAND RHYTHM SECTION OR “ENGINE ROOM.”

The consideration of the steel band called the stage pan side, or stage side as it is referred to in Trinidad, is a group worthy of study in the Trinidad steel band tradition for the North American students and teachers in steel band performance practice. This group is selected out of the larger Carnival or Panorama steel band members to study and perform both calypso, classical, and a variety of musicals styles for performances at yearly events and international tours. The group is much smaller and the caliber of the musicians is often the highest in the steel band. Due to this group’s size and quality it can serve as a better model for the North American school steel band teachers and students in their studies of rhythm, strumming, and movement and the steel band as a whole.

In the study of any musical genre that has multi-dimensional rhythms, it is always beneficial if one has a recording that is clearer and easier to distinguish. Recordings of these smaller stage side groups are often more conducive for study and analysis than panorama steel band recordings. The stage side groups are treated as the official steel bands to represent Trinidad and Tobago on the global music stage and also as primary ambassadors to the world. The calypsos performed at Carnival in the larger steel bands are sometimes used as they are or are rearranged for a more concert setting for the stage
side. This is also the group that does most, if not all, of the classical pan music repertoire. The manner of learning and teaching is still according to the oral/aural tradition even though there are more band members who can read music today. The rhythm, strumming, and movement in the stage side steel band takes on a slightly different rhythmic texture, because of some changes in the miscellaneous percussion instruments being used in the rhythm section or “engine room.” The drum set and congas remain the dominant rhythmic providers, while instead of the iron, one will hear the cowbell as the main bell voice. Added to that is the scratcher or quiro, claves, tambourine, and maracas or shack shack. There are a host of other smaller percussion instruments that are used based on the different styles of the music, the skill of the percussionist, and the mood or color of composition. During an international tour there are only about three or four rhythm players in the rhythm section or “engine room.” One player is on drum set, one on congas, and one or two on miscellaneous percussion instruments. The refining of the rhythm and the establishment of the feel or groove in this setting, reaches a level of rhythmic expression that gives more refined rhythmic depth and smoothness of movement to the strummers and the overall steel band sound experience. There is audio of the stage side at its zenith on the recording “Pan in Honey” by Trinidad Desperados. In this recording one can hear the following samples:

*Pan in Harmony* - Aldwyn Roberts (Kitchener)

*Fiery* - Cecil Hume (Maestro)

*Fire Fly* - Kenny (soloist- Robert Greenidge)

*Flag Woman* – Aldwyn Roberts (Kitchener)

*Fever* - Aldwyn Roberts (Kitchener)
In these samples students and teachers must pay close attention to the rhythm section or “engine room” and the strumming patterns, as they provide the very refined and solid rhythm foundation for the rest of the steel band. In listening to the excerpts of the stage side, students must remember that these compositions were learned in a concentrated and well developed manner. The emphasis was not simply on speed of grasping the right notes, but with a devotion to the highest quality of musicianship and musical intelligence possible on the steel drum. The highest levels of oral pedagogy and the attention to dialogue between voices and rhythms are realized in the practice sessions of the stage side. Rhythm not only informs the calypso, but remains the central core of the learning and teaching in the performance practice of the classical works and all the other styles performed by the stage side steel bands. The skill of choosing the best voicing and instruments so as to achieve the fullest sonic experience in either a calypso or classical composition is another of the many musical decisions that is refined in the stage side. The teachers and students in the North American school steel band will do well in their studies of the ensemble to give closer attention to the voicing, rhythms, and instrumental choices represented in the audio samples. As the need in the North American school steel band to expand the educational insight and pedagogical benefits continues to grow, the model of the stage side must be of greater significance to the school steel band program as they perform in this African derived music ensemble. The

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stage side also performs much more familiar compositions than the Panorama steel band to the North American student and teachers. The Caribbeanzation of American popular music, and other styles common to students and teachers in North America, are performed by the stage side. This helps both students and teachers go from the known to the unknown in their studies with greater musical ease.
Another musical resource available to North American school students and teachers are the even smaller Trinidadian steel bands that have established themselves in American music culture. Often times the rhythm players are also Trinidadians. This group utilizes even fewer instruments, yet are able to maintain the rhythmic vitality of the calypso or style being performed. The substitution of instruments such as the electric bass for the six bass steel drums and the utilization of other melodic instruments to enhance lead lines does not take away from the rhythmic feel or groove which is the central concern of our study. The specific reference to the small Trinidadian steel bands in America in no way negates the contribution of the small American steel bands who have studied the music culture and are life long learners of this art form. However, since the aim is to educate the North American school steel band student regarding rhythm, strumming and movement, we make every effort to expose American students to the original sources of this rhythmic expression, which is the people, while at the same time showing Americans who have being successful in the studies of the Trinidadian music culture in the steel band performance practice. The small steel band usually has one or two lead tenors, a double tenor, double second, guitar or cello, a six bass, drum set, conga, iron and/or cowbell. Rhythm patterns are simulated on the hi-hat and the snare
drum clave rim strokes. Listening to this kind of orchestration brings even more clarity to the individual rhythms and strumming patterns used in the larger steel bands.
CHAPTER 18

GOING FROM THE KNOWN TO THE UNKNOWN

Earlier we mentioned the concept of cultural schooling as it relates to the steel band and the rhythm section or “engine room” in the Trinidadian music culture. This same concept should be used as a vehicle in learning and teaching in North American school steel band rhythm studies. Songs for which students and teachers are already familiar within their music culture that are performed by a Trinidadian steel band should be an invaluable resource for the North American steel band.

The familiarity of the melody and the harmony can greatly enhance the learning and teaching of the African derived rhythms that transform the momentum of the song for the North American school steel band student. The utilization of the students and teachers cultural schooling will give students a musical frame of reference that is familiar in sound but different in rhythm, feel, and groove. This allows for the students to make the internal musical adjustments that demand movement represented in rhythm which is important for performing this music.

The culturally schooled students bring a host of assimilated musical ideas, concepts, and responses from their experiences within the American musical soundscape. Though these experiences are familiar they are not always realized until the students are called upon to apply them or relate them to some other new musical experience. In their
attempts to learn the calypso rhythm, for example, they find that they are constantly discovering different ways of moving and hearing what they have heard in terms of melody and harmony. This kind of experience inspires learning and encourages creativity that is fueled by the need to assimilate the new music into one’s experience as a contributor to their overall music education. The pedagogical benefits of such an experience is worth the investment of the student and teacher in the Afro-Caribbean music culture, and the rhythm, strumming, and movement studies in the steel band. The North American school steel band is poised to gain some of the most enduring musical benefits from this World Music ensemble, and also to make a unique contribution to the music education of both the American student and the Trinidad music culture from which it originated.
CHAPTER 19

TRINIDAD AND NORTH AMERICAN STEEL BANDS:

THE DIFFERENCE AS IT RELATES TO RHYTHM

As we undertake to compare the difference between the Trinidad steel band experience in rhythm and the North American school steel band experience in rhythm, it must be kept in mind that this is in keeping with our goal of the pedagogical benefits for the North American steel band students. Many of the steel bands of Trinidad can be used as models for our analysis, but for our purpose we will use Desperados. The Legendary Desperados, as they are affectionately known both at home and abroad, hold a unique place in steel band history in every phase of the development of the people’s creativity, the instruments, and the performance practice of this great tradition. One of the most distinctive features of this steel band is the Afro-Caribbean hand drumming roots that influenced the rhythmic foundation of steel band performance practice.

The North American school steel band’s roots are more in the marching band or classical percussion tradition. These two ways of approaching rhythm are cognitively, conceptually, and physiologically different. The manner in which time and space is felt is reflected in a way that effects the overall rhythmic experience. For example, the hand drummer is a singer and most often times a dancer, whereas the snare drummer is not required to be a singer or dancer though bodily movement is involved. The multi-
dimensional approach versus the more technical focus approach is felt and expressed differently in rhythm and/or movement.

A second difference is that Trinidad steel band pedagogy is mostly oral/aural in its learning and teaching, except in some cases, where a few people read music. The North American school steel band pedagogy is taught and learned according to the written music tradition. These two ways of approaching learning and teaching are felt and reflected differently in rhythm, and or movement.

A third difference is the interpretation of the feel or groove as it relates to the impulse and pulse of the movement. The students in North American school steel band rhythm studies would often ask, “Where is one?” in an attempt to properly access their movement. This feel or groove in the Trinidad steel band is inherent within the African derived music aesthetic, partially because of the cultural schooling. However, in the North American school steel band this is not inherited but earned through the process of analysis, description, and practice. This often produces a different feel or groove in the interpretation of rhythm or movement.

A fourth difference is the linguistic awareness of the Trinidad music culture and the phrasing of the expression in the calypso and the manner in which this language is imitated on the pans that are being performed. The North American school steel band students have little or no exposure to this manner of speech that in itself is dependent on the rhythm found in this music culture.

A fifth difference is in performance practice approaches. In Trinidad, the performing of calypso in a Carnival steel band is different from performing that same
calypso in the concert hall, with a stage side. In the North American school steel band the same performance practice is often use in both settings.

These are just a few of the differences that students and teachers need to be aware of and can be used to help make musical decisions that will add to the quality of the rhythm section or “engine room” and the overall steel band music experience. The North American school steel band experience is no different from any other learning and teaching experience found in culture. Musicians are venturing into musical feels or grooves that are unfamiliar to their own cognitive, conceptual, and movement interpretation in music. The important thing in the process of this venture is to maintain balance in learning.
CHAPTER 20

AVOIDING ALL EXTREMES IN THE PERFORMANCE PRACTICES OF RHYTHM

Our study of rhythm, strumming, and movement in the rhythm section or “engine room,” and the overall steel band experience in the North American school, should stand on a solid rhythmic ground. Performance must lead us to history, then to education, then to pedagogy, and on to an awareness of the thread that links the Afro, Indo, and Euro American experience of the Caribbean to the North American students studying this African derived music in the steel band tradition in rhythm, strumming and movement. To facilitate the continued development of the North American school steel band education, the teachers must advance the pedagogical benefits already being experienced and use this ensemble to teach the broad ranging music capability of the steel band as this ensemble comfortably performs African derived rhythm in music, Western classical music compositions, and the popular music of today. The music culture of the Caribbean is in itself a music educator’s feast and the steel band is the main course, having the African derived rhythm as the common denominator.

The bringing together of the many cultural contributions in Afro-Caribbean music signals the intelligence of avoiding all extremes in learning and teaching for students and teachers in performance as music education. The teachers and students in the North
American school band will do well to study concepts, principles, and performance practices in the oral/aural tradition as it applies to rhythm, strumming, and movement in the Afro-Caribbean music in general and to the steel band rhythm section or “engine room” in specific.

The study of the written music for the steel band must be equally utilized for the written serves as an excellent symbol of the intent of the composer’s or arranger’s ideas. Those who make proper pedagogical use of these approaches in their teaching and learning will reduce the cultural gap and advance these most essential elements in the performance practice in this music--the rhythm, strumming and movement in the North American steel band education.

The selection of repertoire is to reflect the avoidance of extremes. Students and teachers must use the steel band experience to educate as well as entertain in performances. For example, as the comfort level with the calypso rhythm develops, the teachers can use the rhythm section or “engine room” as a lab for the study of other rhythms such as the bossa nova, bolero, rumba, etc., and select music that can be performed along with these rhythms.

The utilization of the calypso and the classical music must also be representative of the idea of avoiding extremes in the learning and teaching process of the students. Though the practice in Trinidad is mostly oral/aural in the teaching and learning of all the different genres, the music education of the people is rather broad. Classical melodies are not considered a foreign music to the majority of Trinbagonians. The North American school steel band student should be the benefactor of this heritage of music performance competency that embraces the larger musical soundscape.
Another of the extremes that ought to be avoided is the place that the steel band and its education receive. Most often this ensemble is a novelty act to the more serious music performed by students in North American school music programs. Although this perception is changing, it is important for teachers and students to be educated regarding the historical, theoretical, social, and pedagogical benefits of this unique ensemble. The rhythm, strumming, and movement, and the Afro-, Indo-, Euro, and American musical connection that the steel band represents is also an educational asset. This will give students and teachers a better frame of reference toward the Caribbean geography and the Afro-Indo Caribbean music experience of Trinidad in specific.

An extreme I have observed is the separate concert setting for the steel band and the percussion ensemble, or the percussion ensemble and other World Music ensembles. This arrangement in the percussion program can be the result of many things. For example, the demands that are placed on the teachers and students, the priority of the area, or the lack of training involved in the performance practice of the steel band. This then creates an artificial separation where by students in the percussion ensemble do not think of themselves as world percussionists and steel drum players do not think of themselves as percussionists. In my experience, when doing percussion ensemble and steel band as one concert the separation fades. The benefits of doing concerts with the percussion ensemble and steel band as a single concert is that both ensembles do less repertoire but have higher quality because they can both explore the oral/aural tradition and have more time to cultivate the pedagogical benefits and cultural context of the music being performed. This can also be applied to percussion ensemble and any other World
Music ensemble a school may have. The end result is that students reap a broader educational benefit, which is the goal of their schooling.

The extreme of unintentionally reducing the percussion ensemble and the steel band to preservation ensemble must be avoided. This applies to both the Trinidad steel band and the North American steel band experience. The need for collective creativity in rhythm is instructive.
CHAPTER 21

STRENGTHENING RHYTHMIC AWARENESS

As rhythmic awareness is strengthened it influences every other area of musical performance because it is the very essence of the internal rhythmic source that seeks expression in the form of music. The movement of the body in response to rhythm continues to be the first expression that a student must develop. To say it another way, after calling someone for a long time with a faded voice, which sometimes they hear and sometimes they don’t, it is exciting when that voice is strengthened and communication is clearer. So, as the rhythmic development continues to increase, the satisfaction of the teacher, student, and the audience also increases for the North American School steel band rhythm program.

These shared benefits among students are realized as they move farther and farther away from listening to themselves and their individual parts and really begin to listen to the master rhythm which is the sum total of all of the parts. This principle is a reflection of the most basic of human experiences we learn as an individual and we experience and express as a community in the rhythm, strumming, and movement in the Caribbean music culture.

The steel band and its rhythmic identity, as when performing any African-derived music, carries within itself the legacy of a people’s cultural traditions interwoven,
symbolized, and shared in rhythmic communication. This remains equally true regarding their classical pan music heritage. The bomb, which eventually took on a classical music tradition was performed in calypso rhythm. Whether the rhythm, strumming, or movement is learned from a strictly oral/aural tradition or a strictly written tradition in the North American school steel band, the process must not overshadow the goal of rhythmic development in the steel band program. In our efforts to avoid extremes we must also not forget to place the greatest emphasis on the most needed areas of study. In the case of the North American school steel band, these are learning and teaching in the oral/aural tradition, learning fewer compositions with higher quality rhythmic sensitivity, strengthening the rhythm, strumming, and movement, and entering the groove verses trying to create it.

The rhythmic frustration of students and teachers in the North American school steel band is a welcome pedagogical challenge for the students and teachers who see their education as an opportunity to travel beyond their own rhythmic experience in their personal development. The steel band, and specifically performance practice in rhythm, is equipped to expand the musical and rhythmic awareness skills necessary to refine the musicianship and personal satisfaction that comes from learning and, more so, sharing that learning in the academic institution. Some of the more specific educational benefits of strengthening rhythmic awareness through the process of rhythm, strumming and movement for the North American school steel band as I have observed are as follows:

1. Making fuller use of the whole body in receiving and representing rhythmic expression.

2. Closing the gap between hearing, feeling, and doing the rhythms.
3. Connecting more fully with others in the rhythmic experience.

4. Recognizing the thread that links all of the rhythmic activity together through cognitive and practical performance practice.

5. Serving as a rhythmic conduit in bringing out the most of the musical experience for all who are impacted and affected by it.

6. Sharing in the larger world music community as an educator who teaches through doing and uses music as an entry into understanding others.

The strengthening of rhythmic awareness in African derived rhythm, strumming, and movement in the North American school steel band rhythm section or “engine room,” and in the steel band provides a needed pedagogical benefit in the study of Afro-Caribbean music. The students who struggle in their rhythmic development in this art form can know that after their experience in the Afro-Caribbean studies in rhythm, strumming, and movement, their needs well be addressed in their education.

It is important for the students and teachers in the North American school steel band rhythm section or “engine room” to have specific learning outcome goals. The development and awareness of realizing rhythm, strumming, and movement as an expression of the body in motion and emotion in performance transforms the musical experience.
CHAPTER 22

CONCLUSION

The growth of the North American school steel band program is clearly a testament to the ensemble’s appeal. As this growth continues, the need for insider’s perspectives on the how and the why, and not just the what, of this art form has become essential. The educational benefits offered by this ensemble as it relates to world music in general and music and cultural studies in education, in particular, is worth the economic, academic, and artistic investment. The representation of the Afro-, Indo-, Euro, and American music heritage in the Caribbean music culture has been captured and constructed in the steel band. The study of rhythm, strumming, and movement is a pedagogical necessity and a benefit to teachers and students. It is important that the teachers and students receive a broader cultural understanding of this Art form and that the essential pedagogy in music education in Afro-Caribbean steel band music addresses the rhythmic challenges experienced by students. This will add increasing musical quality to the ensemble experience for students and teachers in North American school steel band World Music programs and expand the music culture experience of society.

The concerns that the steel band addresses in the North American school world music program and the necessary rhythmic education were echoed long ago, at the Tanglewood Symposium:
“Music of all periods, styles, forms, and cultures belong in the curriculum. The musical repertory should be expanded to invoke music of our time in its rich variety. Including currently popular teenage music and avant-garde music, American folk music and the music of other cultures.”  

Since these findings, there has been a marked increase in the inclusion of music of different cultures in North American schools, mostly in colleges and universities. However, learning and teaching in world music programs continues to experience difficulties due to the lack of teachers trained in the music’s cultural pedagogy from which the music was harvested. The steel band is no exception. Though The North American school steel band has made impressive progress in their performance practice, there is a need for a closer look at their approach to rhythm, strumming, and movement in the rhythm section or “engine room” and the steel band’s overall performance practice.

Music education involving the African derived music of the Caribbean must incorporate the study of rhythm in culture as an essential component of the student’s and teacher’s experience. This approach will continue to enrich the pedagogical, cultural, and overall educational benefit to the North American School’s Steel Band program.

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**Score**

APPENDIX A

BASIC CALYPSO RHYTHM PATTERNS TO BE USED ALONG WITH THE TUNE PROVIDED FROM PAN IN EDUCATION CD.

Figure 5

Figure 6

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APPENDIX B

“DE CHALLENGER IS MINOR

BY MARK LOQUAN”
"DE CHALLENGE IS MINOR"

Arranged by Amrit Samaroo

Performed by BP Renegades Youth Steel Orchestra

Composed by Mark Loquan

Written by Christophe Grant

Published by MLQ Music Ltd (email: MLQpan@hotmail.com)

Advanced Level
Moderately Difficult to Difficult

Scored by Kareem Brown

Edited by Satanand Sharma, B.Mus., M.Mus.,

Lecturer, UWI Center for Creative & Festival Arts

St. Augustine Campus

Trinidad and Tobago W. I.

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"DE CHALLENGE IS MINOR"

Arranged By Amrit Samaroo

Composed by Mark Loquan
Written by Christophe Grant
Scored by Kareem Brown

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De challenge is minor
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