

# Panning for the power of music

By Andy Gleadhil

**Y**oung people love to make music and as a music teacher, my goal is to make this as easy and enjoyable as possible for them, so that more and more young people – and not just the musical or fortunate ones – can be creative and discover the power of music for themselves.

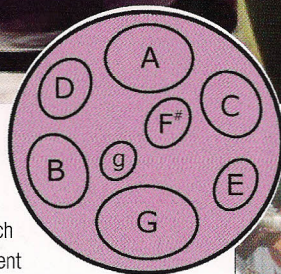
I have found that there are certain styles of music (more properly called musical traditions), that work particularly well in mixed-ability classrooms and which motivate and involve both low and high achievers: African Drumming, Indonesian Gamelan, Brazilian Samba, Japanese Taiko, Hand and Body Percussion and Caribbean Steel Pans.

These are styles that the pupils want to play, that also work particularly well in after-school clubs and community settings and which can quickly take on a life of their own, propelled onwards by the pupils themselves.

Authentic African Drums, Gamelan, Samba and Percussion instruments are all readily available at affordable prices, but Steel Pans have until recently been very expensive to buy, with a full band set-up costing £15-20,000. But a new Jumbie steel pan from America has made it possible to kit out a whole class for less than £1,500.

Steel Pans are the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago, a republic in the Southern Caribbean. Originating from the music, traditions and African heritage of the slaves brought to the islands in the 18th century, the music developed from drumming used in religious ceremonies.

Drumming was banned by the authorities and so the people turned to using bamboo sticks to make their music; this was known as Tamboo-Bamboo or 'stick fighting' music. The islanders also began experimenting with domestic items, such as frying



pans, car brake drums, paint tins and biscuit tins, to make their music.

Groups competed with each other to see how many different tones or pitches they could produce from each instrument. Biscuit tins with two tones were used to create 'ping pong' bands.

Trinidad and Tobago is an oil-producing nation with an American Navy base and 55 gallon oil barrels were often discarded around the island. These were used to create instruments with many tones and eventually evolved into the chromatic instruments we know today.

Full Steel Pan bands emerged just after the Second World War and today a full size Trinidadian steel pan band will have a range of different pans covering a large musical scale. Some of these are single pans, played by one player, or double and sometimes triple pans, played by an individual player.

The Jumbie Jam is a simplified one octave steel pan that is easy to play, has an uncomplicated layout, but does not compromise on sound quality or musical versatility. It is easily packed away for storage and there is also a desk top version. Compare the Jumbie with the face of a traditional steel pan and you will see how uncomplicated and accessible it is.

Steel Pan music is usually presented in three distinct layers: the first is the top line, which carries the main tune or melody.

The second is the accompanying part, which is sometimes described as 'strumming' chords, hence the name of some Steel Pans as 'Guitars'.

The third is the bass part, sometimes referred



Part One (melody)											
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
G	G	D	D	E	E	D	O	C	C	B	B

Part Two (accompaniment)											
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
G	G	G	G	C	C	B	O	A	A	G	G

Part Three (Bass part)											
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
G	O	B	O	C	O	B	O	A	O	D	O

to as the 'boom'. These Steel Pan parts are usually accompanied by a percussion section known as the 'engine room'.

In my book\*, each of the tunes for the Jumbie Jams is written in these three parts using a simple musical grid, so that it is easy for non-musicians to learn each part.

The first part is the main tune, the second an accompanying part and the third a bass part.

As well as facilitating part-playing, this allows a group to challenge pupils who are more advanced with a slightly more complicated accompaniment and also give those who are not so quick to learn a very easy bass part to play.

\*This is an edited extract from Andy Gleadhil's *Caribbean Steel Pan Book*, which takes teachers from class from basics to performance in 10 weeks and is available from [drumsforschools.co.uk](http://drumsforschools.co.uk). School prices available. For further information call 0800 1577 986.

