

I'M WITH THE BAND: CULTURAL EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY
FORMATION WITHIN STEEL BANDS

A Thesis

by

JOSHUA ALLEN MUETZEL

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Chair of Committee,
Committee Members,
Head of Department,

Kimberly Kattari
David Donkor
Ira Dworkin
Steven Oberhelman

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ABSTRACT

How do a steel band's practices, customs, and traditions create its unique social culture, and how are these practices rooted in the cultural history of the instrument? This text examines the history and evolution of the steel pan in Trinidad, and draws conclusions about how steel bands, both in Trinidad and elsewhere in the world, form communities through practices that are rooted in this history, such as liming and learning by rote. This project used one steel band, Texas A&M University's Maroon Steel, as a case study to compare against Trinidadian steel bands, observing both traditional and modern practices to determine the presence of any significant similarities and if so, the reasons for those similarities.

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I'm With the Band: Cultural Education and Community Formation

Within Steel Bands

Joshua Muetzel

“We can find a key to the nature of *communitas* through the flow of music, one of the greatest endowments that gives joy.”

Edith Turner

Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy

1. INTRODUCTION

On a chilly Friday night late in autumn, I stood amongst some of my closest friends as we began to play our last song. We were performing in a park, a crowd of enchanted passersby in front of us, a set of train tracks behind us. Mere months before, we were all total strangers, coming together with nothing in common except our mutual interest in steel pan. Now we were all playing a show together after working so hard to perfect the performance we were putting on. As we reached the “big finish” of our last song, a freight train came around the corner, blaring its horn to warn of its approach. Caught off guard by this loud intruder, we looked around at each other, continuing to play but looking for some direction as to what to do. We all seemed to come to a silent understanding, and extended our “big finish” into something much, much longer, finally crescendoing to the end of the song once the train had passed. In that moment we were able as musicians to adapt and make the most out of an unfortunate situation. But we were only able to do that because of the previous months of rehearsal and learning we did in the presence of each other, and the bond we developed as a result of the social culture of our steel band.

For years this has been the first thing that comes to mind when I think about my own experiences playing in steel bands in the United States. I had never experienced anything else like that, and that feeling of playing so well together with people I had only recently been acquainted with was truly a wonder to me.¹ Growing up I was a very shy person and it was hard for me to make friends, and this has continued on into my present life. How was I able to bond with these people so quickly, to the point that we were able to silently communicate as musicians? I had also never been involved in any kind of musical ensemble setting, so for a while I attributed that feeling to playing in an ensemble. But as time went on and I kept playing with new people and learning more, I realized there was something special about playing in a steel band, or at least something different.

In this project, I set out to determine what this difference was. How do a steel band's practices, customs, and traditions create its unique social culture, and how are these practices rooted in the cultural history of the instrument? I hypothesize that the importance of the social dimensions of an ensemble has been passed down not only in Trinidad, but in ensembles throughout the world that have had some kind of experience with Trinidadian ensembles. I am interested in determining the ways in which ensembles outside of Trinidad and Tobago develop and maintain this sense of community that mirrors the importance of the social dimensions of Trinidadian ensembles. For this project, I focused my attention on Maroon Steel, Texas A&M

¹ My experience here describes being in a state of "flow," which Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi defined as "the holistic sensation present when we act with total involvement" and as a state in which "action follows upon action according to an internal logic which seems to need no conscious intervention" (Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow and the Foundations of Positive Psychology : The Collected Works of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2014, pg 137)

University's steel band, to start. In order to begin, I researched the history of Trinidad and the steel pan to develop a strong and detailed foundation for my project.

2. HISTORY OF TRINIDAD AND STEEL PAN

Trinidad was originally settled by indigenous peoples of the South American mainland, somewhere around 5000 BCE. Being only seven miles away from the Venezuelan coast at its closest point, Trinidad was the obvious first place the seafaring indigenous people would encounter. Those who decided to stay on the island named it Iere, or “land of the hummingbird,” hummingbirds being significant in their culture as they believed them to be the spirits of their ancestors.² Two groups of people, the Arawak people in the south and the Carib people to the north, settled the island, and engaged in battle with each other frequently, usually over women, as women were able to produce children and were therefore considered to be of high value.³

In 1498 Christopher Columbus encountered the island, claiming it for Spain and naming it Trinidad, after the Christian Holy Trinity. Columbus and his men had been stuck at sea for several days with little drinking water and little wind to get them where they needed to go, so upon seeing the three peaks of what are now known as the Trinity Hills, Columbus rejoiced and named the island after the Holy Trinity, at the same time fulfilling a promise he made at the beginning of the voyage to name the next place he discovered after it.⁴

Spain made multiple attempts to establish a permanent settlement on Trinidad, failing in 1530, 1553 and 1569. The “unruly natives” that were meant to be controlled by Spain’s conquistadors would not accept the invaders in their land. Spain was finally successful in

² Smith, Angela. *Steel Drums and Steelbands: A History*. Blue Ridge Summit: Scarecrow Press, 2012, p. 13

³ Ibid., p. 14

⁴ Ibid., p. 14

establishing a permanent settlement in 1592, when the city of St. Joseph was founded, only for it to be burned to the ground three years later by a British explorer, Sir Walter Raleigh.⁵

Spain began to enslave the native people of Trinidad in order to work on tobacco plantations, under the excuse that the Carib people were cannibals, and therefore less than human and worthy of being enslaved. These claims that the Carib people were cannibals have never been proven. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Spain began to establish Roman Catholic missions on the island, much to the dismay of the native people. This led to uprisings and attacks on Catholic missions in 1637 and 1699, the latter of which came to be known as the Arena Massacre, as the Carib people, led by their chief Hyarima, attacked the Arena Catholic mission, killing three priests, the governor and several other officials. These uprisings would lead the Spanish to seek revenge against the native people, and worked them quite literally to death on the plantations. By this time, the native Trinidadian population had dwindled almost to the point of extinction, and in order to replenish their workforce, toward the end of the eighteenth century, Spain began to bring in enslaved African people from the Guinea Coast, Western Sudan and Congo regions, marking the beginning of African slavery on the island.⁶

Africans brought with them what they could, which was not much. In Africa, music had been an important part of life, as important as “eating, sleeping and breathing,” so enslaved Africans brought what they could in order to keep this tradition alive.⁷ Music was used for all

⁵ Ibid., p. 15

⁶ Ibid., p. 16

⁷ Ibid., p. 22

kinds of things in Africa, from marking the changing of seasons to signaling for a hunt to begin. One of the oldest instruments brought over from Africa was the “talking drum.” Shaped like an hourglass and covered in animal skin, these drums were held under one arm and beat with a stick with the other. The drum could be squeezed by the holding arm, changing the sounding pitch after being struck. These drums were used to imitate the language of different tribes and could literally be used as a form of communication. These drums were particularly effective over long distances.

When they arrived in Trinidad, enslaved African were sold to plantation owners. Every effort was made to make sure that no two Africans from the same tribe would go to the same plantation, in order to reduce the amount of communication that could happen between enslaved people. Music and drumming, however, remained a major part of enslaved people’s lives. Drumming was “not only festive but spiritually empowering and an expression of an identity alternative to the one imposed on them by the planter class,” especially useful during these times to keep energy up and morale high while working.⁸ Enslaved Africans realized the importance of rhythm and its power and ability to keep the human spirit going.

Carnival celebrations in Trinidad were a key place where Africans could find some reprieve from the strenuous and exhausting work they were forced to do. Carnival was originally celebrated in Trinidad by the French. Carnival, celebrated in the days leading up to Lent, comes from the Latin phrase *carne vale*, or “farewell to meat,” signifying the fast that would occur during Lent. This could also be read as “farewell to flesh” and signify more the worry-free

⁸ Stuempfle, Stephen. *The Steelband Movement: The Forging of a National Art in Trinidad and Tobago*. Barbados: Press University of the West Indies, 1995, p. 71

atmosphere of the celebrations. It should be noted that during this time, Trinidad was still under Spanish rule, but a large number of French settlers immigrated to the island in the late 18th century for access to free land, after Roume de St. Laurent obtained a *Cédula de Población* that encouraged Roman Catholics to swear allegiance to King Charles III of Spain and settle in Trinidad. French plantation owners celebrated Carnival with elaborate balls, decked out in costumes and makeup. Enslaved people were excluded from these activities, largely because there were often parades through the streets where the French owners would masquerade as enslaved Africans, pretending to be them and imitating their drumming songs and dances. The French knew this would likely incite violence and therefore kept the enslaved Africans out of the loop.

Enslaved people held their own celebrations though. In their own homes and backyards, enslaved Africans found time to “celebrate their culture and mock their masters.”⁹ They engaged in activities from their homeland, including mask making and costuming. Music and drumming were a large part of celebrations as well.

In 1797, the British seized control after an invasion led by Sir Ralph Abercromby compelled the Spanish rulers to cede control of the island. British colonial control didn't change much in Trinidad to begin with, with the exception of an influx of more settlers from the United Kingdom. However, as this was a time of abolitionism in England, antislavery sentiments were prevalent.¹⁰ Slavery was finally abolished in Trinidad in 1833, though it was replaced with an

⁹ Smith 2012, p. 25

¹⁰ Brereton, Bridget. *A History of Modern Trinidad, 1783-1962*. Heinemann, 1981, p. 61

apprenticeship period that ended with full emancipation in 1838.¹¹ To celebrate, the newly freed Africans paraded through the streets reenacting a Canboulay march that they had been forced to do while under slavery. Canboulay (from the French *cannes brulees*, meaning “burning cane”) refers to the necessary process of burning sugar cane that happens right before it is harvested. Enslaved people were forced to do the harvesting and were whipped through the streets on the way to the fields. After emancipation, freed persons performed a Canboulay march to celebrate, taking something that had been used to keep them down and turning it into a celebration of their freedom, which is still enacted today.

Around the same time in the mid-19th century, gangs of stick fighters began forming. This stick fighting, known as Kalinda, is a form of African martial art that often involves music and dance. These rival gangs would engage in stick fights that, although meant for entertainment, would often end in bloodshed. In the 1880s, sick of the violence and obscene costumes involved in Carnival and Canboulay, Arthur Baker, chief of police in Port of Spain at the time, led a large group of policemen to attack a group of celebrators, who fought back. This went on for hours and eventually came to be known as the Canboulay Riots.

Tensions between government officials and the freed persons continued to rise until it came to a head in 1883, when, after a particularly violent Carnival celebration that year, a law was passed that banned “singing, dancing, drumming and other music making.” All use of drumming was banned, along with the use of any other “noisy instrument.”¹²

¹¹ Cudjoe, Selwyn R. *The Slave Master of Trinidad : William Hardin Burnley and the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2018, p. 98

¹² Smith 2012, p. 31

Trinidadians would not be kept down though. They found different ways to celebrate and express themselves. One of the first replacements for the hand drums was “Tamboo Bamboo.” The term Tamboo Bamboo comes from the French word for drum, “tambour,” and the material used for the drumming. Players used different lengths of bamboo and either struck the side of the piece or hit the bamboo against the ground, creating a variety of sounds that they used in place of traditional drums. Tamboo Bamboo was the most commonly used instrument in Carnival celebrations for quite some time, especially at the turn of the twentieth century.

Eventually, Tamboo Bamboo was also banned for the same reasons that skin drums were banned. Publicly, the reason given for the banning was that the bamboo tubes were occasionally used by gang members as weapons against other gangs within Trinidad, and that the bamboo was being harvested illegally, but this was of course another way for the colonial rulers to maintain their hegemonic power, as government officials sought to keep the Trinidadians in an extended form of the conditions they were under during slavery, preventing them from using anything to communicate or express themselves.

Within Tamboo Bamboo bands some people played pieces of scrap metal or other similar pieces of trash found lying around. If a player’s bamboo broke during a Carnival parade, they simply picked up something near them, usually something like a hubcap, brake drum or garbage can lid, in order to keep playing. Players began to enjoy the sound of these metallic objects more than the bamboo, as they created a better, more striking sound, and the use of metal “instruments” increased over time, leading to the “Trinidad’s iron age” beginning in the 1930s.¹³

¹³ Ibid., p. 36

As these metal objects were played more and more, they became dented in particular ways, and in some cases actually produced a musical tone. From these humble origins the modern steel pan was born. Early panmen experimented with different metal containers, starting with biscuit tins and eventually moving their way up to 55 gallon oils drums. These drums were discarded by the US Navy, which had a presence on the island during World War II. The US military had set up oil refineries in Trinidad and as a result, many 55 gallon oil drums were left as waste. These drums eventually became the favorite of early panmen. Through much experimentation and the inventiveness of major steel pan innovators, such as Winston “Spree” Simon, who invented the first “ping pong” steel pan (named for the sound it makes), Ellie Mannette, who gave the instrument its concave shape to make it easier to play, Anthony Williams, who organized the pitches on the pan by intervals of fourths and fifths, and Bertie Marshall, who gave the steel pan its signature sound by making developments in harmonic tuning, the instrument evolved to be more musical and more durable.

In the early days, steel pan was a way for these young, black men to find community, creating friendships between each other while they created the steel pan. “The steelband movement ‘is essentially a creation of the masses with their poor housing, overcrowding, underemployment, large families and general lack of opportunity for recreation and cultural expression . . . [it] was as if in unconscious protest of these delimiting circumstances underprivileged youth evolved a medium of self-expression.”¹⁴ Largely shunned from greater society and without a place of their own, the steel pan and eventually steel bands gave

¹⁴ Johnson, Kim. *From Tin Pan to TASPO: Steelband in Trinidad, 1939-1951*. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2011, p. 193

marginalized Trinidadians a way to cope with the oppressive authoritative powers in Trinidad and help them navigate the liminal, statusless state of their lives by enabling them to come together and create both the steel pan and a community of their own. Through this act of bonding, this marginalized community ended up creating a national art form.

As these instruments began to become more varied and grow in popularity, steel bands began to form. These early bands were not well organized, were typically smaller and would play simple tunes as they marched through the streets. The steel pan had now become the sound of celebration in Trinidad, with steel pans featured prominently in Carnival celebrations, taking over for the outlawed Tamboo Bamboo.

Despite this rise in popularity, steel pan was still considered a nuisance by many and steel bands were often dismantled by local authorities looking to keep pannists quiet. This was due to the complaints of middle-class Trinidadians, as well as the fact that steel bands often engaged in violent gang related activity¹⁵ in rivalries with other bands. Pan playing was an illegal act for quite some time, and the steel pan continued to be criminalized by local authorities, just like the talking drums and Tamboo Bamboo before it. Eventually, however, the value of the steel pan was recognized and it became the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago.

The steel pan was used as the main accompaniment to Carnival celebrations for many years, until it began to be replaced by trucks carrying speakers blasting the music louder than a steel band could play. The steel pan wouldn't go anywhere though, and its popularity within the country led to the creation of Panorama, a steel band competition, in 1963. This competition, which is still happening today, sees different sized steel bands from all over the country coming

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 185

together to compete for the top spot. Each band's leader arranges a calypso from the current year, with different variations and twists, and spends the whole year working hard to perfect their performance to win the judges' hearts.

Outside of Trinidad, the steel pan was beginning to grow in popularity, especially in the New York City area, specifically Brooklyn. Pannists and tuners from Trinidad, such as Ellie Mannette, began to move to the area, and brought with them their instruments and traditions.¹⁶ Carnival had been celebrated in New York for a couple decades at that point, but in the mid- to late sixties a perfect storm of increased Caribbean tourism, an influx of Caribbean immigration into New York, and the popularity of calypso, spearheaded by Harry Belafonte, led to a huge boom in Carnival celebration and Caribbean music appreciation in general.¹⁷

The global audience for the steel pan began to grow through the efforts of Trinidadian pannists on missions of cultural diplomacy, playing their instruments and showcasing the music of Trinidad and the Caribbean as a whole while trying to carve out a place as a musician in New York. However, these panmen, along with other Caribbean immigrants celebrating Carnival in New York, had to navigate the political climate of the 1960s in the United States. The Civil Rights movement had begun to pick up steam and as a result, police were often "wary of large gatherings of black people."¹⁸ Permits for parades or gatherings may have been revoked with less

¹⁶ Allen, Ray, Lois Wilcken. *Island Sounds in the Global City: Caribbean Popular Music & Identity in New York*. Institute for Studies in American Music, 2001, p. 119

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 120

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 124

reason than would normally call for such action, and Carnival celebrators were forced to change the ways they gathered for a few years.

Today, the steel pan has become a truly global instrument, as the steel pan and steel bands can be found all over the world. It serves as a cultural symbol for those outside Trinidad, but it does not fall into the category of “quaint folk practice.”¹⁹ Rather, pannists both in and outside of Trinidad continue to develop the art form and “use the instrument to cross cultural boundaries in significant ways” beyond “a strictly insular, ‘ethnic’ context.”²⁰ Today, the steel pan has become an instrument that can be found in many different musical settings and steel bands all over the world continue to perform some of these old traditions and customs that come from the culture that created the pan.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 132

²⁰ Ibid., p. 132

3. METHODS

In embarking on my own research for this project, I decided to interview past and present members of Maroon Steel, Texas A&M University's steel band, about their experiences both in steel bands and in other musical settings. In addition to these interviews, I conducted ethnographic research on the band's rehearsals and performances, as well as some social gatherings.

Participants in the interviews were asked questions about their musical backgrounds and their musical experiences that led them to join a steel band. Questions included but were not limited to the following: How long have you been involved in musical activities, either alone or in a group setting? What kinds of instruments do you play? Have you been involved in any kinds of musical ensembles, and if so, what kinds? When did you first join a steel band and how did you hear about it? When did you first join Maroon Steel and how did you hear about it? What made you want to stay in a steel band? What is your favorite thing about being in a steel band? Follow-up questions based on the participants' answers followed these questions in order to develop a clear picture of what their experiences have been in musical settings and in steel bands.

In addition to the interviews, I conducted auto-ethnographic research on Maroon Steel.²¹ This ethnographic research spans several years, back to Spring 2015 when I first joined the band,

²¹ David Hayano has argued the value of autoethnography, stating that “[anthropologists] who have unique cultural or subcultural experiences and specialized knowledge can share these views with others, and not matter-of-factly submerge them under conventional anthropological paradigms . . . [years] of effort may be saved by native ethnographers who have already acquired internal group membership. The resultant multidimensional view of reality . . . surely would enlarge anthropology's conceptual and epistemological foundations” (Hayano, David M. "Auto-Ethnography: Paradigms, Problems, and Prospects." *Human Organization* 38, no. 1 (1979), p. 102)

but the bulk of the information and focus comes from the past two school years, 2018-2019 and 2019-2020. I have been involved in Maroon Steel through various different phases: I was a member when the band had a proper faculty director, when it had a student director, and when I myself served as director when I was President and Vice President. I feel I am in a unique position to provide an insider's perspective on the practices and culture of Maroon Steel from these different perspectives, and can describe how these practices have changed over the years, and if any of that has affected the way the band runs and how the members within it interact and perform.

3.1 INTERVIEW DATA

Data was collected from 13 individuals. Participants were recruited for this project via a group messaging application that all members of the band are required to be a part of.

Participation in the interviews was optional and there were no consequences for non-participation. Some former members of the band were also asked if they would like to participate. All of the individuals have been in Maroon Steel at some point, with 2 of the 13 being former members of the band. 4 of the participants were female and 9 were male. All participants had some kind of musical experience prior to joining Maroon Steel, with all 13 having a previous musical ensemble experience and 6 of the 13 having previously been in a different steel band.

Participants were asked about their knowledge of the steel pan, its history, and the history and culture of Trinidad. Based on their interviews, I've broken down responses into three categories: minimal knowledge, basic knowledge and thorough knowledge. I assessed

participants' knowledge based on their awareness of the history of steel pan and of Trinidad. For example, someone may know where the steel pan is from and a bit about how they were/are created, but may not know about the circumstances surrounding the instrument's invention. This would distinguish between knowing where the pan is from and how it is made and knowing more about Trinidadian history, including the steel pan's cultural origins.

Minimal knowledge about the subject would be not knowing much about the steel pan's history, where it is from and how it is made, with no knowledge whatsoever about Trinidadian history and culture. Participants responding in this way would have been involved in pan the least amount of time, or have not been as actively involved in the group. Basic knowledge about the subject would be having an understanding of the steel pan's history, where it is from and how it is made, but having minimal knowledge of Trinidadian history and culture. Participants responding in this way would have been involved in the band for a decent amount of time, at least two semesters, and are able to understand the basics of steel pan without necessarily connecting the instrument with Trinidad's history and culture. Thorough knowledge about the subject would be having an understanding of the steel pan's history, where it is from and how it is made, as well as an understanding of Trinidadian history and culture. Participants responding in this way would have been involved in the band for quite some time, maybe several semesters, and have likely been highly involved in activities with the group. These participants would also likely have been involved in the in-class demonstrations conducted by the band each semester.

Knowledge of Trinidad/Steel Pan

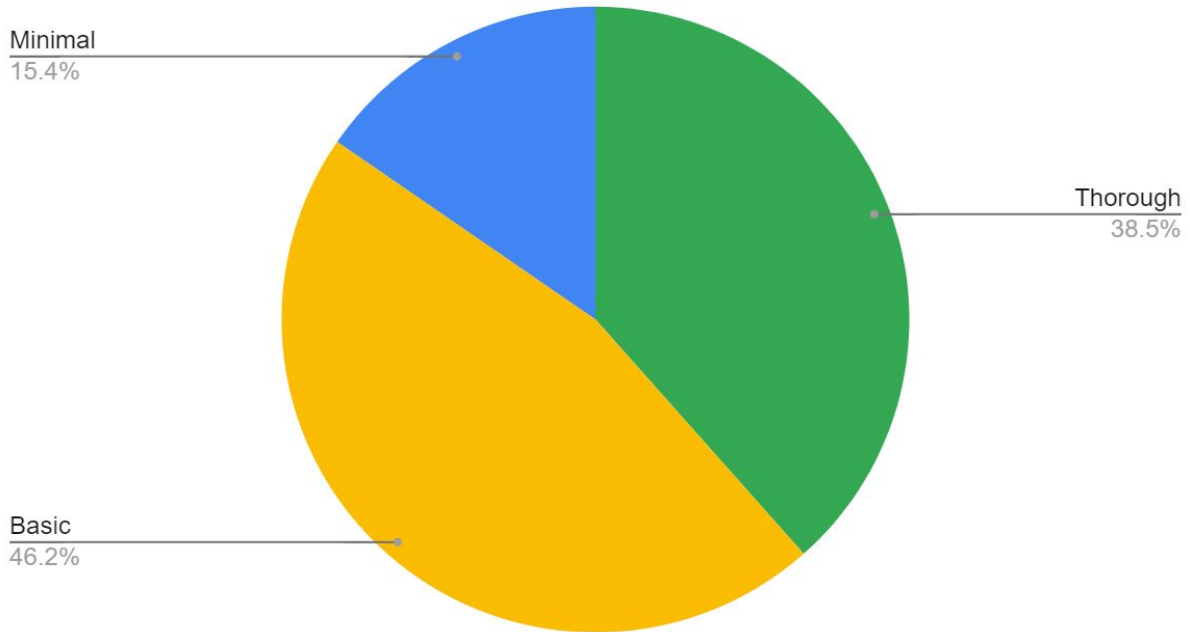


Figure 1

Of the 13 participants interviewed, 2 gave a minimal knowledge response, 6 gave a basic knowledge response, and 5 gave a thorough knowledge response (Figure 1). The two participants who gave minimal knowledge responses have only been in Maroon Steel for about a year, and had little to no experience with steel pan or Trinidad before Maroon Steel. Both were also less likely to be heavily involved in extracurricular band activities (group hangouts, social events) and expressed that their reasons for being in the band were more focused on playing in a musical ensemble rather than something having to do with the community or cultural aspects of it.

Previous Steel Band Experience

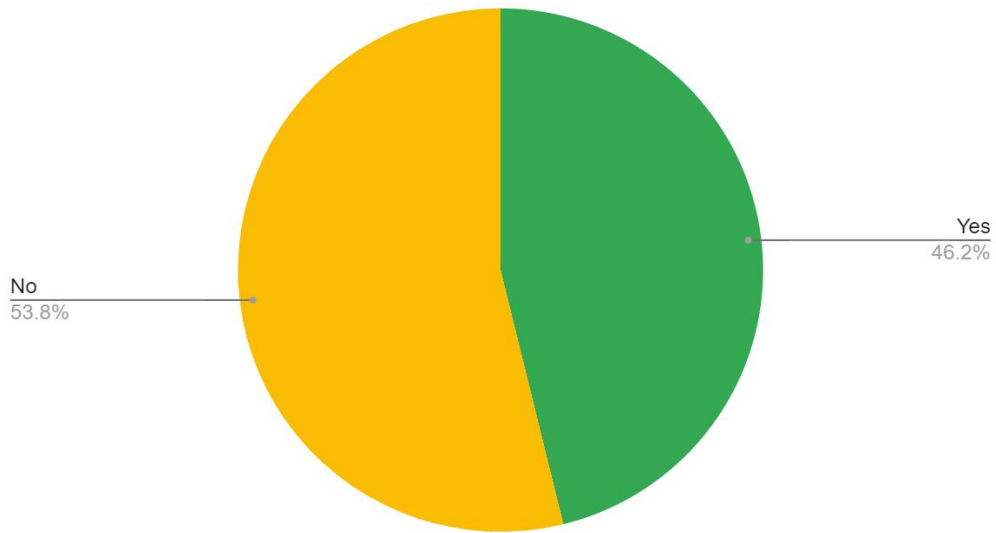


Figure 2

Previous Steel Band Experience By Knowledge Level

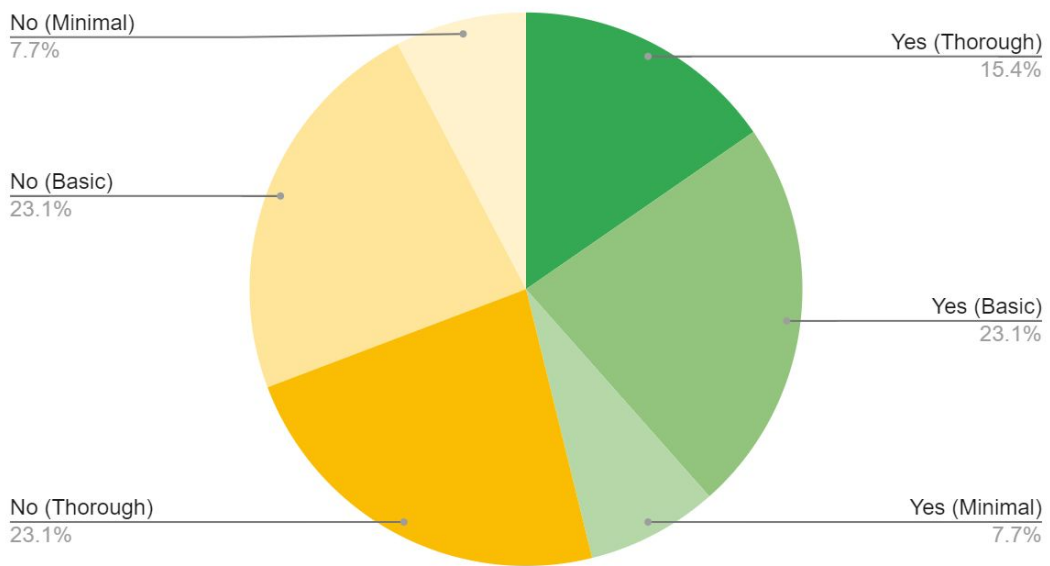


Figure 3

Of the 6 participants that gave a basic knowledge response, half have been involved in steel pan or steel band activities for a year or less. Interestingly, the other 3 participants have had at least a few years of experience in multiple steel bands, making up 50% of the group with previous steel band experience. 5 of the 6 participants that gave a basic knowledge response expressed that the reasons for their involvement in steel pan and steel band activities was for the community or cultural aspects of it, while the sixth participant expressed reasons more in line with wanting to play music in an ensemble setting. Half of the participants in this category were more likely to be involved in extracurricular band activities.

All 5 of the participants who gave a thorough knowledge response have been involved in steel pan or steel band activities for two or more years. Only 1 of the 5 has experience playing in another steel band. All 6 expressed that the community and cultural aspects of the band were among their reasons for being in Maroon Steel, as well as it being a place to play music in an ensemble setting. All 6 participants in this category were likely to be heavily involved in extracurricular band activities.

Participant Thoughts on Steel Band Community

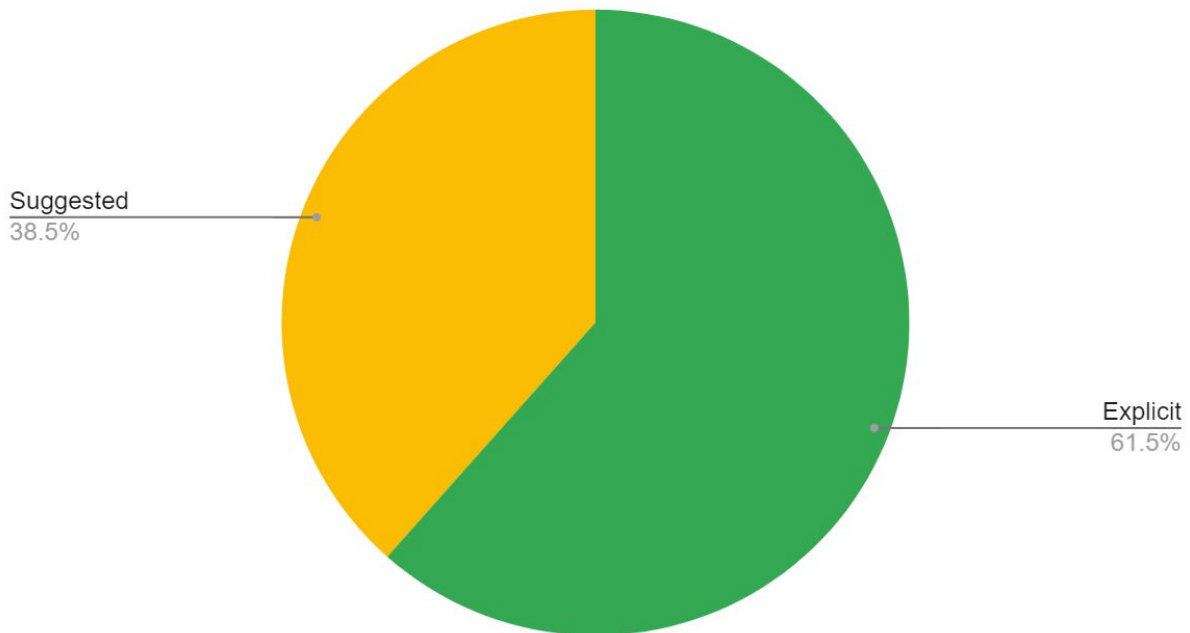


Figure 4

8 of the 13 participants said that they would consider Maroon Steel to be a community. Most expressed sentiments of friendliness and closeness with other members as evidence of this, as well as interacting with band members outside a band setting. For instance, a few participants gave an example of running into other band members outside of rehearsal or performance time and described how that would be a pleasant, friendly experience that they would not have had with members of other organizations they are involved in. However, despite some not explicitly describing the band as a community, all participants during their interviews expressed that they felt bonded with other members, or that the friendliness and welcoming nature of Maroon Steel was one of their favorite things about being in the band, suggesting they held similar sentiments

of community (Figure 4). 3 of the 4 participants who had previous steel band experience stated that this was the same in their other steel bands.

There were some differences described by the 4 participants who had been in steel bands previously, between Maroon Steel and their previous steel band(s). It should be stated that all 4 participants with previous steel band experience had that experience in a high school steel band that was housed within their high school. One of the most common differences was that Maroon Steel is a more relaxed atmosphere and has less rules or restrictions in place than other steel bands. One often cited reason for this was the ability for members of Maroon Steel to move freely about the band in their choice of which pan to play. Members of Maroon Steel can choose to play any of the 4 basic pan parts (tenor, double, triple, and bass) as their own comfort level dictates, whether or not they have experience on that pan, with the understanding that they will work hard to learn the new instrument and will not let the band down. This is in contrast to the previous bands, where participants stated that they were mostly assigned to one type of pan for their entire time in that band. This kind of instrument assignment can create highly skilled instrumentalists, who can learn the ins and outs of a specific pan to the point where the player can play any piece put in front of them. However, participants stated that a system like Maroon Steel's allows players to learn more about steel pan in general and give them a broader understanding of the instrument family. This instrument changing was also said to keep the mind active and engaged in the pan playing process.

Another difference spoken about in the interviews was that previous steel bands had a clear leader or director which created a marked divide between him or her and the rest of the band. Maroon Steel used to be this way, when it was a class and had a professor as a director.

Participants said that this kind of leadership usually lent a slightly more serious tone to rehearsals and performances, in that there was a clear leader who had full control over the band instead of a few different leaders who controlled different things. The participants said that the fact that there was an adult in charge of younger students, usually aged 15-18, created a dynamic that was less relaxed than that experienced in Maroon Steel.

One question asked participants where they think they obtained the bulk of their knowledge about steel pan and Trinidad. The 2 participants who gave a minimal knowledge response had only gathered any knowledge from Maroon Steel rehearsal settings. They each have only been in Maroon Steel for about one year, and have not been involved in any class demonstrations.

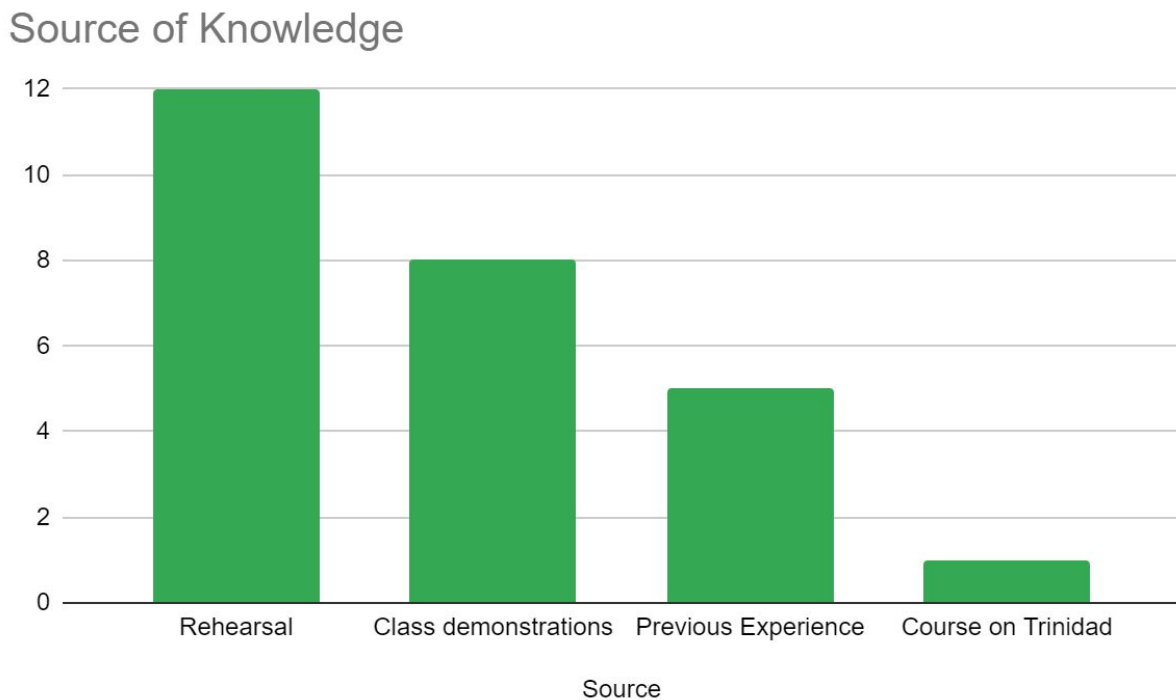


Figure 5

Of the 13 participants, 12 cited rehearsal as a place of learning for them, 8 cited class demonstrations, 5 cited their previous experience, and one a course they took covering Trinidad (Figure 5). Of the 6 participants who gave a basic knowledge response, 5 had multiple sources of steel pan and Trinidad knowledge. 3 of those 5 cited their involvement in Maroon Steel's in-class demonstrations as a significant source of learning for them. These demonstrations cover the entire history of the steel pan, from its origins in West African talking drums to the present, and connect significant events in steel pan development with Trinidadian history. 3 participants in this group also cited their previous steel band experiences as having been a significant source of learning. All 3 stated that their previous directors had made a point of teaching the band about steel pan and Trinidadian history.

Participants who gave a thorough knowledge response also cited multiple sources of steel pan and Trinidad knowledge. All 5 cited Maroon Steel's in-class demonstrations as a significant source of learning. 2 participants in this category also cited other steel and experience (one prior to joining Maroon Steel and one after) as sources of learning. One participant also cited a course at Texas A&M University that covered Trinidadian culture in depth as a significant source of learning.

All but one of the 13 participants stated that rehearsals were a source of learning about steel pan and Trinidadian culture. They said that the knowledge flowed naturally in the playing of steel pans, and that some discussion of history and culture was bound to happen in that setting. Some also stated that if they had a question about the history or culture, they felt comfortable asking their bandmates to get the information.

As mentioned previously, all 4 participants who have some kind of previous steel band history stated that their steel band director was a source of learning for them. All 4 stated that these directors were highly passionate about steel pan, but were not sure if their directors had any experience actually being in Trinidad and witnessing the culture firsthand. 3 of the 4 directors also made a point of teaching the audience at performances about steel pan and Trinidadian culture. It should also be stated that one of the participants not included in this category had different steel band experiences *after* leaving Maroon Steel. That participant's experiences also line up with those of the 4 with previous steel band experiences, with the director being highly passionate about Trinidadian culture and steel band, and making a point to speak about it both to the band and to audiences.

In summation and in general terms, most members of Maroon Steel have at least a basic knowledge of Trinidad and the steel pan, if not a thorough understanding of the history of both. This knowledge is most likely to come from a rehearsal setting or from class demonstrations meant to educate classes about steel pan and Trinidad. Certain practices or traditions come up in rehearsal settings, like learning by rote and liming (explained in detail later) as they occur “naturally” in the band. That is, when band members engaged in one of these practices, whether or not they realized what they were doing, it was given a name and its importance explained. Previous experience in steel bands did not necessarily lead to a higher likelihood that a member had a better understanding of the culture than someone who had no experience. Overall, all members of Maroon Steel (that participated in this study) expressed sentiments that indicate a sense of community (friendship, helpfulness, bonding).

3.2 ETHNOGRAPHY DATA

Over the years I have noticed some changes in the way Maroon Steel works. One of the most significant changes occurred when the ensemble was no longer tied to a class and, subsequently, a grade. Members during my first semester in the band during the Spring of 2015 were required to attend all rehearsals and performances and practice on their own time outside of rehearsals to learn their parts. Though there were times when certain students would fail to meet all expectations, at the end of the semester the band came together and performed exceptionally well. The drive to work hard and get better was higher during this time than I have ever experienced in any of my involvements in steel bands. This is almost certainly because of two things: our dedication to the band and practicing were literally being graded, and the band was under the direction of an experienced, passionate leader who was a clear authority figure over everyone else. When I refer to directors as “experienced,” the word concerns experience playing in steel bands in Trinidad in settings that are more or less traditional. This experience leads to a better understanding of the culture and the craft through practice-based learning in the locale where the steel pan was invented and continues to be innovated. This kind of experience can make directors in turn better educators of those who are not able to go and be a part of those experiences. Granted, even for those who are able to interact with steel pan directly in Trinidad, experience and knowledge are ongoing processes of learning and mastery of an idea or an art form cannot come from some significant encounters, but rather comes from a lifetime of experiences and interactions.

Though a grade was involved, I could tell that that was not the main factor in our collective success that semester. We all truly *wanted* to be better, not just to save our GPAs, but

because we were all there with each other in a setting where our individual successes or failures had repercussions for the entire band.

As the years went on, I noticed things slowly changing within the band. The next semester, the ensemble was no longer tied to a class and the professor who had been in charge was no longer around. The band was saved by some passionate members who had been in it for a while, as they were able to convert it into a student organization and run things themselves. This was great for the moment and kept the band's hopes alive, but the uncertainty of the future loomed. That first year was definitely a period full of trial and error, as we 20 or so students who were previously all peers suddenly needed to find a confident musical director within our ranks and competent leadership to surround her. This change in social dynamic brought some new changes to how the band operated, mostly in the fact that now there was no clear authority figure who could easily enforce rules about attendance and practicing. The President during that time, though respected as a leader by most of the band, was still a student just like the rest of us, and some didn't see her direction as something that had to be followed.

However, these students were definitely a minority and the vast majority of members fell into a sort of mutual respect between everyone in the band, leaders and non-leaders alike, that understood that certain people needed to be in charge in certain situations, but that no one was necessarily ranked higher than anyone else, regardless of position.

This kind of atmosphere has been in place since then. Though there were some troubling times early on when the band as an organization was still trying to get on its feet, things seem to have calmed down to the point of routine or normalcy at this point. Any member, regardless of age, race, sex, major in school or experience playing steel pan, is seen as an equal in the eyes of

the other members. Of course certain members may take charge in particular situations, given that some kind of experience they have is helpful. For example, for the past two years I have been the director of the band in rehearsals, teaching the music and helping others with their parts. This is in large part because of my previous experience in ensemble leading, in particular my previous experience leading that very band. Another example is when members who have experience with moving equipment take charge when a truck is being loaded to head to a performance. In any of these kinds of situations, there may be one or a couple students in charge, but it is never to the point that they are felt as holding rank over others. There is still an equality felt amongst the band, a feeling that everyone must pitch in and help out however they can for the good of the band. At the end of the day, we aren't individuals in that setting but are separate parts of one whole, Maroon Steel.

This equality and lack-of-rank is made apparent by the joking and general light-hearted nature that occurs during rehearsals and performances. Any member can be cracking jokes and having fun with any other member, whether that person be a brand new fresh face that week or one of the longest-tenured members of the band. In general there is a laid back feeling to rehearsals, and though one or two people may be in charge and may be serious at times, it never feels like the mood has shifted to something darker. The serious moments are only signs that everyone cares about the result of our efforts, and laughter and merriment are soon restored to the rehearsal room anyways.

One major thing I have noticed in the past few years in my time in Maroon Steel is that the "culture" of the band that was present during the time when it was a class and when the band had a dedicated, experienced director has slowly gone away and changed into something else.

For example, in my anecdote from the beginning, the band was somehow able to silently signal each other to keep playing when a performance was interrupted by a train. For years this event for me was a clear example of the “special” or “different” nature of playing in a steel band, exemplifying what it was like to experience the bonding and closeness I had felt. However, in semesters since then, there have been similar train incidents that had different outcomes. For example, in the Fall semester of 2018, a freight train came by and interrupted one of our songs. However, this time, the band was not able to connect as we had in the past, and we ended our song amidst the grinding and screeching sounds of the train wheels in such a disappointing way.

After this happened, I began to think about what was different about this group that prevented us from connecting like other groups had in the past. Was it just a fluke of that particular situation? Was it that we were playing a particular song that was not suited to extending for a longer time, like the song we were playing the first time it happened? Or was there something different about the band now, something that hadn't revealed itself so clearly as it had in that moment?

I began thinking that the further the band had gotten away from having a director who has experience with Trinidadian culture and with Trinidadian steel bands, the more it had changed into something different from what I knew. Part of this seemed obvious, in that certain things would undoubtedly be different between when the leadership was a professor and when it was student-led. However, I did not expect such things that I had considered fundamental to steel bands to change. I had thought that that closeness and bond that enabled us to adapt to adverse performance environments was part of being in a steel band, that it might have had something to do with the instruments or the types of music played by the ensemble. But as the years have gone

on I've realized that a major difference has been the lack of experienced leadership, at least leadership experienced in leading a steel band, or a "world music" ensemble.

However, throughout all this time, there have been a few things that have remained constant. Certain practices, customs or traditions have always been practiced. At first, during my early years in the band, I didn't necessarily notice or realize what was going on. But as I learned more about the steel pan and steel pan culture, I made connections between what happens in Trinidad and what I experienced in Maroon Steel. For example, during all my years in the band, *liming* (explained in detail in the next section), which is a special form of hanging out, has been an ever-present practice. It is important to how steel bands function, and is something Maroon Steel has never failed to do. Another key practice in Maroon Steel rehearsals that I've observed is teaching by rote, or teaching via example instead of through some form of text. This practice happens in almost every single rehearsal and is crucial in order for some members to learn the songs. I had always thought it was just other members being nice, but again as I learned more about the culture, I noticed that these were practices that also occurred in Trinidad.

In more recent years things have begun to trend back to the way they were when I first joined that band. It has felt like it used to, with the band playing more in sync with each other and bonding in a way that I haven't experienced since my first semester. I believe this is in large part due to a few student leaders, myself included, getting back to the roots of the ensemble and making sure that the history of the steel pan and culture of Trinidad are understood and respected. This has involved taking care to ensure that important practices to the band are continued, and when they happen, explaining their significance to the band so that the other members may begin to develop an appreciation for the art form they are performing. Overall, the

band feels more musical, more in tune with each other, and as a result, is behaving more like one big instrument. Andy Narell, one of the foremost pan players from the United States, once said of steel bands that “[when] you put all the parts together it becomes something else entirely, this one giant instrument, this living organism.” His words reflect my feelings about my time in steel bands perfectly, that when the band all comes together, playing well with each other, it takes on a different form that is totally unique to steel bands and is hard to explain if one hasn’t experienced it for themselves. It’s a transformation that comes when everyone is on the same wavelength, easily communicating and performing with each other. It’s an atmosphere that is unlike anything else. But what changed from my early days in pan, to a few years ago, to now? What was missing or different a couple years ago that has now resurfaced?

4. PRACTICES, CUSTOMS, AND TRADITIONS

During my time in Maroon Steel and in other steel bands, I have noticed some practices, customs, and traditions that the band engages in that help to foster this atmosphere of social bonding and collective performing, and these practices relate to similar practices performed in Trinidad.

The first practice important to this atmosphere is called “liming.” Early steel bands in Trinidad were often made up of communities that represented specific neighborhoods or locations, and as a result, members would be prone to hanging out, or “liming,” outside of rehearsal settings. “To lime is to relax, to enjoy oneself. Liming can range from conversations around the coffee pot to visiting friends to the full-fledged bacchanal of a night in town.”²² Liming can be any social activity, big or small, “provided the activity has no explicit purpose beyond itself.”²³ Bands, comprised largely of lower- and middle-class Trinidadians, engaged in liming, often spontaneously, as an anti-structuralist, anti-authoritarian way of bonding together.

Maroon Steel hangs out as a band a couple times per semester. These events are often organized by some kind of leadership in the band, but are sometimes organized by other members, or are not organized at all and are impromptu gatherings. These events are important to the steel band, as the bonding that happens at these events creates a closeness between members that improves performance. As the members get to know each other better, they grow more comfortable with each other and experience a melding of thought and emotion that is

²² Juneja, Renu. "The Trinidad Carnival: Ritual, Performance, Spectacle, and Symbol." *Journal of Popular Culture* 21, no. 4, Spring, 1988: p. 87

²³ Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. "Liming in Trinidad: the art of doing nothing." *Folk* 32, no. 1, 1990: p. 23-43

shown during performances, experiencing a state of flow as a group in which members react to other members' actions without much conscious thought about how or why.

Another important practice done by both Maroon Steel and Trinidadian bands is teaching by rote. In Trinidad, the pan players learn to play each piece through a process called learning by rote. Instead of relying on written sheet music like many other musical art forms, steel bands learn through a process of watching, listening and repeating, following the band leader's example as he or she demonstrates the phrase. In this way, anyone who can watch and listen can become a member of a steel band. There is no prerequisite that they understand how to read some kind of music notation, and there isn't even really a need to understand or have even played a steel pan before. In using this learning process as the standard, steel bands in Trinidad are able to engage with a larger part of the community without the risk of excluding or alienating those who may not have specific skills typically associated with performing in a musical ensemble. "[Steelbands] are inclusive organizations. Panyards are open to everyone, and novices are encouraged to develop their musical skills and to become band members. Wide participation is in fact emphasized much more than individual virtuosity. Pannists strive for individual excellence but with the aim of perfecting the band as a whole. Playing pan is perceived as a group activity, and for the most part it is steelbands rather than individual pannists that achieve musical reputations in Trinidad. Thus communities continue to build large bands, and through collective effort hope to become victorious in the national arena."²⁴

²⁴ Stuempfle, Stephen. *The Steelband Movement: The Forging of a National Art in Trinidad and Tobago*. Barbados: Press University of the West Indies, 1995, p. 217-218

Though members of Maroon Steel use sheet music to do the bulk of their music learning, there are times when the music is taught by rote. The most common way this happens is in regard to rhythm, when the band leader who is directing rehearsal is often asked to “scat” the rhythm of a particular section, using “ba” sounds to perform the rhythm for one person, a section, or the entire band. This is usually followed by the tutees playing along by clicking the rhythm on their sticks a couple times while the director scats in order to make sure they have the rhythm correct before attempting to play it on the pan. Another way members can learn by rote is having another member show them the passage of music on the pan itself. This teaching member does not necessarily have to be a band leader, and often isn’t. One member will play the passage a couple times with the learning member watches, before copying what they saw on the pan themselves. These ways of learning by rote are one of the most significant differences between steel bands and other musical ensembles. The less strict, less structured atmosphere of steel band rehearsals provides room for these non-textocentric teaching moments to happen, and create a more inclusive environment for those that may have difficulties reading music, like those who never learned or those who may have a learning disability that affects their sight reading skills.

Liming and learning by rote were important to the sense of community embodied in steelbands when they developed, something that Maroon Steel learns about and tries to embody themselves. In Trinidad, pan has always been about community formation and creating spaces where those who may not be welcome other places can feel at home. In the early days of the steel pan’s invention, times were turbulent, with working-class Trinidadians growing more and more restless with poor living and working conditions that the colonial government placed upon them. Things came to a head in 1937 when riots and strikes were sparked by “high cost of living,

unemployment and underemployment, low wages, racist hiring practices, the absence of a means for expressing labor grievances, and dissatisfaction with the few elected officials in the government.”²⁵ Oil workers “particularly resented” financial burdens as they knew the oil companies were making huge profits. It was during this time as well that the Americans arrived on the island, bringing with them not only more industrial waste (oil drums), but certain rowdy social behaviors, including a more laidback, friendly attitude mixed with racism and general loudness, that led to a boom in the entertainment industry and an increase in prostitution.²⁶ It was during these tumultuous times that panmen came of age. Amidst great change in Trinidad, early panmen found themselves navigating a difficult space of social upheaval. These conditions undoubtedly influenced pan inventors and steel band innovators as they then began to move forward and create the earliest versions of what became the modern day steel pan and steel band. The community-focused aspects often found in steel bands today have their roots in these tumultuous times surrounding the steel pan’s invention in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

The members of Maroon Steel are taught the history of Trinidad and the steel pan and the importance of that history to the performance of steel pan music. This history has always been taught, at least during my time in the band, in some form or fashion, including brief little quips by the band leaders during rehearsals, longer out-of-rehearsal sessions, in-class demonstrations, and in-performance program information that is spoken to the audience. All the while, the importance of accurately representing the culture from which the steel pan came and recognizing the hardships that the marginalized inventors went through during the creation process has been

²⁵ Ibid 1995, p. 45

²⁶ Ibid 1995, p. 45

of high importance to the band. As a symbol of Trinidad and the steel pan, at least around the Bryan/College Station area, Maroon Steel and its members have the responsibility of not only representing the culture in an appropriate way, but also educating the greater community about that culture as well.

In Trinidad during Panorama performances, steel bands will wear matching costumes that contribute to both the overall performance and the unity amongst members. The steel band appears the same way it sounds, as one cohesive group, “one giant instrument.” These costumes can be either simple, like wearing a t-shirt with the band’s name on it, or more elaborate, involving flashier fabrics or patterns.

Maroon Steel practices the same kind of costuming. For performances, members wear a t-shirt with the band’s logo on it, creating a unified look, an added performance element and a symbol of the band’s community. The band also holds a contest every so often to design a new t-shirt, which any member can participate in. The designs are then voted on by the whole band and a new t-shirt is created. These contests serve as another way the band bonds through creation and community gathering.

A final custom or tradition that I feel is of importance is the type of music played by the steel band. In Trinidad, steel bands play a variety of different styles of music, including calypsos and socas, pop and classical arrangements called bomb tunes (when these pieces would be debuted, it would be like dropping a bomb on the audience), and original pieces written for steel band. The majority of pieces played are either arrangements of calypsos or socas, or original pieces. For example, at Panorama, the major steel band competition held in Trinidad during Carnival season each year, bands must come up with an arrangement of a calypso from that year,

make some interesting variations and tweaks to it, and then perform it after spending a year perfecting the performance. The rule that a current calypso song must be used for Panorama competitions keeps certain musical traditions alive in Trinidad and Tobago.

Maroon Steel plays a wide variety of musical styles, including traditional Trinidadian calypsos and socas, pop and classical arrangements (bomb tunes), and original pieces written for steel band. These pieces also vary greatly in difficulty. Maroon Steel specifically puts an emphasis on trying to play pieces that are not stereotypical of the “island vibes” typically associated with steel pan music (e.g. Jimmy Buffett, Bob Marley, The Beach Boys, etc.). As mentioned earlier, Maroon Steel and its members have a responsibility as a world music ensemble to accurately and appropriately represent the culture from which the steel pan sprang, and a big part of this is avoiding stereotypical music. Instead, Maroon Steel focuses on playing calypsos and socas that are more representative of the Trinidadian musical tradition, as well as original pieces written specifically for steel bands that are continuing to grow the repertoire for these instruments and help showcase the versatility of the steel pan to a new audience.

These practices, customs, and traditions I have noticed in Maroon Steel draw directly upon the same or similar practices that are performed in Trinidadian steel bands. Both in Trinidad and in the United States, these practices serve not only their intended purpose (liming as a social gathering, learning by rote as an educational tool) but also help to foster an atmosphere of inclusion and community that sets steel bands apart from other musical ensembles. Without these practices, steel bands would certainly not function in the same way, either in Trinidad or the United States. The inclusion of these practices in normal band activities by band leaders in

the United States maintains a connection to the culture and history from which the instruments came that helps to foster a similar sense of community.

Now that the foundation for these social dimensions and their purposes can be identified in the practices, customs, and traditions of Trinidadian and other steel bands, how can we come to a theoretical understanding of how these practices create community?

5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the information I gathered from my interviews, my auto-ethnographic research, and from previous thoughts I had about the function of the social dimensions within steel bands and how steel bands generally work, I have developed a theoretical framework to support my findings.

5.1 RESTORED BEHAVIOR

In *Between Theater and Anthropology*, Richard Schechner defines restored behavior as “strips of behavior [that] can be rearranged or reconstructed . . . independent of the causal systems (social, psychological, technological) that brought them into existence . . . [with] a life of their own.”²⁷ Any behavior, action or performance, is some combination of other behaviors that already exist in some form. Behaviors “exist separate from the performers who ‘do’ these behaviors” and as a result, can be “stored, transmitted, manipulated, transformed”²⁸ Performers “get in touch with, recover, remember, or even invent” these behaviors and then rebehave the behaviors. This restoration of behavior is “carried on in rehearsals and/or in the transmission of behavior from master to novice.”²⁹

Maroon Steel is restoring the behaviors of steel pan performance in every rehearsal and performance, learned from directors with experience in Trinidad (master to novice) and from

²⁷ Schechner, Richard. *Between Theater & Anthropology*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, p. 35

²⁸ Ibid., p. 36

²⁹ Ibid., p. 36

students of those directors to other students. The nature of steel pan performance behavior allows it to be recreated by anyone with access to a steel pan/steel band. Maroon Steel performs steel pan with a critical difference/distance.

After conducting some archival research, I was able to determine some rough estimates for the demographics of Maroon Steel since its inception in 2013.

Racial Demographics of Maroon Steel

White	Latinx	Asian	Black
65%	16%	14%	5%

Table 1

Gender Demographics of Maroon Steel

Female/Female-Identifying	Male/Male-Identifying
56%	44%

Table 2

First, the majority of Maroon Steel’s members are white, and it has historically been white for as long as I can recall (Table 1). The majority of members have also been women or have identified as women (Table 2). This is an immediate signifier to an audience, whether it is noticed or not. Audiences in other parts of the world, especially somewhere like Central Texas, will watch a steel band perform and have no idea of the history of the instruments (unless the band makes a specific point to educate the audience). By representing itself in this way, as an almost entirely white band performing Caribbean music, Maroon Steel risks continuing colonizing actions of the steel pan and Trinidadian culture.

In Trinidad, the majority of steel pan players are of African descent, with a smaller amount of Indian descent. This is reflective of Trinidad's demographics in general, with the two largest groups, each making up about 36% of the population, of African descent and those of Indian descent. Pannists have also historically been mostly male. The steel pan was very much an art form that rose out of the oppressive circumstances that Trinidadians of color endured during the centuries of colonial occupation. The steel pan is an evolution of instruments that acted as a source of community and coping for oppressed Trinidadians, who came together through performance and used these behaviors to contend with colonial powers and their actions.

Maroon Steel on the other hand, while performing the same behaviors, is performing in a drastically different setting and with drastically different histories, both for the area in which it performs and for the members of the band. Performing the living tradition of a group that may be almost completely different racially and socially can quickly become problematic and a source of continued colonial thinking.

This difference in how the behavior is repeated, by mostly white faces and bodies, affects how Maroon Steel, and by extension the steel pan, is received and understood by an audience. If such a band does nothing to educate the audience about the steel pan and its origins, it continues colonial behaviors of appropriating an art form for its own use. If such a band goes about the performance appropriately and with respect to the culture, making note of the steel pan's origins, the performance and the restored behaviors used in it will always be slightly different, slightly off, from its original counterparts in Trinidad, tinged with the band's necessary remarks that "the pan is not ours, but is something we fell in love with." This obviously differs from how the same behaviors are received in Trinidad, where steel pan performance is part of the national identity.

However, in both Maroon Steel and Trinidadian bands, the steel band serves as a vessel for community formation, albeit for groups that are demographically and socially very different and in need of community for drastically different reasons.

5.2 COMMUNITAS

In his seminal work *The Ritual Process*, Victor Turner develops his concept of “communitas” as a way of describing a “modality of social relationship” experienced by those who are in a “communion of equal individuals” beyond any kind of higher structure.³⁰ Through his work with the Ndembu in Zambia, Turner theorized that studying the ritual behavior of a group can help to understand social processes. Using this as a guide for my project, I studied the ritual behavior of Maroon Steel (practices, customs, and traditions) in order to determine how the band’s own communitas is developed.

Edith Turner, collaborator and wife of Victor, has defined *communitas* to be “the sense felt by a group of people when their life together takes on full meaning” and “a group’s pleasure in sharing common experiences with one’s fellows.”³¹ This feeling is very much present in all kinds of musical ensembles, as Turner explains in chapter 3 of her book *Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy*:

Music is a fail-safe bearer of communitas, significantly because it is the genre that is by its very nature the most ephemeral. Music will always die. It exists only as long as the vibrations continue. Music is not found in structures or abstracts; it

³⁰ Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Routledge, 2017, p. 96

³¹ Turner, Edith. *Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 1-2

does not depend on words or on obeying the rules or, strictly speaking, on capitalism, although capitalism is of the essence in the entertainment industry, as elsewhere. But music in itself is like our blood flow, there and gone, fresh, used, and restored. Even the idea of it is emotional. It has its living existence in its performance, and its life is synonymous with *communitas*, which will spread to all participants and audiences when they get caught up in it.³²

Turner speaks here about the ephemerality of music, how it only exists while it is being performed. This ties music in with *communitas* in that *communitas* is often found in liminal settings, where the participants are going through some kind of significant life change, transitioning “from a lower to higher status . . . through a limbo of statuslessness [sic]”³³ Edith Turner describes *communitas* as “a gift from liminality, the state of being betwixt and between.”

³⁴ It is important to note here the liminality of the lives of members of Maroon Steel. Many members of the band are in their first year or two of college and are still adjusting to the huge change that has happened in their lives. College for many is a liminal state, between their familiar childhood and the unknown future. These students may have trouble finding the right path forward and may struggle with their identity as they go through these major life changes. Turner goes on to say that “[during] this time, people find each other to be just ordinary people after all.”³⁵ Maroon Steel is a setting in which college students at Texas A&M can come to realize this and find that there are others in similar situations dealing with similar change in their lives. Through this shared experience, along with their shared love and appreciation for the

³² Ibid., p. 43

³³ Turner, Victor, p. 97

³⁴ Turner, Edith, p. 4

³⁵ Ibid., p. 4

music they play, Maroon Steel provides a *communitas* that encourages friendship and bonding between members that fosters better performance together. I should make it clear that, while I am drawing comparisons between the roles that steel bands served in aiding both oppressed Trinidadians and students at Texas A&M through liminal states, I am in no way saying the experiences are the same. The marginalized black men in Trinidad who created pan and found community through it endured the racism and classism that had been present in Trinidad for centuries that members of Maroon Steel, the vast majority being white, have certainly not experienced, at least to the same extent.

A feeling of community or belonging was one of the most prevalent findings from the interviews and my own auto-ethnographic research. Though only 8 of the 13 participants described Maroon Steel as a community, all 13 expressed sentiments about coming together through music in friendship, and bonding in such a way that makes the band bring new meaning to their lives. Many of the participants in the interview process described making friends in Maroon Steel as “effortless” and almost like it just happened automatically. Many attributed this feeling to the general atmosphere in the band, as the laid back, relaxed nature of rehearsals encouraged members to relax themselves, and in turn were more open to new things, like trying new instruments or making new friends. In addition, the “statuslessness” of Maroon Steel (members taking on different jobs as the situation arises and stepping in or out of leadership roles) creates a less formal atmosphere and that statuslessness is key to the formation of *communitas* in the band.

Based on the interviews and my auto-ethnographic research, it seems clear that Maroon Steel creates a sense of *communitas* amongst the members of that band that serves to bond them in their liminal state in life and helps to improve performance as well.

5.3 MUSICKING

Christopher Small has argued that “there is no such thing as music” because “[music] is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do.”³⁶ He coined the term *musicking* to define this act, defining the word in his book, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*, as follows: “To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing.”³⁷ Obviously a band such as Maroon Steel engages in such an activity as musicking, with the members coming together and engaging in the performance of music. It is important to note, however, that musicking includes any part of a musical performance, including the listening performed by an audience. In this way, both band and audience *music together*, sharing an experience of *communitas* that bonds them in a meaningful way for however long the performance lasts.

³⁶ Small, Christopher. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1998, p. 2

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9

This was mentioned by several of the participants in this study, who expressed joy in not only playing music with others and in performing for an audience but also in the exchange of emotion and joy *between* band and audience that is experienced during a performance. As Edith Turner has discussed, music is a “fail-safe bearer of *communitas*” and this feeling is achieved and heightened in Maroon Steel, as well as other music ensembles, through musicking together.

The act of musicking can also generate a flow state, such as that which I experienced myself when the train came by, in which band members are able to act and react to the actions and reactions of others, seemingly unconsciously. Musicking has the ability to create this kind of flow state amongst those in participation, as the musicians are hyper-focused on playing the music in such a way that they are able to generate a flow state through the act of musicking together.

5.4 AFFECTIVE ECONOMY

In her article titled “Affective Economies,” Sara Ahmed discusses the ability of emotions to “*do things*.”³⁸ She challenges the notion that emotions are privately experienced phenomena and are instead exchanged between individuals in a kind of affective economy. Ahmed urges us to “consider how [emotions] work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective” and argues that emotions “align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments.”³⁹

³⁸ Ahmed, Sara. “Affective Economies.” *Social Text* 22, no. 2, 2004, p. 119

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 119

This kind of affective economy is present within Maroon Steel, and ties in with the *communitas* felt by all members through the act of musicking. One of the most commonly referenced things during the participant interviews was the “vibe” felt amongst the members of the band. In other words, members of Maroon Steel share in a positive, relaxed environment created through the act of musicking, an act that involves the exchange of positive emotion via the performance of steel pan, and through this affective economy a feeling of community is created within the band.

6. CONCLUSION

Steel bands have a unique social climate unlike anything else I've experienced in other social situations or even in other musical ensembles. Through the tumultuous history of Trinidadian musical styles and iterations, something has survived that is present in steel bands today. The hand drums and other musical stylings brought over from West Africa that make up the foundation for the steel pan had a profound effect on what would follow, specifically the significance those instruments held to those enslaved in Trinidad. Taken away from their tribes, those instruments served as a signifier of home, as a way for enslaved people to maintain some kind of connection to their homeland and as an idea to gather around and form community. Through my research so far and to the extent of this project, I have determined that this importance has been passed down through musical practice, and in steel bands specifically the customs and traditions of liming, learning by rote, musical repertoire and costuming are fostering that sense of community.

As Maroon Steel continues to adapt to changing group demographics and shifts in leadership, I have noticed a new change in band dynamic, particularly in the past couple years. In the 2019-2020 school year, the band has a new group of young musicians who are highly passionate and knowledgeable about steel pan and Trinidad, some having gained that enthusiasm from previous steel band experiences while others have realized it in their first encounter with a steel pan. Regardless, the future is bright for the ensemble and these young performers are already developing a greater understanding of the history and culture of the steel pan and Trinidad than others have in years past, and I believe that started with the student leadership of the 2018-2019 school year. The officers of the organization during that time had developed a

thorough understanding of the history and culture and made a point to bring it up more often than it had been in the past. The president of the organization in particular saw the importance of the ensemble and its potential for education, both within the band and the community, and fought for more recognition of the ensemble within the department in which it is housed in order to have a better chance at securing resources and to increase the visibility of the band. I believe this mindset has continued forward, with the newer members recognizing the importance of the history of Trinidad to the performance of steel pan and appropriately representing a culture that is not their own.

The results of this study were not exactly as I expected, in that I thought more members would have a better understanding of the history and culture surrounding the steel pan and that more members would have a greater appreciation for the social aspects of the band. What I found out was that while a large number of members do have this awareness of the importance of the community aspects of Maroon Steel, some are more concerned with playing music, regardless of any social dimensions. Some sought out an organization like Maroon Steel simply as a way to continue to play music in an ensemble setting, or to continue to play percussion. To these members, the community aspects of the band, while appreciated, are considered to be second to the musical aspects. However, as stated earlier, all participants interviewed expressed some kind of enjoyment of the social dimensions of the band, some even going as far to say that these social aspects improved certain facets of performance.

During this project, all participants indicated that they felt that it was important to know and understand the history of anything one cares about, in that this information will give one a better appreciation for what they are doing. Even those that did not have a great understanding,

who gave a minimal knowledge response, recognized the importance of knowing the steel pan's history and culture, and expressed a desire to learn more and gain a better understanding.

Part of the reason some had failed to develop a decent understanding of the steel pan and Trinidadian culture was because some did not see Maroon Steel as a serious commitment. Many participants saw Maroon Steel as a form of stress relief, and some felt that they didn't have enough time or energy outside their rigorous class schedules to put more effort than necessary into Maroon Steel. This was not showing a lack of interest or commitment, but rather a realistic evaluation of their time and availability. This lessened participation in band activities has likely led to a lesser understanding of the culture.

Through these interviews I was also able to determine that some aspects of my initial question were correct, in that certain practices, customs and traditions that are practiced by the ensemble aid in fostering that sense of community, and those practices are seemingly rooted in the cultural history of the instrument, its roots in traditional African instruments brought over by enslaved people that aided in maintaining a connection to home and in creating new community, that same community-creating power traced up through Tamboo Bamboo and into the steel pan, creating community for the marginalized young black men who were inventing it.

Further research is needed to confirm the findings of this limited case study. First, research should be done on current bands in Trinidad to determine how similar or different their social customs and traditions are to bands in the past. Bands across the United States should be examined for their social customs, and the directors of these ensembles should be asked about their knowledge and experiences regarding the steel pan and Trinidad, and asked about their thoughts on the importance of teaching those traditional practices and customs. Comparisons

should be drawn between the findings of current Trinidadian steel bands with those of steel bands in the United States to determine how similar or different the practices are and just how rooted American steel band performance is in the cultural history of the steel pan and Trinidad.

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Appendix

In addition to this written thesis, a short educational film and documentary was created as a supplement. This film is meant to provide audio and visual information that cannot be provided through a text-based medium. If the video is not located where this text was found, it can be found on YouTube under the name “The Steel Pan: Trash Into Treasure” at the URL <https://youtu.be/-Y6K8ZIK0YA>.