

Society for Ethnomusicology

Dropping the Bomb: Steelband Performance and Meaning in 1960s Trinidad

Author(s): Shannon Dudley

Source: *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Winter, 2002), pp. 135-164

Published by: University of Illinois Press on behalf of Society for Ethnomusicology

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/852811>

Accessed: 28/03/2010 02:01

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=illinois>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Society for Ethnomusicology and *University of Illinois Press* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Ethnomusicology*.

Dropping the Bomb: Steelband Performance and Meaning in 1960s Trinidad

SHANNON DUDLEY / University of Washington

This article analyzes the performance and reception of the “Bomb,” a steelband arrangement of European art music as well as other “foreign” repertoires, performed in calypso style during carnival in Trinidad.¹ The practice began in Port of Spain in the late 1950s and its popularity persisted for several years beyond Trinidad and Tobago’s 1962 independence from Great Britain, a span of time during which some intellectuals viewed “the Classics” (as Trinidadians commonly refer to European art music) as symbols of European cultural domination. The projection of such colonial icons by the “national instrument”² at the “national festival” brought together highly charged and seemingly incongruous symbols, generating censure and opposition from nationalists, but also excitement among steelband followers. My interest in meaning thus has to do with the way Trinidadians attached significance to the performance of a particular repertoire, European art music, in the context of carnival. Although steelband musicians and listeners also associated certain European melodies with affective qualities such as romance or sadness, I will not really engage arguments about the way emotions and ideas may be encoded in musical structures (e.g. Meyer 1956, McClary 2000). Rather, drawing on interviews and published opinions, academic writings, and comparisons to the other carnival arts of calypso and masquerade, I will explore a range of “interpretive stances” by which Trinidadians ascribed ideological and affective meanings to the practice of the Bomb generally.

Most ethnomusicologists would agree with Steven Feld that “meaning fundamentally implicates interpretation” (1994:79), and that when a steelband plays a Beethoven minuet, Trinidadians will interpret the performance differently than would English or German listeners. Indeed, different Trin-

Trinidadians will interpret it differently. Despite the uniqueness of each listener's interpretation, of course, meaning is also socially constructed, and we can therefore conceive, if not definite meanings, then at least a range of interpretive possibilities by which individuals ascribed meaning to the Bomb in 1960s Trinidad. Such possibilities will be referred to here as interpretive stances (not to be confused with Feld's "interpretive moves"³), a term which implies, for one thing, certain predispositions based on a person's upbringing, socio-political and aesthetic values, and experience of music.

These kinds of predispositions may correlate significantly with social class, but I also use the term "stance" to problematize correlations between *particular* musical preferences and *particular* class positions. The steelband's history is often portrayed in terms of class conflict and negotiation (e.g., Aho 1997, Dudley 1997, Steumpfle 1995) and, to be sure, opinions that individuals expressed about the Bomb or other cultural forms were often read as markers of solidarity with a particular group and its ideology. Moreover, the categories of "middle class" and "lower class" are meaningful to Trinidadians,⁴ and I frequently rely on them here. Some people involved with the steelbands, however, moved between different worlds, and they could assume interpretive stances temporarily and change them in relation to particular issues and contexts. What musical preferences might we expect, for example, from a man who came from a poor family, went to an elite school, listened to classical records at his friend's house and on the radio, and learned to play music from laborers, illiterates, and thieves? Such diversity of social and musical experience is common enough in the steelband world, and such a person might take a "middle class stance" on one issue, but a "lower class stance" on another.

Finally, interpretive stances should be understood not only in relation to social position and ideology, but also in relation to physical sensation and emotion. Ethnomusicologists need to engage this kind of affective experience, if for no other reason than the tendency of musicians and enthusiasts in Trinidad, as in many musical cultures, to describe their preferences in aesthetic terms. We may never be able to find an aesthetic judgment in which ideology is not entangled with affect, but this does not mean that ideology and affect work upon us in the same way, or that ideological affinities must correspond to affective affinities. In carnival music, especially, where participation and collective performance are the norm, affective affinities overlap social and ideological boundaries. People of different persuasions, that is, often enjoy dancing to the same music. The Bomb was therefore interpreted in relation to shared sensibilities of style, movement, and pleasure, as well as political beliefs. I will make some tentative distinctions, in this sense, of Trinidadian aesthetic sensibility by correlating verbal descriptions of affect with observations of musicking and dancing.

To provide context for my discussion of the Bomb's interpretation, I will first review the early history of the steelband, the practice of the Bomb, and the cultural politics of Trinidad's independence era. I will then discuss two interpretive stances that draw attention to the genre's ideological dimensions—the Bomb as an accommodation of colonial hegemony (“Sophistication”), or the Bomb as resistance (“Resignification”)—and, finally, contrast these with an interpretive stance I call “Aesthetic Pleasure.” Although no one of these interpretive stances encompasses the complete meaning of the Bomb, collectively they point to the diverse and sometimes contradictory feelings and ideas these performances evoked.

From Dustbin to National Instrument

The men who first played melodies on paint cans and dustbins in Trinidad responded both to intense competition between bands and to middle and upper-class prejudices against them and their music (see Goddard 1991:17–41 for several well-known origin stories). During the late 1930s in Port of Spain, metal containers became widely integrated into bands of bamboo stamping tubes called “tamboo bamboo.” The metal was louder and more durable, but it performed the same function as the bamboo, playing polyrhythmic accompaniment to call and response songs, or *lavways*. The lineage of these bamboo bands extends back to the *kalinda* drumming and singing that accompanied stickfighting in the nineteenth century *jamette* carnival (from the French *diametre*, referring to people beyond the “boundary” of respectability). Skin-headed drums were virtually banned after the 1882 “Canboulay riots” between *jamette* revelers and police (Cowley 1996:77–103), and a stigma of vulgarity and danger continued to be associated with the tamboo bamboo that replaced them. The same stigma was attached to the metal instruments that replaced bamboo.

This stigma was sharply challenged when, during the carnival of 1946, Winston “Spree” Simon played “Ave Maria” and “God Save the King” on a steel pan before an audience that included the Governor of Trinidad (*Port of Spain Gazette* 1946). Simon and other panmen had by this time discovered that a single metal surface could be shaped and pounded in such a way that certain spots could be tuned to distinct pitches. The early melody pans were called “ping pongs” because of their rustic, percussive sound and at first steelband musicians simply used different pitches to create interesting rhythmic patterns, or devised simple songs that fit the few notes they had (for examples see Dudley 1997:56–61). But the ability to play “recognized” tunes, dramatized by Spree Simon's famous performance, conferred a musical credibility that positioned the steelband to become something entirely different from its *jamette* antecedents. Playing polyrhythmic accompani-

ment to a carnival lavway, that is, might be interpreted as “noise,” but playing Schubert or Mozart meant that the panmen were making “music.” Judged by these colonial musical standards, panmen were keenly attentive from the beginning to the distinction between melody and rhythm, and to the status of particular works and genres. New instrument names also expressed their aspirations to be taken seriously: the “ping pong” became the “tenor”; the deep-pitched “boom” became the “bass”; and pans like the “bélé”⁵ and the “grumbler” were replaced with “guitars” and “cellos.”

The status of the steelband did not change overnight, but it was enhanced by concerted efforts to promote it as a legitimate art form in the 1940s and 1950s. Motivated both by interest in the new instrument and by concern over violent clashes between rival steelbands, a government Steelband Committee convened in 1950 encouraged the formation of the Trinidad and Tobago Steelband Association. In the same year the Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra was formed, with representatives from a number of the major steelbands, and in 1951 “TASPO” performed in London at the Festival of Britain. Enthusiastic reviews for TASPO in the English press enhanced the status of the art form at home in Trinidad, and in the following year, a steelband category was introduced in the biennial Music Festival, where steelbands competed in the performance of European art music. Through these opportunities steelband musicians received greater exposure to formal musical training, broadened their repertoire, and played for diverse audiences.

Beginning in the 1950s, many middle class Trinidadians came to identify themselves culturally with the steelband. Before this time, identification with English views of culture and refinement had been (along with education, economic status, and lighter skin) an important marker of middle class status (Powrie 1951, Braithewaite 1975). In a climate of cultural nationalism, though, the steelband’s low class status was complicated by its new status as a symbol of Trinidadian creativity and achievement. Attitudes towards pan changed rapidly with the formation of so-called “college boy” bands like Dixieland steelband (founded in 1950) and Silver Stars (1951) by middle class school boys. These bands were embraced enthusiastically by their middle class communities, significantly eroding the social barrier to beating pan or playing mas’ (masquerade) with steelbands. By the early 1960s steelbands had surpassed brass bands as the preferred music for masquerade and carnival season entertainment.

Dropping the Bomb

Around the same time the steelband was expanding its role in carnival, a practice called “the Bomb” became the new rage. The Bomb was an ar-

rangement rehearsed in secrecy and unveiled on the street for the first time during the early hours of J'ouvert Monday morning (the opening event of Trinidad carnival), and the repertoire of the Bomb consisted of foreign tunes, most often "Classics." Although "foreign" in origin, the tunes panmen chose to arrange for the Bomb tended to be well-known in their communities. Even lower class Trinidadians had significant exposure to classical music through Sunday radio programs, as well as steelband performances at the biennial Music Festival and other venues; they heard foreign popular music, like Perez Prado's mambos, on the radio, and enjoyed American film songs and soundtracks in movie theaters. What distinguished the Bomb, though, from other steelband performances of the Classics was that it was arranged in calypso rhythm; or, more precisely, in the style of a steelband "road march," suited to the processions of dancing masqueraders.⁶

According to Neville Jules, leader of the Trinidad All Stars, the name for the new practice was coined when one of All Stars' members told someone, "Wait until J'ouvert morning when we drop the bomb" (Jules 1999). All Stars was the band most strongly associated with the Bomb, and the tradition may be said to have developed out of a rivalry between All Stars and Crossfire, a steelband from the western Port of Spain neighborhood of St. James. All Stars suffered an embarrassment during the carnival of 1957, when Crossfire outplayed them with an arrangement of "Another Night Like This," and Neville Jules resolved that the following year they would avenge this defeat with something extraordinary. The piece he chose to arrange was Beethoven's "Minuet in G," which they rehearsed while on tour in Guyana. (In later years, All Stars were famous for the strict secrecy of their rehearsals, which were conducted in the attic of a downtown building, using pencil erasers instead of normal sticks to make the music quieter.) In the 1958 carnival All Stars surprised Crossfire with a rendition of the popular piano composition in calypso rhythm: "In the morning we sent our scouts out and we heard [Crossfire] were coming down on Frederick St. and we caught them on the corner of Frederick St. and Duke St., and we were playing 'Minuet in G' and there was no more talk about Crossfire again" (Jules 1999).

"Minuet in G" restored All Stars' pride and created a precedent for the competitive performance of Classics on J'ouvert morning. Figure 1 shows my transcription of this arrangement from the RCA single that the Trinidad All Stars recorded (1958). In contrast to the Beethoven original, the melodic phrasing is transformed into duple meter, and the pianist's left hand is replaced with walking bass and strummed chords. Though not fully realized on the recording, the street performance would also have featured accompaniment by the steelband's usual battery of interlocking irons (vehicle brake drums struck with bolts) and *shac shacs* (maracas).

The most intense rivalry in the Bomb was between bands from the East of Port of Spain (especially All Stars from downtown and Highlanders from Laventille) and bands from the West (especially Invaders and Starlift, both from Woodbrook). Spectators anticipated this showdown eagerly, lining Park, Charlotte, and Frederick Streets and Marine Square in the wee hours of J'ouvert morning to see the steelbands pass. In the early days winners were judged informally by these crowds and Neville Jules remembers that “you would know how well you playing by the talk of the people listening” (1999). Starlift arranger Ray Holman also remembers the influential commentary of big dock workers with loud voices whom he called “the

Figure 1. Beethoven “Minuet in G” from Piano Sonata Opus 49, no. 2.

a. All Stars Rendition.

The musical score for the 'All Stars Rendition' is presented in six staves. The top staff, labeled 'melody', is in G minor (one flat) and common time (C), featuring a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The second staff, 'h. strum', and third staff, 'l. strum', are in the same key and time, showing rhythmic accompaniment with eighth-note chords. The fourth staff, 'bass', provides a simple bass line with eighth notes. The fifth staff, 'iron', shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with a common time signature 'C' and a 'C' time signature. The sixth staff, 'shak shak', shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with a common time signature 'C' and a 'C' time signature.

b. Beethoven Original.

The musical score for the 'Beethoven Original' is presented in two staves. The top staff is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time, featuring a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The bottom staff is in the same key and time, showing a simple bass line with eighth notes.

pundits of pan” (1999). Sometimes the panmen could tell right away when they had been beaten, as Starlift member Eddie Odingi recounts (see Appendix for identification of Bomb titles cited here and elsewhere in this article):

I remember in 1961 when we came up with “Ave Maria,” All Stars stopped and listened to us. Rain was falling. We played “Ave Maria” and we felt good because the great All Stars had stopped and listened to us. And then we stopped to listen to them, and they dropped “Muzetta Waltz” and they followed that with “Anniversary Waltz.” In quick succession, they dropped them—one, and then two that morning. I went home in tears. The following year when we played “Dance of the Hours” and “Hallelujah Chorus” they ran. That was ‘62, they ran, boy! Then I felt good. (Odingi 1993)

After the initial “dropping” of the Bomb on J’ouvert morning, rivalry generally gave way to revelry. During most of the Monday and Tuesday carnival celebrations, steelband supporters danced to the strains of Beethoven, Mozart, and Handel, as well as calypsoes by the Mighty Sparrow and Lord Kitchener, mambos by Perez Prado, and popular songs from film and radio—all rendered in a consistent carnival rhythmic feel by the steel pans, irons, and other percussion. The exclamations of excited revelers and the rhythmic “chip, chip, chip” of hundreds of leather soles on pavement joined with the music⁷ as steelbands wound their way through the city. The diverse repertoire of the Bomb, including many “foreign” tunes, was thus rendered in a distinctively Trinidadian style that expressed itself in sound, performance, and participation.

Calypso Nationalism

In counterpoint to the panmen’s enthusiasm for the Bomb, an intellectual discourse on the importance of calypso intensified in the 1950s and 1960s, partly in reaction to the steelbands’ penchant for playing “foreign” tunes. In this discourse European art music was portrayed both as a model and as a problem for the development of Trinidadian culture, reflecting the more general colonial dilemma of reconciling cosmopolitan ambitions with pride in local culture (see, for example, Geertz 1973). Charles Espinet and Harry Pitts, for example, in a 1944 government-sponsored study of calypso, wrote that “hope is held by local musicians for further musical development of the calypso along classical lines” (1944:22), but also affirmed the Herderian position (Wilson 1973) that folk culture is the repository of national character: “No study of a people can be complete,” they wrote, “without reference to their folk-music” (ibid:13). The great writer, political activist, and pan-Africanist C.L.R. James also held Caribbean art forms to the standards of what he saw as a more mature European civilization,

questioning whether there was “any medium so native to the Caribbean, so rooted in the tight association . . . between national surroundings, historical development and artistic tradition . . . from which the artist can draw that strength which makes him a supreme practitioner” (1959:184). James encouraged the efforts of Caribbean artists to master European forms and adapt them to local themes, citing Trinidadian choreographer Beryl McBurnie as an example. At the same time, he celebrated the potential of Caribbean folk culture, particularly calypso, saying, “when our local dramatists and artists can evoke the popular response of a Sparrow,⁸ the artists in the Caribbean will have arrived” (ibid:188).

Trinidadians in the 1950s and 1960s were generally concerned, therefore, that their indigenous musical forms should develop and improve; but some intellectuals (and certainly many calypsonians) were also concerned that their “national instrument” should play their “national music.”⁹ They worried that steelband musicians, in their pursuit of progress, were abandoning Trinidad’s most distinctive musical genre, the calypso. Thus, by 1955, when the five most popular steelband choices of 1955 turned out not to be calypsoes, “the preference of the public (or the musicians) for foreign melodies was the subject of much commentary after carnival” (Rohlehr 1990:437). This resulted in calls for calypsonians to keep pace, such as this *Trinidad Guardian* editorial from 1966 that focuses on the responsibility of calypsonians to provide suitable material for steelband arrangement:

The steelband has reached the most extra-ordinary level. Today calypsonians have to compose with the steelband in mind, for a tune is not a tune unless a panside carries it to the public. The public does not recognize a calypso unless it is conveyed by a steelband. In short, the steelband is way ahead of the calypso as an “art form” and calypsonians who aspire to fame locally should bear this in mind. (Quashie 1966)

Because steelbands in the 1950s and 1960s did play an important role in popularizing calypsoes during carnival, a trend toward increased formal and harmonic complexity in calypsoes during this period may be evidence that calypsonians paid heed to this kind of advice.

Not only were calypsonians exhorted to do better, though; steelbands were also pressured to play more calypsoes. For example, in a panel discussion on the topic in 1966, folklorist J.D. Elder urged: “By all means play the classics, but what we want is the Trinidad image . . . the projecting of our own culture not someone’s else’s. If we are going to achieve a higher level musically, the basic raw material should be our folklore” (Rouse 1966). Pressure on the steelbands to play calypso had its most significant expression in the creation of a new competition called Panorama, organized jointly by the National Association of Trinidad and Tobago Steelbandsmen (NATTS) and the government’s Carnival Development Commission (CDC) in 1963 for the first carnival after independence.

The Panorama competition ushered steelbands into the official showcasing of the carnival arts and gave them increased access to government and private sponsorship, but its requirement that steelbands play calypsoes also steered them in new musical directions. Steelband musicians initially welcomed Panorama as a chance to vie for reputation and prize money on the same stage as the prestigious Calypso Monarch and Carnival Queen competitions at the Queen's Park Savannah. In 1969, however, Citibank withdrew its sponsorship from the Bomb competition (which was by now formally judged), a move that was perceived by many as an unwelcome attempt to tell the steelbands what music they ought to be playing. In a newspaper article titled, "Come Hell or High Water the Bomb Stays," Steelband Association president George Goddard attacked Pete Simon, a vocal detractor of the Bomb, and cited the efforts of journalist John Grimes to discourage the Bomb as early as 1958. Goddard identified Simon and Grimes with an influential school of thought that was at odds with the panmen: ". . . the Bomb did not meet with the approval of certain people who felt that a similar cash prize should not be awarded for the non-calypso contest as that for the Panorama contest which was a calypso contest" (*Trinidad Guardian* 1969). Other panmen, like Starland captain Selwyn Griffith, also perceived Panorama as an effort to control the steelbands' repertoire: "They brought the Panorama competition in 1963 to sort of put on a greater muzzle and guideline now on the ability of the steelbands" (Griffith 1993).

Eventually, Panorama did become the most important venue for steelbands, consuming most of their time and energy during the carnival season. The Bomb, though it is still sponsored today by Pan Trinbago (the current name of the steelband association), evokes relatively little public interest or creative effort from the musicians. The Bomb's decline and Panorama's ascendance can be explained by a variety of factors, including increased use of DJs that drove steelbands off the streets, the exciting musical innovations of Panorama arrangers, and the lure of Panorama's prize money and subsidies. But ideological arguments about performance of foreign music during Carnival also shaped the institution of Panorama, which continues today to exert a powerful influence on steelband music in Trinidad and Tobago. In addition to raising provocative questions about performance and musical meaning, an examination of the Bomb controversy therefore provides insight into an important moment in the development of the steelband movement in Trinidad.

Interpreting the Bomb

Given the panmen's struggle to "prove themselves" musically, as well as the cooptation of the steelband by the nationalist movement in the 1950s and 1960s, it is clear that steelband music has developed through a dynamic

tension between accommodation and resistance to both colonial and nationalist hegemony. This tension is explored by Keila Diehl (1992), who defines six interpretations of Classics performed by steelbands, ordered along a continuum according to their degree of accommodation or resistance to colonial hegemony. Although it is not based on fieldwork in Trinidad, and it focuses on formal stage performances by steelbands, Diehl's thesis is an intriguing theoretical exploration of how the "meaning" of the European Masters' compositions may or may not change when they are performed in a new context.

The meanings ascribed to this repertoire become even more fascinating in relation to the Bomb, because Port of Spain's streets during carnival represent such a very different context, compared with a concert hall, for the performance of European art music. In particular, a consideration of the Bomb forces us to extend the range of possible meanings beyond a simple continuum from accommodation to resistance, and to make room for aesthetics, affect and exuberance as well. As a way of defining this interpretive continuum, I will present evidence for three interpretive stances by which Trinidadians may have ascribed meaning to Bomb performances: 1) Sophistication—interpreting the Bomb as a strategy for achieving status according to dominant standards; 2) Resignification—interpreting the Bomb as a rebellious reframing of dominant cultural icons; 3) Aesthetic Pleasure—interpreting the Bomb as an affective experience.

Sophistication

The easiest interpretive stance to identify in published accounts and opinions during the 1960s was a tendency to dismiss the Bomb as a pitch for status and sophistication, a view that was closely related to the "calypso nationalism" described above. Considering the function of the Bomb as a weapon used against musical rivals, it makes sense that the cultural status of a work would be an important consideration for its selection as a Bomb tune—that Beethoven's compositions would offer more firepower, so to speak, than those of local calypsonians in colonial (and post-colonial) Trinidad. Beyond the need to vanquish rival steelbands, mastery of European art music has been a way for steelbandsmen to enhance their reputations in Trinidadian society generally. As noted above, pan's popularity as a new instrument in the 1940s was predicated on its ability to render "recognized" tunes, especially Classics, and one of the most effective ways that steelband musicians enhanced their status was through the performance of European art music.

Ray Holman, one of Trinidad's foremost steelband arrangers, explains the importance of performing Classics "correctly," even when played by a

steelband in calypso rhythm, and the derision he might be subjected to for a mistake in harmony:

We were inferior, as musicians. We didn't have the musical knowledge so we listened to try and get this thing how close we could get it. For it to sound decent, you know. And we took a pride in that. If I could come close to how Beethoven did it, I didn't have no music sheet, you know. . . . I wanted it to be correct, like the correct chords and so on. So we used to pride ourselves on that. If a band playing out—you know what is a thing in Steelband, in the Bomb: "Them ain't play no good, they play a set of wrong chord!" you'd hear people say. (Holman 1999)

Like Holman, many steelband musicians tend to acknowledge their concern for status only indirectly, speaking in terms of artistic ambition rather than social ambition, excited not only about the opportunity to play European art music, but about the technical challenges it presented. Since most of them did not have access to any kind of formal musical training, they saw performing Classics as a way of learning the same kind of musical skills that middle class piano students or police band musicians could learn from books and instructors.

Because steelband musicians took pride in their musical sophistication, the suggestion that they should concentrate on calypso sometimes struck them as an attempt to cast them in the role of rustic folkloric musicians. In response to J.D. Elder's exhortation to project "our own culture not someone's else's," for example (cited earlier), Pan Am North Stars' leader Anthony Williams argued that the panmen still needed to expand their musical abilities:

By interpreting the Classics the steelband achieved many things . . . We began to get ideas in modulations . . . The Classics play an important part in steelband development. Right now we are not mature enough to experiment in folklore, which is limited and simple. It is a case then of going to the masters to acquire knowledge, not so much a case of rejecting our own, which, like I said, offers no challenge. In time, we should be able to come back to our folklore and do a good job on it. (Rouse 1966)

In the view of nationalists, such comparisons between calypso and classical music seemed to privilege European ideals of harmonic, melodic, and formal complexity over musical strengths that one might associate with carnival musicians and calypsonians (such as rhythm, phrasing, or word play), implying a relative lack of sophistication in Trinidad's indigenous music.

Opposition to this apparent preference by the panmen for the Classics over calypso was led in the press by Pete Simon, a journalist, musician, and cultural activist. Simon resented the intrusion of classical music into what he felt should be a celebration of local culture: "Isn't this preference for

the classics by steelbandmen during this tempo-setting period of our National Festival a clear-cut attempt to downgrade the calypso? To relegate it to second choice? To give it an inferior place?" (Simon, 1970). While taking care to praise the art form and the musicians, Simon suggested that panmen were being manipulated by competition promoters, and noted that "semi-classical" melodies such as Minuet in G that were "recognisable and singable" had given way in the late 1960s to more obscure works whose only virtue was their supposed musical sophistication: "The titles of the bombs tell the story of Snob appeal and the names of the composers are cast in the same mould. One is not surprised to hear of 'The Seventh Movement of the Sixth Concerto' by Janislav Bumbumkoski, or 'The Last Overture of the Twelfth Opus' by Igor Ronskoopoofoof!" (Simon 1969).

Echoing Simon's disgust, an "Ex-J'Ouvert Fan" wrote to the *Trinidad Guardian* newspaper complaining that steelbands were pursuing a musical agenda that was antithetical to the spirit of the occasion:

The past two years were a miserable experience, longing for the band to play a calypso and all they play are these classical pieces, leaving the crowd to walk away thoroughly disgusted and dissatisfied. This is all well and good for Queen's Hall, at the Steelband Festival which I would sit for hours and thoroughly enjoy, but definitely not on J'Ouvert morning, dressed up in old clothes and the spirit set for the beginning of "The Carnival Bacchanal," only to have a great disappointment. It amounts to a Ball with a Mantovani orchestra and the guests waltzing in jeans and hot shirts. (Trinidad Guardian 1969)

This attitude about the appropriate time and place for the performance of the Classics was expressed frequently in public debates about the Bomb in the 1960s. It suggests that opponents of the Bomb did not disapprove of the performance of classical music per se. Simon and others supported and enjoyed local efforts to render the works of European composers, but they felt a need to separate the musical experiences of the concert hall and carnival. "We feel ten feet tall, and rightly so," wrote Simon, "to boast that our panmen can play anything from Calypso to Chopin, but it must here be emphasized that where the Great Masters are concerned, the elements of Time and Place must be the determining factors" (1969). The preservation of carnival as a domain of cultural expression that was ostensibly indigenous and off-limits to the encroachment of European "high art" was one way of resolving the uncomfortable tension between local pride and a cosmopolitan cultural identity.

While it may be true, then, that panmen dropped the Bomb partly in order to prove themselves by colonial cultural standards, it also seems clear that middle-class nationalists who opposed the Bomb were responding in their own way to the same dilemma of European cultural hegemony. Raymond Williams notes that this sort of dilemma is a fundamental dynamic

of hegemony and warns that “it would be wrong to overlook the importance of works and ideas which, while clearly affected by hegemonic limits and pressures, are at least in part significant breaks beyond them” (1977:114). This caution is underscored in many recent ethnomusicological explorations of the interface between “traditional” or “local” music systems and “Western music” (e.g. Nettl 1985, Guilbault 1993, Barber and Waterman 1995) which demonstrate how Western forms are given new meanings, or made to serve local aesthetics and values. Indeed, if we take Pete Simon’s judgment with a grain of salt and look more closely at the experiences of the people involved, we can find evidence that lends itself to more empowering and positive interpretations of the Bomb.

Resignification

In this section I will suggest ways in which the Bomb was consistent with a broader practice in Trinidad carnival, in which symbols of colonial power were either mocked or appropriated for the empowerment of the performers. This second interpretive stance is one that is not often taken explicitly in relation to the Bomb, but has been used to explain the significance of other carnival arts or of carnival in general, and is especially popular in academic discourse. Many scholars have characterized carnival as an occasion for inverting the normal order of things and of subjugating symbols of power and social respectability to the pleasures of the vulgar masses (e.g. Bakhtin 1984, DaMatta 1991, Kertzer 1988). The Bomb appears in some ways to be a particularly vivid validation of this theoretical interpretation: the work of a revered European composer is removed from the concert hall and wedded to the kinds of instrumentation, dancing, and licentious behavior that are commonly viewed as antithetical to the values of the classical music concert. To argue for an interpretation of the Bomb as symbolic inversion, though, one must first establish the popular appeal of the Bomb.

If the Bomb were, as Pete Simon implied, merely an attempt by the steelband musicians to project their own sophistication, one would have expected its appeal to be limited to musicians and to community supporters who had a stake in interband rivalries. This was not the case, though. In contrast to the irritation of the “ex-J’Ouvert Fan” quoted above, the following excerpt from a 1964 newspaper article by Austin Simmonds, titled, “Calypsoes vs. Classics,” paints a picture of enthusiastic reception for the Bomb. Simmonds attacks attempts by “purists” to enforce the performance of traditional (“old minor”) calypsoes through formally judged competitions, and implies a distinction of class: between the middle/upper class venue of the Queen’s Park Savannah and the “people’s” carnival downtown (Friedrick Street or Independence Square):

. . . nothing but “indigenous melodies” are judged at Carnival competitions. Do these judges ever leave the judging arenas, where the entire audience is seated and bored stiff after the first two hours and travel along the streets? If they do, they will be able to judge for themselves what makes Jack jump. Travel along Frederick Street or Independence Square on Monday morning, and listen to what the bands are playing before they arrive at the Grand Stand where the judges sit. Look at the faces of the throng of paraders and spectators. Those who line the pavements cannot stand still. There is a great difference between these spectators and those who sit at three o’clock in the Grand Stand at the Savannah. The “Minor-key” no longer establishes rapport with those who have come to participate in the enjoyment. Casablanca did it long ago with “Bells of St. Mary’s.” Ebonites set the town ablaze with “Roses From the South,” Dixieland brought down the house at Queen’s Hall with “Estudiantina”; North Stars did it with “Voices of Spring.” Listen for Silver Stars with “Elizabethan Serenade” this year. This is the pattern. (Simmonds 1964)

Simmonds clouds the issue slightly by conflating Queen’s Hall concerts (“Estudiantina,” “Voices of Spring”) with Bomb tunes performed on the streets, but his contention that the Bomb was “what made Jack Jump” on J’Ouvret morning is borne out in my many conversations and interviews. Unlike Pete Simon, then, who felt that the Classics were out of place in carnival, many Trinidadians found the Bomb to be delightfully consistent with their conception of carnival festivity.

It is frequently argued by Trinidadian scholars that the people’s passion for carnival is rooted in its historical role as a venue for protest. This perspective on carnival is announced unequivocally in the titles of works like Hollis Liverpool’s “Rituals of Power and Rebellion: The Carnival tradition in Trinidad and Tobago” (2001), or Ana Maria Alonso’s “Men in ‘rags’ and the devil on the throne: A study of protest and inversion in the carnival of post-emancipation Trinidad” (1990). Given this view of carnival generally, it is tempting to view the Bomb as a form of resistance to colonial authority, and to interpret it as an act of transgression, a defilement of dominant cultural icons. For example, Pete Simon (exemplifying once again the conflicting impulses of local and global cultural identification) accused the steelband of defiling the great works of the European “Masters,” arguing that the appropriate setting for classical music was the Music Festival rather than:

. . . a bawdy, loud, raucous, shouting, giggling, cavorting, hippie-minded, oil-drenched band of revelers in different stages of ridiculous undress and various degrees of drunkenness, throwing decorum and conventionalities to the wind. Is this the setting for listening to the Masters? This is nothing short of sacrilege. (1969)

One might suppose that for steelband musicians and their supporters, criticism like this would only have added fuel to their fire and increased

their zest for flouting such prudish attitudes. Such a perverse delight in defying decorum certainly has precedents in calypso and masquerade. Indeed we may consider it a trope that expresses itself significantly in all the Trinidad carnival arts. Carnival masquerade, and drumming in particular, was consistently perceived in British colonial Trinidad as a threat to public order and safety (Cowley 1996). More symbolic defiance of colonial authority is also amply documented in the literature on calypso (e.g. Rohlehr 1990, Regis 1999).

Perhaps the most pervasive symbol of this kind of defiance and perversity in Trinidad carnival is the character of the devil, which takes many different forms. Calypsonian and historian Hollis Liverpool suggests that the devil masquerade was a way for black people to mock white authority by embodying negative characterizations of the black race (2001:263-264), a psychology that could be applied to the Bomb as well. Mitto Sampson's account of an 1870s stickfighting song, "*Djab sé y ô neg, Mê Dié sé nom-la blâ*" ("The Devil is a Negro, But God is a white man"), shows that identification with the devil was a way to convert derogatory stereotypes into attributes of power. The stickfighters "came to feel that since God is a white man and the devil is a negro every negro has that devilish ferocious quality in him, and it whipped them up" (Pearse 1956:257). Whether by coating themselves with black oil, behaving lewdly, clashing violently with rival bands, or terrorizing middle class people in the streets, Trinidad carnival performers through the years have embraced images of evil and mayhem.

It is important to note, though, that when these "devils" played with images of colonial authority, it was often more than defiance or mockery—it was also a symbolic appropriation of power. The appropriation of attributes of high status by people of low status certainly defied the notion of European superiority, but it did not necessarily defile the icons of European power. Through the practice of the Bomb, for example, musicians and supporters may have gained satisfaction not from deriding the authority of classical music, but from wielding this authority themselves. The cultural power or weight of classical music is acknowledged in the phrase "dropping the Bomb," but this Bomb gives people a sense of exhilaration, rather than oppression, because they get to do the dropping for a change. Of course they are dropping bombs on their neighbors, not their oppressors; but the thrill of power, rather than its proper objective, seems to be the important thing here.

A similar kind of appropriation can be seen in the carnival character called the Book Man. The Book Man, with goatee and horns, armed only with a feather quill and a book titled *The Golden Rule* on one cover and *The Royal Law* on the other, confronts a fearsome dragon on the street. While the Book Man writes with devilish glee, the Dragon writhes in ago-

ny (see Photo 1). Onlookers to this drama must have some empathy for the hapless dragon, struggling in the web of the Englishman's law, and the Book Man's white face seems to cast the Englishman as the devil. On the other hand, people can also identify with the devilish Book Man and vicariously experience the thrill of usurping the oppressor's role.

Like classical music or legal erudition, another important symbol of power in colonial Trinidad was the English language, and the use of English in calypso is also an important part of the carnival tradition of appropriating symbols of power. Soon after 1900, English, the language of the colonial administrators and the educated, replaced French patois in carnival songs. This happened as *chantwells* (the singers for neighborhood bands, who were often stickfighters as well) began to perform for paying audiences in tents, where they became known as "calypsonians." The use of extremely florid English by calypsonians was a weapon with which they cowed rivals and boosted their prestige, as illustrated below in the lyrics to "Iron Duke in the Land," sung by Julian Whiterose in 1914. Whiterose was one of those calypsonians who made the transition from chantwell to tent singer, and he spices his lyrics with the patois boasts of the stickfighter:

Photo 1. The Dragon drops to his knees, subdued by the Bookman's furious writing in a volume titled "The Golden Rule" on one cover, and "The Royal Law" on the other. (Port of Spain, Trinidad, 1993. Photo by Shannon Dudley)



At my appearance upon the scene
Julius the devil play the Chord
And still I am the head of fraternal order
Calling, sweeping to all the agony
Achieving my surprising majesty
In blending, beaming and swaying
Jumping this way, bawling, "Clear de way, Whiterose *joli*
Djable ré-ré'o" (Handsome Whiterose the devil king)
(transcription from Spottswood and Hill 1989)

It is significant that Whiterose's English is *not* entirely "correct," or even entirely English. Just as classical music was modified in the Bomb, literate-sounding English had to remain subservient to an established complex of calypso aesthetics (which includes devilishness). This is implied in politician and cultural activist Albert Gomes' mild criticism of Atilla the Hun, made in the 1930s (Atilla, a.k.a. Raymond Quevedo, was an educated calypsonian who insisted on proper English):

The ideal Calypso, to my mind, would be one combining the bawdiness of the Lion with the wit and intelligence of Atilla, whose only fault is that his compositions are apt to become too tendentious. In spite of my political sentiments, I should not like to see the Calypso a mere propagandist form of expression. It is essential—very essential indeed that it retain its swing, and its sly, sensuous humour, qualities with which songsters like the Lion are primarily concerned. (1/29/3? *Trinidad Guardian*, cited in Rohlehr 1990:331¹⁰)

The calypso, then, like the Book Man masquerade or the steelband Bomb tune, may evoke symbols of colonial power to bolster the performer's authority, but it privileges a local carnival aesthetic. Terrence Ranger's work on East African *ngoma* dance groups suggests that this may be a common phenomenon of festival performance in colonial societies. Ranger argues that pre-colonial "modes" of performance were perpetuated by *ngoma* dancers who used European military uniforms and musical instruments as marks of prestige, and that this retention of pre-colonial values was evidence that Africans did not succumb to the "absolute power" of colonial rulers (1975). One might argue in the Trinidadian case that an important part of the carnival aesthetic, or "mode," is the resignification of establishment icons.

As tempting as it may be to view the Bomb as an act of resistance, however, I have found little clear ethnographic or historical evidence for this interpretation. While a few people did comment to me that steelbands were criticized for performing the explicitly sacred music of Handel's *Messiah* during carnival, the panmen's defiance in persisting seemed directed more at their prudish detractors than at the *Messiah* or the cultural values it represented. Even more than their community supporters, the steel-

band musicians themselves have always tended to express admiration and appreciation for classical music. Therefore, if the popularity of the Bomb did derive to any significant extent from redefining the authority of elite cultural icons, it probably had more to do (at least from the musicians' perspective) with the chance to identify with symbols of power than a desire to mock them. The thrill of wielding Beethoven's cultural authority is suggested in Neville Jules' account of All Stars' feud with Crossfire; and, in general, the association of the Bomb with interband rivalry and belligerence suggests that the Classics retained their power to intimidate in these carnival performances.

On the other hand, there are many indications that the Bomb was—perhaps simultaneously, or perhaps depending on the precise context, or the individual interpretation—about something much more than status or intimidation. By naming it “the Bomb,” by rearranging its sound, and by dancing to it, Trinidadians claimed European art music as a repertoire that they could enjoy in their own distinctive way, as an experience of pleasure, and as a thing for aesthetic contemplation.

Aesthetic Pleasure

The interpretive stance most frequently taken by steelband musicians is primarily aesthetic, focusing on the relative beauty, value, or appropriateness of different compositions and arrangements. Some contemporary scholarship debunks the aesthetic as a concept which, while cloaking itself in the innocent guise of personal sensibility, is in fact a socially constructed ideology implicated in the maintenance of order and authority (Eagleton 1990, Said 1993). The depiction of large scale musical forms like sonata form, for example, as being more intellectually interesting than cyclic call and response forms may be implicated in a larger argument for the intellectual superiority of Europeans over Africans.¹¹ Terry Eagleton notes, however, that the aesthetic is “radically double-edged” because its glorification of individual sensibility can easily generate resistance to conformity (1990:9). In the case of Trinidad carnival, I have argued that performances may be understood both as negotiations of social status, and also as satire or projection of personal power, suggesting that aesthetic judgments in carnival do indeed cut both ways—valuing both accommodation *and* resistance to dominant norms.

Few of us would agree, however, that our aesthetic judgments could be reduced to mere political opinions. Eagleton reminds us that the term “aesthetics” was originally applied not just to art but to “the whole region of human perception and sensation, in contrast to the more rarefied domain of conceptual thought” (1990:13), and if we insist upon this affective di-

mension of the term (as many of us still do), we can talk about how aesthetic judgments relate to emotion, movement, and an experience of joy and well-being. While such experiences may be intensely personal, in festive events like carnival they also involve a communal feeling of being “in sync” (Turino 1993:111) which may transcend barriers that divide people at other times. The Bomb was valued for the way it conduced to this integration of individual expressive fulfilment with communal in-syncess.

This aesthetic value says less about power relations, perhaps, than it does about a Trinidadian social and musical style, and it demonstrates that the adoption of European aesthetics by steelband musicians has been partial and situational. In contrast to the formality of European-style stage performances, Bomb performances required steelband musicians to put people at ease, to make them dance and enjoy themselves unselfconsciously. This could be just as important as the cultivation of symphonic finesse for a steelband’s reputation and status. Indeed, in comparing his own band, Starlift, to the Pan Am North Stars, Ray Holman implies a distinction between two different *kinds* of reputation and status, associated with stage concerts and the road, respectively: “. . . when we talking about, ‘old chap’: Pan Am. See what I’m saying? Status: Pan Am. Girls, limin’, who will get women: Starlift. . . . It was a different thing. They never had the following we had” (1999). Starlift was one of the most popular bands for carnival during the late 1960s and early 1970s (known as a good group to “lime” with, as Holman says—meaning to hang out, talk, party, or otherwise enjoy the company of friends). Compared to North Stars’ polished stage performances of the Classics, where traditional European concert etiquette dictated a separation between active performers and passive audience, Starlift’s Bomb tunes were enjoyed in a very different way:

There was a great respect for classical music. So if a band play that in the road, it used to sound nice. You know this tune, and you could dance to it; because in the Queen’s Hall you can’t dance to it. So the same nice tune, the same nice melody and chords, you’re getting it that you could dance. And Trinidadians love to dance. So it was more appreciated.” (Holman 1999)

Although Holman saw the Bomb as enhancing the appeal of a music he already liked, others really enjoyed the Classics only in the context of the Bomb, where those who were not playing instruments could and did *participate* in the performance through dancing, shouting, playing a bottle and spoon, or chipping along in time. Crowd participation in these street performances bridged the gap between performers and audience, a gap that was such a powerful aspect of the sacralization and distancing of “high culture” as experienced in the concert hall (Levine 1988, Small 1998). All Stars member and arranger Leon “Smooth” Edwards explains how the per-

formance context of the Bomb helped many people to relate to the Classics in a more familiar and comfortable way:

OK, the Festival it was played as written. If it's legato, if it's andante, if it's whatever. So you listen to it in its true form. Carnival time it was played in a dance form where you could chip and dance and have fun with it. Probably slightly altered, or rephrased slightly, but left enough so that you could recognize it. So it's just something unique, you know, the mere idea that you could dance to a Classic. A Classic to most people is something that is normally boring or too high for them. And the mere idea, it's simplified enough that you could dance to it, you know, it brought about a new novelty, it brought about a new meaning to Classics. It made people appreciate Classics now, in the sense that they could sing it, you know. A lot of people knew Classics by the Bomb, by listening to the band playing it. It became accessible to the people. (Edwards 2000)

Just as the Bomb gave steelband supporters a chance to relate to the Classics in a way that was more comfortable for them, the musicians also enjoyed the chance to adapt these works to a style of playing with which they could more fully identify:

. . . when you hear a tune, you used to try to take that tune and turn it from a waltz to a mambo, from a waltz to a samba, or from a waltz to a kaiso (i.e., calypso). And it takes a lot of doing to do that . . . You're disarranging the whole of the fellow's composition. You are disarranging it and rearranging it to suit your mentality . . . you break down the foundation of the tune all over and you start re-building it with some sort of magical growth of yours. (All Stars member Big Mack Sandiford, quoted in Stuempfle 1995:163)

The excitement that musicians and supporters felt in making the Classics their own was clearly related to the status of European art music, but in at least two different ways. As argued in the preceding sections, the Bomb was, for some people and in some contexts, about conforming to or appropriating the authority of the "Great Works." However, in the context of carnival festivity, many people enjoyed the Bomb for the way it *neutralized* the authority of the Classics and their ability to make them feel alienated or inferior. For musicians and supporters alike, the Bomb provided relief from the judgments about high and low culture that they associated with other experiences of listening to European art music. This ability to immunize oneself against the oppressive authority of colonial culture may in itself be an act of resistance, but it also sets the stage for a much more psychologically diverse range of experiences and emotions, as Veit Erlmann argues in relation to the *isicathamiya* performances of South African factory workers:

In an environment that imposes denotative precision and the one-dimensional functionality of "labor units" on the individual, the production of such abun-

dant, overflowing meaning is not only a creative process but also an enormously political act of resistance. By concentrating on this abundance, the analysis of the politics and praxis of performance can move beyond the construction of accommodation and resistance as dichotomous categories and lead us to a better understanding of performance in the logic of its own praxis. (1992:705)

Like South African isicathamiya, the Bomb's appeal—indeed the affinity steelband musicians felt for classical music generally—had to do with aesthetic choices that we cannot completely explain in terms of accommodation and resistance, sophistication and resignification. Ray Holman's account of an experience he had as a teenager arranging for Invaders steelband will help to illustrate how considerations of sound and affect often preceded considerations of status. (The people he mentions here include Ellie Mannette, the captain of Invaders, and Lennox Pierre, a lawyer and amateur violinist who took an active interest in advising steelband tuners and musicians on matters of music theory, arranging, and performance.)

Ellie come on the pan and he play and he say well that is A minor, how you playing D? He couldn't understand it. G, and you playing D. E minor and you playing D. So they call Mr. Pierre. Big thing, you know, when he say send to call Mr. Pierre. So they call Mr. Pierre, Mr. Pierre come in the yard. But in the meantime now I say listen, I jump on my bicycle, eh? And I head down Petro St. It had a fella called Blackman, they were music teachers and the fella used to go to school. I say, Listen, I want you to help me with something, tell me what this is," and I play for him, we going on the piano now (*sings the tune*) I say, "What you call that, what it is I doing there?" And he go and he bring out his sister. He didn't know. When I play it she says that is a pedal point. I say, What it is you say, a pedal point? What is that?" She say, "Just what you're doing there, playing one note, even if the chords change." I say, uh-huh, well they dead now! I gone now boy!

I jump on my bicycle man, and I gone up in Invaders yard. I have my two sticks in my pocket. When Mr. Pierre start to talk, he say he can't understand this thing, "but Ray . . ." I say, "Mr. Pierre, you don't know what is a pedal point?" Boy, all the young fellas in the yard, they watching me like I know this amount of music! That was kicks, boy! I feel like a big, big man now, because I teach them this thing. I say Mr. Pierre, you don't know what is a pedal point? Well you see that? Mr. Pierre lost all credibility then. Because some other man who was in the yard listening, a gentleman came, and he say, "What the boy saying is correct"—and he speaking proper English, eh?—What the little fellow said is correct, it's a pedal point." (Holman 1993)

This story gives an amusing example of the power and authority that steelband musicians could attain through knowledge of formal music theory. On the other hand, if we consider the sequence of events, it appears that Holman used the pedal point before he had any idea that he could claim it as a sanctioned technique of European art music. This suggests that steelband musicians like Holman were excited about the possibilities of new

sounds that the Classics offered them. They were guided by considerations of craft, as well as status, in their decisions to use certain classical works or techniques.

It is important to remember that, for most Trinidadians in the 1950s, classical music was not an exotic experience but rather a part of their routine soundscape. Steelband musicians performed classical music at the biennial music festival and other venues and the panmen were familiar with some pieces as standards in their repertoire. Beethoven's "Minuet in G," for example, was a favorite solo piece for the festival competition for several years before Neville Jules decided to arrange it in calypso rhythm for carnival. People of means often played songs like "Minuet in G" in piano lessons (or heard it played by their sisters, since girls were more likely than boys to be encouraged in music lessons), and most households were exposed to a wide repertoire of "light" classical music on the radio, particularly on Sunday mornings. Smooth Edwards, for example, who grew up in the humble neighborhoods of John John and Laventille, remembers:

In my days growing up, Sunday morning you were sure to get some program of Classics and hymns, you know—standards, from way back when. You would hear it. Not necessarily sit down to listen to it, but you would hear it. The same way you would hear a hymn at church service. Somewhere along the line you would hear—it was sort of what the people in the area thought was soothing, relaxing music, and they thought that was the time of the week to feature it. It may not have been the harsh [sound] or the big symphony, you know. It might have been just the lighter classical forms, the Bach, you know . . . pleasing to the ear. (Edwards 2000)

And while European art music was an important influence and resource for steelband musicians, the Classics (notwithstanding Pete Simon's complaints about the works of "Janislav Bumbumkoski" and "Igor Ronskoopoofoof") did not dominate the Bomb repertoire overwhelmingly. This can be seen in the list of tunes in the Appendix, and is born out even more convincingly in a broader investigation I did of over fifty Bomb tunes (including Gideon Maxime's review of steelband competitions [1993], and other tunes mentioned in interviews and newspaper articles), roughly half of which were European art music compositions. Many of those, furthermore, were "light classical" pieces that did not have a particularly elevated stature.

Status, therefore, does not seem to have been the overriding consideration in choosing pieces for the Bomb. Steelband arrangers were just as interested in the way a given composition could be made to fit the rhythmic sensibility of their steelband, by how they felt they could bring it alive for dancers, by the emotions it invoked, and many other affective considerations. Musicians thus have distinct opinions about what kinds of music "work" in a steelband arrangement. Teddy Belgrave, for example, recount-

ed how Highlanders once tried to arrange an excerpt from Bizet's opera, *Carmen*. Even though the first part of the arrangement turned out wonderfully, they eventually scrapped it entirely because they came to a spot that they couldn't arrange to suit their style (Belgrave 2000). By contrast, Carleton "Zigilee" Constantine believed that Perez Prado's mambos were popular with steelbands in the 1950s because they were so well matched to the idiom: "That music was just definitely like he make it for pan" (Constantine 1993). For Ray Holman, the "groove" that he wanted to achieve with the Bomb, that urge it gave people to dance in a particularly sweet and satisfying way, had to do with melody and with a quality of sadness that some songs had:

I would look for a nice melody. That way I could make them groove. The Bomb was to groove. Or to make you feel in heaven—"Hallelujah Chorus" wasn't a groove, that was heavenly (*sings*). But when we play "Accelerations Waltz" it was groove (*sings*). . . . Melody, and a certain feel that people would want to cry when they hear the song. It is a certain feel, I don't know how to describe it. The tune must have a certain melancholy in it. That is the important thing, for the Bomb. When they played "Liebestraum" people used to cry. (Holman 1999)

Holman's perception that "groove" depends on melody and poignancy contrasts with the tendency in much ethnomusicological literature to explain danceability in terms of rhythm (e.g. Dudley 1996, Keil 1995, Washburne 1998). It is also an important reminder that musicians of the African diaspora are capable of experiencing an aesthetic affinity not only with African or neo-African musical forms, but also with European art music. Steelband musicians, then, were not just making a calculated appeal to someone else's standards of beauty and value when they chose to play "foreign" compositions—they were making music that they and their audiences enjoyed dancing to.

Holman's ideas are part of a discourse on the aesthetic of carnival dancing, an aesthetic that is defined in terms of both movement *and* emotion, and is expressed in phrases like "free up," "break away," or "let go." Indeed, like the trope of agitation or heat (*anraje*, *chofe*) that Gage Averill identifies in Haitian carnival music (1997:21), the trope of "freeness" might be said to characterize Trinidad carnival (see, for example, Miller 1991; Regis 1999:42). Part of the freedom of the Bomb, as Smooth Edwards noted, was that dancing made the Classics less alienating. In addition to jettisoning the repressed behavior of the concert hall, however, carnival dancers relied on a particular style of melody and rhythm to "free themselves up." Big Mack Sandiford's reference to "disarranging [a Classic] and rearranging it to suit your mentality" speaks about the need to generate a musical structure and feeling ("kaiso") that were more familiar and energizing to carnival danc-

ers than the structure and feeling of the original (“waltz”).¹² This responsiveness to a style of carnival dancing links steelband music closely to other kinds of carnival dance music, and the need to change and adapt foreign compositions draws attention to the differences between local and foreign musical aesthetics.

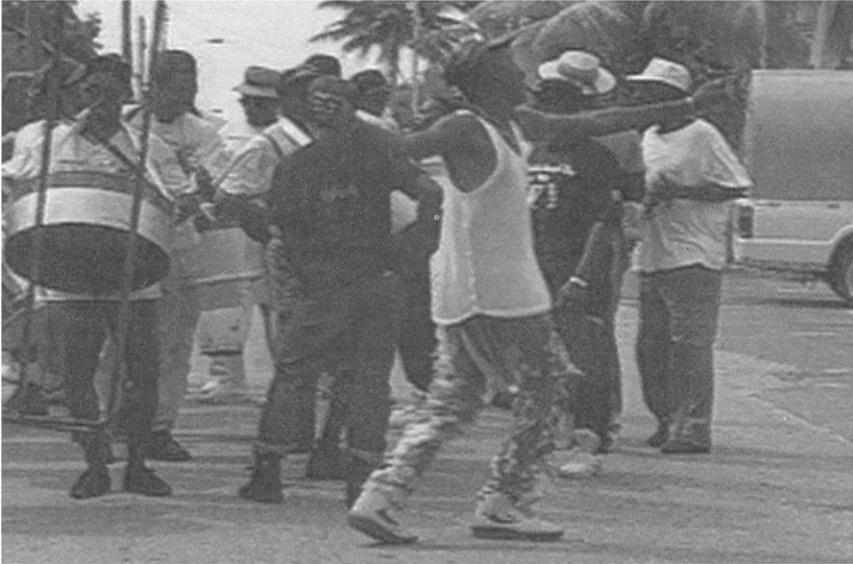
Attention to dance may also point, however, to local distinctions of affect. Dancing to a steelband playing a Panorama arrangement at slow tempo in the panyard, for example, strikes me as a particular kind of freedom. In contrast to the more consistent movements associated with calypso and soca on the road, stepping steadily forward (“chipping”) and winding the waist (“wining”), in the panyard you may see swaying bodies, waving arms, twirls, and other dramatic movements (see Photo 2). Such a way of dancing relates to the programmatic quality (suggestive, that is, of an unfolding story or drama) in both Bomb tunes and Panorama arrangements, and to the sort of wistful abandon that I think Ray Holman implies by his use of “groove.” This contrasts with the sexual abandon and physical intensity of people dancing to the “jam and wine” music that dominates modern carnival.

Abundant complaints about the dissolution of modern carnival (see Ahye 1991, Miller 1991) might give the impression that “jam and wine” is displacing “groove” as the young generation takes over from the old. “Groove” and “jam and wine,” however, probably represent more enduring Trinidadian distinctions of affect (since, for example, commentaries on the carnival of the nineteenth century are also replete with complaints about moral and aesthetic dissolution [Cowley 1996]). If this is so, it is easy to believe that the “soothing, relaxing” qualities Edwards associates with classical music, or the “melancholy” Holman heard in *Liebestraum* resonated with established aesthetics of carnival music and dance (and, of course, helped to mold them). To some extent, that is, steelband appropriations of the Classics at carnival time during the 1950s and 1960s filled an established affective “niche” in carnival, coexisting with other kinds of music and other kinds of affect. “The Bomb was to groove,” said Ray Holman, and the Hallelujah chorus “to make you feel in heaven”—and he could have added that a Kitchener road march could make you “jump up,” “get on bad,” and “wine your waiste.” Different ways to free up, with different kinds of music.

Conclusion

The story of the Bomb raises obvious issues of colonialism, class, nationalism, and cultural promotion, yet one of the challenges that such a politically charged performance genre presents is to keep sight of the *dif-*

Photo 2. A dancer frees up to the sound of the Beatles' "Yesterday," performed by the Maraval Blanca 47 Steel Orchestra. (Point Fortin, Trinidad, 1993. From a video by Shannon Dudley)



ferences between politicking and musicking. My initial instinct (like Keila Diehl's) was to analyze the Bomb in terms of accommodation and resistance, an approach that has its parallel in the scholarly debate about whether carnival (or other festival and ritual events) is a "steam valve" that gives stability to the status quo, or whether it has the potential to subvert the status quo in lasting ways (see Alonso 1990, Kerzer 1988). Barbara Babcock notes that play and symbolic inversion "define a culture's lineaments at the same time as they question the usefulness and the absoluteness of this ordering" (1978:29), the implication being that what is important about a carnival performance like the Bomb is how it affects social order. In contrast, John Blacking argues that "ultimately, the music is the most important aspect of music-making, not only for someone who studies it but also for those who participate in it, and it is the special character of musical activities that is sociologically and anthropologically problematic, rather than the characteristics that they have in common with other social activities" (1995:227). Even though the experience of the Bomb was conditioned by other social experiences—class distinction, political resistance, or the affective unity of emotion and movement in a carnival band—the Bomb's meaning was greater than the simple sum of these interpretive stances.

The different messages that people heard in the Bomb could be compared to what anthropologist James Fernandez calls an “argument of images”—contrasting images which tell us little individually, but which, by their repeated juxtaposition in ceremony and ritual, collectively help us sense the “complex whole” with which we yearn to connect (Fernandez 1986). The pictures you see here of the devil and the freed up dancer, for example, are images which are consistently juxtaposed in the “bacchanal” of Trinidad carnival. In performance, the two dimensions of these flat images are vastly expanded, linking them to an argument of sound and movement, of which the Bomb is a part. Christopher Small points to such an argument when he writes, “Through musicking humans have the power to explore and articulate . . . contradictions and paradoxes simultaneously, in ways that verbal language cannot” (1998:204). For some people the Bomb meant status, for others it meant romance, and for many people its different messages were surely experienced simultaneously, integrated so that they made sense in a deeply felt way.

The competing and complexly interrelated meanings of the Bomb continue to play themselves out in contemporary steelband performance. For example, if we think of the Bomb as Classics performed in calypso style, then Panorama has in a sense become its mirror image, featuring calypsoes performed in a classical style: ten minute theme and variation arrangements, elaborate modulations and re-harmonizations, introductions and codas, strictly memorized and performed by an orchestra of one hundred players. These renditions of native calypsoes are judged by formally trained musicians, many of whom (though they are Trinidadians or Tobagonians) have never played in a steelband. Musical complexity and virtuosity are still used as weapons of intimidation, and supporters and musicians alike dance and shout their way ecstatically through Panorama performances. All of these conditions give rise to complaints that arrangers compromise their integrity by catering to judges or fans, or that panists are not developing the kind of musicianship that they ought to (Dudley 1997:233–81). Such opinions reflect an ongoing tension between the undeniable social forces that have shaped the art form, and visions of steelband performance as an aesthetic enterprise.

Appendix. Bomb Tunes Mentioned in This Article

Title	Composer	Original performance context
Acceleration Waltz	Johann Strauss	Waltz
Anniversary Waltz	Dubin and Franklin	Recorded by Bing Crosby 1941
Another Night Like This	Ernesto Lecuona	Film: "Carnival in Costa Rica" (1947)
Ave Maria	Schubert	German lied, heard in religious settings with Latin text substituted
Bells of St. Mary's	Emmett and Furbur	Film: "Bells of St. Mary's" (1945) starring Bing Crosby
Carmen (aria from?)	Bizet	Opera: "Carmen"
Dance of the Hours	Ponchielli	Opera: "La Gioconda"
Elizabethan Serenade	Ronald Binge	Light classical, popularized esp. by the Mantovani orchestra
Liebestraum	Liszt	piano etude
Minuet in G	Beethoven	piano minuet
Musetta's Waltz	Pucini	Opera: "La Boheme"
Penny Lane	Lennon & McCartney	Recorded by the Beatles, 1967
Roses from the South	Johann Strauss	Waltz

Notes

1. This article builds upon my dissertation (Dudley 1997), and is based on observations of contemporary steelband performance during the carnivals of 1989, 1993, 1994, and 2000, as well as interviews, published opinions, and recordings. Most of my data pertains to people and events in and around Trinidad's capital city, Port of Spain. I am grateful to the University of Washington's Royalty Research Fund and Simpson Humanities Center for funding my fieldwork from January through March, 2000, and to the Simpson Center for giving me a chance to share this article with its Society of Scholars faculty seminar. I am also indebted to many organizations in Trinidad which facilitated my research, including Pan Trinbago, the National Carnival Commission, the University of West Indies, and UWI's Festival Center for the Performing Arts and its faculty. Among the innumerable musicians who shared their time, knowledge, and talents with me, I am particularly indebted to Ray Holman, who served as visiting artist at the University of Washington School of Music for two years (1998–2000). I have also been assisted by my students at the University of Washington: Brian Bensky, Hillary Funk, and Eiko Nagahama. The staff of the University of Washington's Center for Advanced Research Technology in the Arts and Humanities (CARTAH), helped me with graphics, as did Gary Gibson. I am also grateful for the careful reading and feedback of Jocelyne Guilbault, Charlie Keil, Philip Schuyler and Richard Will. Special thanks to my wife, Marisol Berríos-Miranda, for her invaluable assistance with fieldwork and editing.

2. The steel pan was officially declared Trinidad and Tobago's national instrument in 1992, but it already had powerful symbolic importance at the time of independence.

3. Steven Feld (1994) uses the term "interpretive moves" to refer to a series of cognitive processes (locational, categorical, associational, reflective, evaluative) by which we ascribe meaning to music when we hear it. An "interpretive stance" is a kind of predisposition that could influence which of these "interpretive moves" we privilege, and the *particular ways* we locate, categorize, associate, reflect upon, and evaluate music.

4. See Braithwaite's *Social Stratification in Trinidad* (1975) for an explanation of Trinidad's pre-independence class structure. Braithwaite argues that the pre-independence class structure was mainly based on race, but also describes ways in which people positioned themselves socially by means of European culture, education, and manners. In the 1950s and 1960s

the term "upper class" would have referred to people of European descent, English or "French Creoles," who don't figure in the story I am telling here because they had little input into the debate on national culture.

5. This name is borrowed from a type of skin-headed drum that is used in the "belair" or "bélé" dance in Trinidad, and elsewhere in the French Caribbean.

6. Calypso bands, with string and wind instruments, have always conformed to the same basic carnival dance sensibility as the steelbands, but calypso is also performed for seated audiences in the "tents." Steelband music features some rhythmic conventions (strumming and iron patterns, for example) as well as voicing and arranging techniques, that are not necessarily found in calypso bands, and vice versa. This is an important distinction to keep in mind when people make claims that calypso is carnival music and is therefore the "natural" repertoire of the steelband. In historical perspective, calypso is only one of several kinds of carnival music, including styles that are specific to particular masquerade characters and their dances. Some steelband musical conventions are unique to the idiom, and others can be traced to a variety of sources, some not even directly associated with carnival (Stuempfle 1995:32-44).

7. This sound is remembered fondly by older steelband musicians as an integral part of the music, and provides the name for a typical style of Trinidad carnival dancing, called "chipping." It can be heard on some of the recordings made by Emory Cook in the streets of Port of Spain in 1956 (Cook 1994).

8. The Mighty Sparrow (Slinger Francisco), whose extraordinary popularity began in 1956 with the song "Jean and Dinah," and who is still viewed by many as Trinidad's greatest calypsonian.

9. Radio disc jockey David Elcock explained the distinction between these concepts to me in a 1993 interview (quoted at more length in Dudley 1997:215-16): "I think our pride as a nation is first in the instrument, and then secondly in what it can do, as opposed to the idea that it is the national instrument and therefore it plays the national music. The national music of Trinidad and Tobago, in the estimation of a lot of us, is calypso. And this is what [the steelband] started out playing—calypso—at carnival time . . ."

10. Due to a typographical error, the date of this citation is missing in Rohlehr.

11. See, for example, Charlie Keil's critique of Meyer's argument that deferred gratification in music "is a sign . . . that the animal is becoming a man" (Keil 1994:74-75).

12. See Dudley 1996 for a discussion of calypso's "rhythmic feel."

References

- Aho, William. 1987. "Steelband music in Trinidad and Tobago." *Latin American Music Review* 8(1):26-58.
- Ahye, Molly. 1991. "Carnival, the Manipulative Polymorph: and Interplay of Social Stratification." In *Social and Occupational Stratification in Contemporary Trinidad and Tobago*, edited by S. Ryan. St. Augustine: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies.
- Alonso, Ana Maria. 1990. "Men in 'rags' and the devil on the throne: A study of protest and inversion in the carnival of post-emancipation Trinidad." *Plantation Society in the Americas* 3(1):73-120.
- Averill, Gage. 1997. *A Day for the Hunter, A Day for the Prey: Popular Music and Power in Haiti*. Chicago:University of Chicago Press.
- Babcock, Barbara. 1978. *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1984. *Rabelais and his World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Barber, Karin and Christopher Waterman. 1995. "Traversing the Global and the Local: *fuji* music and praise poetry in the production of contemporary Yoruba popular culture." In *Worlds Apart: Modernity Through the Prism of the Local*, edited by Daniel Miller, 240-62. London and New York: Routledge.

- Belgrave, Teddy. 2000. Personal conversation, St. Augustine, Trinidad. Feb. 29.
- Blacking, John. 1995. *Music, Culture and Experience*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Braithwaite, Lloyd. 1975. *Social Stratification in Trinidad: A Preliminary Analysis*. Mona, Jamaica: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies.
- Constantine, Carleton "Zigilee." 1993. Personal Interview, Port of Spain. March 31.
- Cowley, John. 1996. *Carnival, Canboulay, and Calypso: Traditions in the Making*. Cambridge University Press.
- DaMatta, Roberto. 1991. *Carnivals, Rogues, and Heroes: An Interpretation of the Brazilian Dilemma*. London: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Diehl, Keila Mackie. 1992. "Tempered Steel: The Steel Drum as a Site for Social, Political and Aesthetic Negotiation in Trinidad." Master's thesis, University of Texas, Austin.
- Dudley, Shannon. 1996. "Judging by the Beat: Calypso vs. Soca." *Ethnomusicology* 40(2):269-98.
- . 1997. "Making Music for the Nation: Competing Identities and Esthetics in Trinidad and Tobago's Panorama Steelband Competition." Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley.
- Eagleton, Terry. 1990. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Edwards, Leon "Smooth." 2000. Personal Interview, Port of Spain. March 4th.
- Elder, Joseph D. 1969. *From Congo Drum to Steelband: A Socio-historical Account of the Emergence and Evolution of the Trinidad Steel Orchestra*. St. Augustine, Trinidad: University of the West Indies.
- Erlmann, Veit. 1992. "'The Past is Far and the Future is Far': Power and Performance Among Zulu Migrant Workers." *American Ethnologist* 19(4):688-709.
- Espinete, Charles S. and Harry Pitts. 1944. *Land of the Calypso: The Origin and Development of Trinidad's Folk Song*. Port of Spain: Guardian Commercial Printery.
- Feld, Steven. 1994 (1984). "Communication, Music, and Speech About Music." In *Music Grooves*, by Charles Keil and Steven Feld, 77-95. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Fernandez, James. 1986. "The argument of images and the experience of returning to the whole." In *The Anthropology of Experience*, edited by Victor Turner and Edward M. Bruner, 159- 87. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973 (1971). "After the Revolution: The Fate of Nationalism in the New States." In his *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 234-54. New York: Basic Books.
- Goddard, George. 1991. *Forty Years in the Steelbands: 1939-1979*. Edited by Roy D. Thomas. London: Karia Press.
- Griffith, Beverly and Selwyn. 1993. Personal Interview, St. Augustine. Jan. 16.
- Guilbault, Jocelyne. 1993. *Zouk: World Music in the West Indies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Holman, Ray. 1993. Personal Interview, St. Annes, Trinidad. July 7.
- . 1999. Personal Interview, Seattle. August 8th.
- James, C. L. R. 1977. "The Artist in the Caribbean." In his *The Future in the Present: Selected Writings*, 183-90. London: Alison and Busby.
- Jules, Neville. 1999. Telephone Interview. July 21.
- Keil, Charles. 1994 (1966). "Motion and feeling through music." In *Music Grooves*, edited by Keil and Steven Feld, 53-76. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1995. "The Theory of Participatory Discrepancies: A Progress Report." *Ethnomusicology* 29(1):1-20.
- Kertzer, David. 1988. "Conflict and Crisis." In his *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, 125-50. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Levine, Lawrence. 1988. "The Sacralization of Culture," in his *High Brow Low Brow*, 83-168. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Liverpool, Hollis. 2001. *Rituals of Power and Rebellion: The Carnival Tradition in Trinidad and Tobago, 1763-1962*. Chicago, Jamaica, and London: Research Associates School Times Publications/Frontline Distribution Int'l Inc.

- Maxime, Gideon. 1993. *Forty-One Years of Pan*. Trinidad: author.
- McClary, Susan. 2000. *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Meyer, Leonard. 1956. *Emotion and Meaning in Music*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Miller, Daniel. 1991. "Absolute Freedom in Trinidad." *Man* 26:323-41.
- Nettl, Bruno. 1985. *The Western Impact on World Music: Change, Adaptation, and Survival*. New York: Schirmer Books.
- Odingi, Eddie. 1993. Personal Interview. July 21.
- Pearse, Andrew. 1956. "Mitto Sampson on Calypso Legends of the 19th Century." *Caribbean Quarterly* 4:250-62.
- Powrie, Barbara E. 1951. "The Changing Attitude of the Coloured Middle Class Towards Carnival." *Caribbean Quarterly* 4(3-4):224-32.
- Port of Spain Gazette*. 1946. March 5th, p.1.
- Quashie. 1966. *Trinidad Guardian* (Port of Spain), Feb.20, p.8
- Ranger, Terrence. 1975. *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa, 1890-1970*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Regis, Louis. 1999. *The Political Calypso: True Opposition in Trinidad and Tobago 1962-87*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Rohlehr, Gordon. 1990. *Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad*. St. Augustine, Trinidad: author.
- Rouse, Ewart. 1966. "The Steelband: Classics vs. Folk." *Trinidad Guardian* (Port of Spain), Nov.23, p.18.
- Said, Edward. 1993. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Alfred Knopf.
- Simmonds, Austin. 1964. "Calypsoes vs. Classics." *Trinidad Guardian* (Port of Spain), Feb.9, p.9.
- Simon, Pete. 1969. "Is the 'Bomb' Destroying the Spirit of Carnival?" *Trinidad Guardian* (Port of Spain), Jan.19, p.9.
- . 1970. [Criticism of the Bomb competition] *Trinidad Guardian* (Port of Spain), Feb.1, p.5
- . 1974. [Protest against use of foreign judges in steelband competitions]. *Trinidad Guardian* (Port of Spain), Jan.27, p.10 and Feb.3, p.4.
- Small, Christopher. 1998. *Musicking: The Meaning of Performance and Listening*. Hanover: University Press of New England.
- Spottswood, Dick and Donald Hill, producers. 1989. *Calypso Pioneers*. [sound recording] Rounder 1039.
- Stuempfle, Stephen. 1995. *The Steelband Movement: The Forging of a National Art in Trinidad and Tobago*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Trinidad All Stars. 1958. *Minuet in G* [sound recording], RCA 7-9017.
- Trinidad Guardian*. 1969. Letter to the editor. Feb.13, p.10.
- Turino, Thomas. 1993. *Moving Away From Silence*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Washburne, Chris. 1998. "Play it *con filin!*: The Swing and Expression of Salsa." *Latin American Music Review* 19(2):160-85.
- Williams, Raymond. 1977. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wilson, William. 1973. "Herder, Folklore, and Romantic Nationalism." *Journal of Popular Culture* 6:819-35.