

ROOTS OF RHYTHM - CHAPTER 13:
THE STEEL DRUMS FROM TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Name _____

Date _____

FUNSHEET - FIND FACTS AND OPINIONS: THE STEEL DRUMS

The steel drums are tuned metal cans or "pans" that can be used to play melodies. They were invented on the two-island nation of Trinidad and Tobago in the 1930s. Mainly used in an annual festival called Carnival, these instruments are now used for playing different types of music all over the world. At the time of their invention, musicians in the festival's parade were using bamboo tubes to make rhythms, by hitting them and stomping them on the ground. However, they were not very loud. Some young boys would play on metal cans to get a louder sound.

Around the time of World War II, one young boy named Winston Spree, found that dents in the bottom of a metal can would make different pitches, and this allowed him play melodies. He and another boy named Elliot "Ellie" Mannette, along with others, experimented as they grew up and improved the pan design. Oil had been discovered on the islands in the 1800s and, because they lived near a military shipyard, there were lots of empty oil drums around. These young steel drum makers began to use the oil drums and learned that the dents in the bottom of the can had to be separated and placed in certain positions. Ellie Manette found that hammering the bottom of the can into a bowl shape made it easier for the performer to play. So pan makers would "sink," or hollow out the surface before placing the notes and tuning them. They also discovered that it helped the sound if they cut off the pan below the playing surface and heated it over a fire.

A rhythmic percussion group called the "engine room" accompanies the melodic pans in the steel drum band. These performers use the drum set, bells, and other metal sounds. The main rhythm for the steel band is called *calypso*.



Map of Trinidad and Tobago



Panic Steel Drum Ensemble

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Directions: Read each of the following sentences and draw an X in the box to tell whether it is a fact or an opinion.

1. The steel drums can be used to play melodies. Fact Opinion
2. The steel drum ensemble consists of tuned metal oil drums and other percussion instruments. Fact Opinion
3. The nation of Trinidad and Tobago should be called just one name, Trinidad. Fact Opinion
4. Steel drums bands should include some guitars. Fact Opinion
5. The climate on Trinidad and Tobago is too hot. Fact Opinion
6. Winston Spree was a young boy when he started to make steel drums. Fact Opinion
7. The main rhythm in steel bands is called *calypso*. Fact Opinion
8. I think that steel drum bands should play very fast and very loudly. Fact Opinion
9. It must be difficult getting from the island of Trinidad to the island of Tobago. Fact Opinion
10. The steel drums are still made from empty oil drums, by "sinking" and heating the metal. Fact Opinion

Tenor Pan – Side View



Tenor Pan - Top View

