

VOL. 1, No. 1, JANUARY 2018

# The Steel Times

A PUBLICATION OF NSSBE



# The Steel Times

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Cover: bass pans on stage before the concert begins. Photo: Kelly Jo Brown.

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The Steel Times is published three times a year: January, May, and September by NSSBE.

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## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Eugene Novotney

I am beyond thrilled to be welcoming you to the first ever edition of the new NSSBE newsletter, *The Steel Times*!

It has been a long time coming... First of all, special thanks and recognition to the all of the people behind the organization of the NSSBE, including the Steering Committee, the Board of Directors, and the first NSSBE President, Dr. Chris Tanner, whose vision and commitment cannot be overstated. But also, special thanks to everyone reading this right now - because if you are reading this, you are already a member of the NSSBE and a supporter. And really, this organization will not continue to exist without you and your support. And I mean that. So this is a very exciting time for us all, and we all can take pride in it together.

Initially, *The Steel Times* will be published three times per year: January, May, and September. Each newsletter will have a specific theme relating to the steelband art-form, and my goal is for each issue to contain something useful. Very appropriately, the theme for this first edition of *The Steel Times* is the First Annual NSSBE Conference to be held on March 10, 2018 in Oxford, OH, and the headlining guest artists for that conference, Victor Provost. Conference organizers Mike Greer and Mike Wendeln have done a wonderful job in bringing together a great collection of artists for the day, and I am super excited to see and hear Victor Provost live - he is just an unbelievable talent, and always inspires. Read the articles to follow for more information about Victor and more details about the NSSBE Conference, and you can check it all out on the website too, where you can also register.



Photo: Kelly Jo Brown.

I am also very pleased to report to all of you that each edition of *The Steel Times* will contain a regular column written by steelpan legend, Andy Narell, entitled *We Kinda Pan*. In it, Andy will talk about composing, arranging, directing, playing, improvising, recording, history, and basically anything else that comes to mind. I am also happy to have the writing team of Ray Funk and Andrew Martin on board as regular contributors, and also, Dave Gerhart as my assistant editor. With a great crew like that, it should be a pretty easy job ahead for me.

And finally, a special thanks to the leadership of the NSSBE, Chris Tanner, Brandon Haskett, and Tom Miller, for believing in me and entrusting me with this newsletter. I appreciate the opportunity.

So please enjoy this first edition of *The Steel Times*, and see you in March.

EUGENE NOVOTNEY is a percussionist, composer, and scholar who has been involved in the steelpan movement in the United States since 1982. He is Professor of Music and Director of Percussion Studies at Humboldt State University in Arcata, California.



## WELCOME TO NSSBE

Chris Tanner

The National Society of Steel Band Educators (NSSBE) embodies an idea that has developed over several decades in the United States: that steel band leaders and directors in this country require a means to interact as professionals. The mission of NSSBE is the advancement of steel band education in the United States, and our goal is to serve as the focal point for this wonderful discipline within the US.

There are pockets of steel band activity – areas containing a number of ensembles within a small region – and there are bands that exist miles apart from their closest neighbor. In any case, despite the diversity in terms of locale, a common factor is that most steel bands in the United States today are housed within educational settings.

As we approached the second decade of the 21st century it was clear that a critical mass had been reached. Steel band programs could be found in all fifty states, and in many regions the growth trend was steady for years. As such the need for a professional society dedicated to steel band education became acute. Professional organizations devoted to particular instrumental or vocal idioms, or to various disciplines such as music education or composition, have existed for decades, providing a valuable service and undoubtedly contributing to the perpetuation of excellence within their respective domains. NSSBE aims to fulfill a similar mission with respect to steel band, filling a void that can no longer be ignored.

We are grateful for your support of this nascent organization through your membership. It will be important in the years to come, as our Society finds its footing, for members to contribute in significant and meaningful ways to the growth and development of the organization. You – the teachers and band leaders who work day to day, year in and year out,



in this discipline – are our greatest resource. As we move through the next few years we encourage you not only to attend our conferences, but perhaps also to consider becoming a contributing author for the website, or even for this newsletter. Through these activities, we will develop connections and increase rapport and camaraderie within our community. Sharing ideas with one another will spur growth and increase excellence in the steel band idiom in this nation.

In closing, there is much to be done. We have arrived at a seminal moment in the story of the steel band movement in the United States, and it is exciting to dream, visualize and imagine what may happen in the near future, and also in the long term within our discipline. My sincere hope is that you will continue to be part of the story of NSSBE as we journey forward, focused on the common goal of excellence in what we do.

Thank you again for being part of this organization. I look forward to seeing you in March at our inaugural professional conference, and to working together to advance the cause of steel band education.

CHRIS TANNER is the founder and Director of the Miami University Steel Band in Oxford, Ohio, and the Chair of the Miami University Music Department. He is the author of *The Steel Band Game Plan*, and serves as President and is a founding member of the National Society of Steel Band Educators (NSSBE).

## WE KINDA PAN

Andy Narell

Hey everybody. Welcome to my column. Eugene Novotney asked me to contribute regular pieces to the NSSBE newsletter and I'm going to try make myself useful. My plan is to write regular pieces about steel band music and pan playing - composing, arranging, directing, playing, improvising, recording, history, random thoughts, etc... I'll try to come up with a format that includes explanation and written musical examples, links to audio and video clips, questions from you, and a space where we can have a conversation.

For today I just want to say a few words about steel band music and people. As I'm sure you all know by now, the pan owes its existence to a history that included slavery and colonial rule, that it was created by teenage youth from poor neighborhoods in Trinidad – boys who ran with gangs and fought with each other. My own involvement with pan began with a community center program for kids in gangs in New York. As a social worker with no musical background, my father launched 20 steel bands in the space of one year at the Educational Alliance on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Before he ever went to Trinidad he'd already organized the first steel band festival in the USA in 1962. He didn't even know that the pan had been created in the same type of environment that he was working in, but he saw the effect that steel band had on the kids and he believed it could be a positive force in our society. He went to Trinidad shortly after, during what I would call the Golden Age of steel band music (more about that in future articles), and discovered that those same kids that had been beating on paint cans and fighting with each other – now 20 years older – had transformed themselves into disciplined orchestras playing music at a world class level. Violence had been replaced by music competitions, and steel bands were touring the world and playing in major concert venues. Women were starting to play in the bands, following a period in the



50's when they had responded to their exclusion by creating all girl bands – yet another piece of steel band history that was unwittingly duplicated at the 'Edgies' (as it was called by everybody there), where my dad launched America's first all-female steel bands during the first year of the program.

The whole story is fascinating and too long for today's article (see Kim Johnson's *Illustrated Story of Pan*), but the point I want to make here is that steel bands transformed not only themselves but their entire society in Trinidad. As the bands became more inclusive they became a place where people of all backgrounds could come together to play music in orchestras. Black, white, Indian, Chinese, male and female, old and young, professional and amateur, educated and uneducated, middle class and poor – the steel band became a place where people could find common ground through the joy of playing music together. And these bands that began as warring gangs evolved into pivotal institutions in their communities.

Steel band music is now an international phenomenon, and everywhere it goes there are the signs – the walls come down and we see a diversity of people playing together that is perhaps unrivaled by any other type of



music. Initially embraced by the rest of the English-speaking Caribbean, the last 30 years has seen an explosion of steel bands around the world, from Europe to Japan, South Africa, Nigeria, Australia, the USA and Canada. There are now hundreds of university, high school and middle school steel bands in the US, steel band schools in Paris and Tokyo, steel bands in South African township schools, and a steel band program in Israel where Jewish, Christian, and Muslim children are rehearsing and performing together.

It's no accident that the development of steel bands in Trinidad coincided with other social movements – civil rights, black power, women's rights – as well as radical changes in jazz, popular, and calypso music. Today is the last day of 2017, and as I sit here thinking about how we are bombarded every day with news of how divided we are, I want to say to you that I believe that we who are making steel band music happen are part of something much greater than ourselves - a musical and social movement that is bringing people together in unprecedented ways. I also believe that in order for steel bands to thrive that the music needs to keep moving forward. I've been trying to contribute to that end for 50 some years now, and will try to be a resource for all of you. So, I look forward to having a conversation with you about music and pan, and let's make 2018 a great year for steel band music.



ANDY NARELL is one of the best known and most recorded steelpan artists in the world. He is internationally recognized as a world class performer, composer, arranger, and scholar, and he was recently inducted into the Percussive Arts Society's Hall of Fame for his lifetime of contributions to the steelpan artform.

## NSSBE INAUGURAL CONFERENCE: SATURDAY, MARCH 10, 2018

Eugene Novotney

On behalf of the entire National Society of Steel Band Educators, I would like to personally invite you to attend our First Annual NSSBE Conference on March 10, 2018 in Oxford, OH on the campus of Miami University and be a part of history in the making!

The featured headline artist at this first conference will be Victor Provost, who is widely recognized as one of the most important and innovative steelpan artists of this generation. Through appearances at concert halls, clubs, and stages throughout the world, he has been meticulously developing a reputation as a “dazzling” soloist, crafting an impressive improvisational voice and style. With a strong foundation in Bebop, a contemporary sensibility, and deep roots in Caribbean music, he seamlessly melds and mixes genres. The Washington D.C. City Paper’s Jazz Percussionist of the Year six years running, his new recording Bright Eyes debuted at #5 on the iTunes Top 40 Jazz Charts and has been met with praise from The Washington Post, Downbeat Magazine, and Hot House Magazine, as well as artists and presenters.

Victor’s presentation at the conference will be entitled, Touch and Sound: Practical Elements of Steel Pan Performance. In this practical and useful session, Victor will offer his thoughts on how best to approach playing steelpan instruments based on his years of experience in the field. He will offer tips for developing proper steel pan technique, and will demonstrate short & effective exercises designed to increase proficiency on the instrument. Victor, who is known for his mature sense of touch, will also address the impact of dynamics on ensemble playing, and explore the best practices in steel pan performance that he has developed throughout his career.

In addition to his presentation, Victor will also close the conference with a steelpan performance with members of the Miami University Steel Band (Dr. Chris Tanner, Director), as well

as special guest musicians Rusty Burge, vibraphone; Michael Sharfe, bass; and John Taylor, drums. This performance will include selections from the standard steelband repertoire, along with jazz standards performed by Provost and the guest musicians. This will be an excellent opportunity to see and hear one of steelpan’s most important voices in an intimate and personal setting. Don’t miss it!



Victor Provost

The conference will also include several other presentations and sessions by leaders in the steelpan movement in the United States. Dave Longfellow, who is the Director of the Virginia Rhythm Arts Project and a nationally recognized steelpan educator, will present a hands-on session on the Trinidadian Engine Room. This interactive presentation will focus on expanding the knowledge of percussion styles common to the Panorama-style steelband through an examination of engine room techniques common to the steelbands in Trinidad & Tobago. The session will explore various approaches to instrumentation and rhythmic grooves with regard to typical musical styles such as



Soca, Calypso, Kaiso, and Latin. In addition, Longfellow will demonstrate advanced techniques for steel band drumset players, including how to direct the band from the drumset, how to drill a band in rehearsal, and other helpful concepts that have proven to be useful in improving a band's overall sound.



Dave Longfellow

Dr. Jason Koontz, who is the Director of Percussion at Eastern Kentucky University and a recognized world percussion expert, will lead a session on Integrating Brazilian Percussion Instruments Into the Engine Room. Often, steelband directors encounter Brazilian musical styles such as Samba and Bossa Nova in the pan repertoire, yet they often have little knowledge or experience in the Brazilian percussion traditions. This hands-on session will explore the authentic techniques and folkloric rhythms used for Brazilian percussion instruments, and will demonstrate how to adapt and integrate these instruments and rhythms into your steelbands' engine room.

Dr. Brandon Haskett, who is Professor of Music at Saginaw Valley State University and a nationally recognized steelpan scholar, will moderate a roundtable discussion, which will provide an opportunity for experts

in the field to address questions relating to steel band pedagogy or other topics of interest within the steel band idiom. Conference registrants are encouraged to submit ideas or topics for this roundtable session via e-mail ([info@we-teachpan.org](mailto:info@we-teachpan.org)) no later than February 15, 2018.

This inaugural conference will be hosted by NSSBE Steering Committee members, Mike Greer and Mike Wendeln, who have truly drawn together a great collection of artists for the day. The conference will be open to members only, with registration available both in advance and on site. Registration costs are \$60 for regular NSSBE members and \$20 for student NSSBE members. The conference registration for NSSBE Sponsors is already included (for one person) through their sponsor membership. Please check the NSSBE website for details and additional information.



Jason Koontz

Finally, and probably most importantly, this inaugural NSSBE conference will be a place where people who are interested in the steelpan can connect, interact, and share their ideas and their passion! If you are passionate about the steelpan and dedicated to advancing steel band education in the United States, let's all get together and have a great time this March in Oxford, Ohio.



Victor Provost

“Provost has reached that combination of sensibility and chops that turn his bop-driven jazz solos into mesmerizing rides that at times swing the listener off into an abyss and then pull him back with a triumphant return home”  
– The Washington Post





# HABITS OF THE STEEL PAN SOLOIST

Victor Provost

Though pan is generally considered a communal instrument and, as such, significant emphasis is placed on an individual's part within the steel band, the steel pan soloist is a player that has acquired the necessary technical, musical, and psychological skills to stand out from his or her peers. The soloist can be called on to present the most demanding pieces of repertoire, improvise fluently, or interpret written scores with virtuosity, sensitivity, and grace. Here are 6 things you can begin doing today to stand out and begin developing the habits of a successful steel pan soloist.

**1. Find an Every Day Exercise.** A successful soloist has developed the habit of playing the instrument every day - not just waiting for ensemble rehearsals to meet. Your Every Day Exercise should take no longer than five minutes and should take you through 12 keys. This should not be repertoire, rather it should be an exercise that deepens your awareness of the aural and spatial interconnections of the instrument. (You begin to see/feel/hear key centers distinctly). Note – your Every Day Exercise should be just one part of your larger practice routine.

**2. Develop a Practice Routine.** A routine practice schedule is essential for the aspiring Soloist. There are countless resources with information on developing a practice routine. Your routine should be:

a. Limited in focus - work on no more than three or four elements at a time towards long term progress. One element is typically repertoire, others may include scale and arpeggio studies, transcribing, and improvisational techniques such as patterns, licks, triad-pairs, etc. to name a few.

b. Free of distractions – if you use your phone for as a metronome, recording device, etc. put it in airplane mode and use headphones.

c. Goal-oriented and flexible – practice routines evolve slowly according to long-term goals.

d. Timed – 45 minutes on, 15 off is a reasonable way to structure practice time. Don't "wear out your chops" - focus on avoiding lower back issues, carpal tunnel, and other repetitive motion injuries.

e. Recorded – this tracks your progress over longer periods of weeks or months and gives you an audible reference with which to identify strengths and weaknesses.

**3. Sticking is Important.** When practicing – particularly memorizing – passages or lines, thinking critically about and writing out sticking patterns is extremely important. Good sticking should minimize both arm movement AND hand repetition.

**4. Study a Variety of Music.** Obviously a pan soloist should be familiar with the repertoire of contemporary music for steel pan. But studying, for example, the Bach Violin Partitas, or Charlie Parker's improvised alto sax solos, or Brazilian Choro music, can also be an invaluable exercise.

**5. Find Your Voice.** The first and second generations of steel pan soloists had no precedent from which to draw and, as such, they all developed very personal and unique approaches to their playing. This is evident in their touch, interpretation of solo playing, approach to improvising, and even the mallets they use. Today's young generation of aspiring soloists have the advantage of being able to listen to and imitate their predecessors, but also, risk not building on that precedent and fully developing their own unique sound.

**6. Develop Career-Healthy Habits.** Be prepared, punctual, and professional. Be nice to people and pleasant (or even *fun*) to be around. Take criticism with grace, be flexible, and make corrections quickly. You probably won't get fired from the gig the first, second, third, or even fifth time you play a C# instead of a B in measure 157, but showing up late to a rehearsal even once can put your job in jeopardy.

Each of these habits can be analyzed and described in greater detail, but these are six ideas - six things you can begin doing right now to help you on your way to being a successful steel pan soloist!

## VICTOR PROVOST'S FOUR EVERY DAY EXERCISES

Take one through twelve keys every day



Here are four examples of Every Day Exercises I've used. Chose one and begin working through all twelve keys. You can use different cycles to get through all keys; 4ths, 5ths, chromatic, whole tone (two sets), minor 3rds (three sets).

Stop after five minutes, even if you don't get through twelve keys. Continue working on new keys and increasing speed.

These are simple, focused lines to get your hands moving!



# VICTOR PROVOST: MASTER OF IMPROVISATION

Ray Funk and Andrew Martin

The inaugural conference of the National Society of Steel Band Educators to be held this March 10, 2018 will feature the accomplished jazz pannist Victor Provost in both a workshop and concert. Based in Washington, D.C., Provost as an internationally regarded and in-demand jazz player who, in addition to releasing his own albums, is a highly sought-after session musician and collaborator performing with Paquilio De Rivera and recording most recently with vocalist Kat Edmunson. Busy by any measure, Provost also leads his own group and is an Arts Ambassador to his hometown of the U.S. Virgin Islands, which honored him with a Special Congressional Recognition in 2014.

Provost released his debut album *Her Favorite Shade of Yellow* in 2011 and quickly gained the attention of the jazz world with bop-oriented originals, jazz standards, Lord Kitchener's "Rain-O-Rama," and Bob Marley's "Redemption Song". His second album, *Bright Eyes* (2016) features a growing cadre of guest artists and another Lord Kitchener panorama classic, "Pan in Harmony." *Bright Eyes* debuted at #5 on the iTunes Top 40 Jazz Charts and has been met with praise from The Washington Post, Hot House Magazine, and Downbeat Magazine which lauded it, "a great jazz album that happens to feature steelpan—as opposed to a great steelpan album that incorporates jazz."

Provost's talent is undeniable, yet his path to steelpan and jazz stardom is rather unorthodox. Born and raised on the island of Saint John, US Virgin Islands, Provost began taking piano lessons as a child and displayed early promise as a musician. However, by the age of 12, he found his true passion and joined Steel Unlimited II Youth Steel Orchestra under the leadership of Trinidadian steelpan pioneer Rudy Wells. Provost first heard Steel Unlimited II as a youth and instantly fell in love with steelpan.

Comprised entirely of youth players, Steel Unlimited II travelled the world, including the East Coast of the USA in the summer of 1992, places Provost found incredible. "The first time we went out was for about a week and a half, two weeks... We did Disney World and New York, then the following year we did Denmark and Germany and that was a month, I believe it was 30 days. And it was a ridiculous number of performances." According to Provost, "Travelling with that group is basically what solidified my desire to be a musician, a working musician, because I love the travelling, and I love the playing, and I love meeting the people. I like experiencing the cultures and I couldn't think of a better way to do that

than doing through music."

In the mid-1990s, Provost came with Wells to Trinidad as part of a Pan Trinbago initiative. It was Provost's first chance to see panyards and he soaked up the Trinidadian scene. Provost continued his studies and in 1998 was the first featured steelpan soloist at the world-renowned Umbria Jazz Festival in Perugia, Italy. Besides playing with pickup groups for tourists in Saint John, however, his career was put on the back burner in the early 2000s. Looking towards his future, Provost left the Caribbean for the University of Pittsburgh with a plan to major in computer science. The pan jumbie caught up with him in Pittsburgh, however, and Provost hooked up with jazz musicians from Virgin Islands and started playing regularly in the area. He eventually ended up in the Virginia Beach, Virginia area teaching steelpan and studying jazz improvisation with the legendary jazz pedagogue Charlie Banacos.

Provost finally settled in Washington, D.C., in 2009 where he promptly established a career. His virtuosic skill has since drawn praise from many including Liam Teague, who, after featuring Provost along with the Northern Illinois University Steelband, notes, "What an amazing musician! I continue to be amazed by his improvisation and playing, in general. He is a wonderful ambassador for the steelpan and is definitely taking the instrument into new musical territory."

Performing accolades aside, Provost is also a noted jazz educator, a role that includes his work at George Mason University where he is an adjunct professor tasked with directing the steelband and developing their jazz studies program. After recently opening its audition process to pannists the program is already attracting talented undergraduate and graduate students. A celebrated pedagogue and clinician, Provost has worked with school and university steelbands across North America. 2017 has already seen Provost featured at New York University, Temple University, Eastern Carolina University, University of Southern Mississippi, high schools from Los Angeles to Maryland, and several different school programs in the Virgin Islands.

He continues to arrange and compose steelband music as well as develop exercises for teaching pannists improvisation skills. His unique combination of pedagogical dedication and dazzling performing chops will no doubt bring the inaugural National Society of Steel Band Educators conference to a satisfying close.

RAY FUNK is a retired Alaskan judge and a Fulbright scholar who is passionately devoted to calypso, pan, and mas.

ANDREW MARTIN is an ethnomusicologist, percussionist, pannist, and Professor of Music at Inver Hills College in St. Paul, Minnesota.

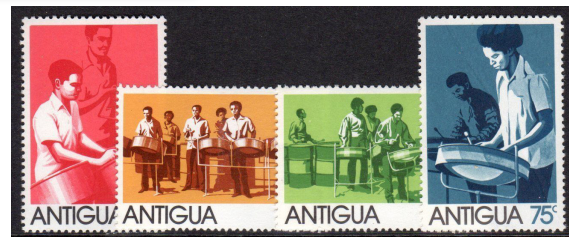
## STEELPAN FOR POSTAGE

Ray Funk

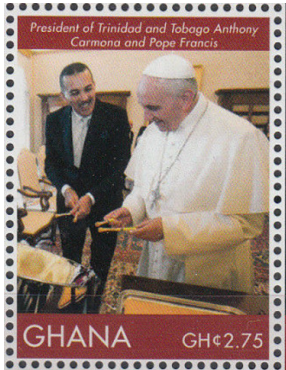
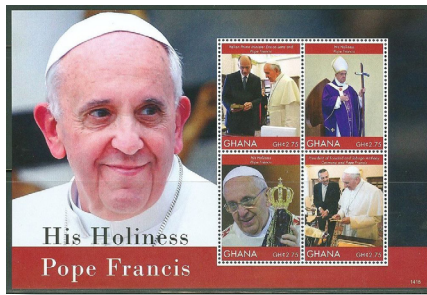
Steelpan has been on postage stamps for at least half a century. Trinidad and Tobago has celebrated the national instrument many times. In 1968, a Carnival series had a stylized steel-band on the beach. In 1969, there were more stylized pans in three stamps commemorating The 24th International Congress of the Junior Chamber of Commerce. In 1970, a Carnival series had a Steelband of the year with small images of Duke and Sparrow. By 1979, a further Carnival series had one commemorating Skiffle Bunch. They have had two stamp series of instruments.

Most of the other English speaking countries of the Caribbean have all featured steelpan images on stamps. The list includes Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, Guyana, Montserrat, St. Kitts, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Dutch Antilles. Many of these are stylized and colorful depictions of the instruments and of people playing in the band but others have images of specific bands like the Starlift Steel Orchestra of St. Vincent, or the University of the West Indies Steel Band (Montserrat), or the series of stamps that honored the 50th anniversary of the Hell's Gate Steel Band in Antigua.

In 2000, Trinidad issued a Christmas stamp with three angels playing pan. Then a stamp came out in 2014 from Ghana celebrating the visit to the Vatican by Trinidad President Anthony Carmona on July 6, 2013, when he presented a tenor pan to the Pope, who then tried his hand at the instrument.









## TIPS FROM DR. DAVE

Dave Gerhart

Welcome to Tips from Dr. Dave, a column that will be featured regularly in The Steel Times. My name is Dave Gerhart, and I am the director of the CSULB Steel Drum Orchestra and the Island Hoppin' Steel Drum Band, based in Long Beach, California.

I initially learned about the steel drum when I was sixteen. My high school director purchased two steel drums to use in our field show performance. The first time I heard the pans, I knew I had to learn more. In college, I became a member of the CSULB Steel Drum Orchestra under the direction of Dr. Michael Carney. During my junior year, my mentor Michael helped me put together my first band. Since 1993, I have played over 1000 performances on steel pan.

As a percussionist and steel drum educator, I am honored to be writing this column for The Steel Times. My goal is to share some tips and tricks that I have learned over the years. I have been fortunate to work with some amazing steel pan educators in my time, and the knowledge that I have gleaned from them has helped guide me in my teaching. I also look forward to hearing from you — our members. I know that many of you will have things to share, and I will welcome your contributions. Together, we will grow and improve as educators and musicians.

I'm looking forward to the adventure!



DAVE GERHART is a nationally recognized percussionist, composer, and educator who is the Percussion Product Manager for the Yamaha Corporation of America and Lecturer of Percussion at the Bob Cole Conservatory of Music at CSU-Long Beach

## NOT DONE YET

Eugene Novotney

I took this photo below in 1993 on Western Main Road in St. James, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. It was Carnival Monday afternoon, and I was walking with some friends as I noticed this entire steelband deserted on the curb - pans stacked on top of pans, and drums and percussion instruments stacked on top of that. I will never forget it, and am so glad that I actually had a camera with me to take the photo - it was 1993, and that was well before the smart phone camera in every pocket era. From what I can tell, the sticker on the front of the tenor pan upside down in the center of the photo looks like it reads *Spellbound*, and of course, that is exactly what I was. From the straps hanging off of the pans, it appears that this was a small “pan-around-the-neck” band. I only wish that I could have heard them jamming.

I think that if there is one thing that everyone who has ever played in steelband can relate to, it is the fact that you have to deal with equipment to have a steelband. Everywhere that I have been around steelbands, I have also been around people moving pans. And I know from my own personal experience that well after the gig is over and the crowd is gone, steelbands are being moved and loaded into cars, vans, & trucks, and being carted around to every destination imaginable. So regardless of what message this photo appears to convey, always remember that when the final note has been played and the music has drifted off into the night, there are still steelbands to be moved, and you are ... not done yet!



Photo: Eugene Novotney





Photo: Kelly Jo Brown