

Andy Gleadhill is the author of the acclaimed World-Class Music Teaching Guides and his sixth book, World-Class Jumbie Steel Pans, is available now from [drumsforschools.co.uk](http://drumsforschools.co.uk)

# Life

## RHYTHMS OF

### Today you will learn...

- > to play an authentic African drumming rhythm
- > to play some Tamboo Bamboo music
- > to make a Ping Pong biscuit tin drum
- > to understand how steel pans were developed in the Caribbean

As children follow the evolution of Caribbean steel pans, the history of the African population of Trinidad and Tobago will unfold in parallel, says Andy Gleadhill...

**We are all aware of the impact the slave trade had on the world, but hidden among the stories of hardship, sacrifice and defiance is the fascinating history of how steel pan bands were born.**

By exploring the way music developed in Trinidad and Tobago, children can learn about how the lives of the Islanders developed and cover subjects such as geography, history, science, art, design and technology, languages and, of course, music.

### Starter activity

The sound of African Drumming has captivated and inspired people for centuries and is one of the earliest forms of communication. When people from Africa were

transported to America to work as slaves on the cotton sugar and cocoa plantations, they brought with them their traditional music, which was an important part of

their religious ceremonies. Much of this music was played on drums.

You can introduce children to this type of music by asking them to play an authentic African Drumming rhythm.

Divide the class into three groups, each with one or more of the following.

**GROUP 1:** large, low pitched drums

**GROUP 2:** medium pitched drums

**GROUP 3:** small, high pitched drums

If you do not have these, try to find three distinctly different sounding groups of percussion instruments. Alternatively, you can use large cardboard boxes, medium plastic storage boxes and small metal tins. The role of group 1 is to maintain a steady beat. Ask them to do this by counting to four and playing their low sounding instruments only on beat number one.

Play-rest-rest-rest-

1 2 3 4

Play-rest-rest-rest - etc.

1 2 3 4

The whole class can help by counting out loud to four, round and round.

Group 2 can then add their part, which will rest on beats one and two then play on counts three and four.

rest-rest-Play-Play-

1 2 3 4

rest-rest-Play-Play - etc.

1 2 3 4

Group 3 can then add the final and more complicated part, where they count to eight, playing on beats one, three, five, six and eight.

Play-rest-Play-rest-

1 2 3 4

Play-Play-rest-Play-etc.

5 6 7 8

Don't forget to keep looping these rhythms round and round.

This is a traditional West African rhythm known as a Sogo.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy Gleadhill has over 30 years' experience as a professional musician and teacher. He is currently the Head of Bristol Arts and Music Service. [andygleadhill.com](http://andygleadhill.com)



## Main activities

### 1 **Tambo Bamboo**

Soon the plantation owners banned the slaves from playing their African drums



as they were using them to communicate between plantations and to practice their African religions. So instead the plantation workers developed Tamboo Bamboo, making their music using sticks of bamboo that were readily available on the plantations. Children can play Tamboo Bamboo music using broom handles and wooden spoons, or you can use any long and short stick. When playing Tamboo Bamboo music, pupils must always keep their broom handle or long stick upright and vertical and their short stick horizontal. As a general rule, the broom handle is played by lifting it up and stamping the low end down on the floor (from now on known as "stomping") and the wooden spoon or short stick is only played by striking against the shaft of the broom stick (from now

on known as "clicking"). Now try the following call and response exercises, where the pupils repeat the exact actions of the teacher.

Teacher: Stomp-Stomp-Click-Click

1 2 3 4

Class: Stomp-Stomp-Click-Click

1 2 3 4

Teacher: Stomp-Click-Stomp-Click

1 2 3 4

Class: Stomp-Click-Stomp-Click

1 2 3 4

Teacher: Stomp-Click-Click-Stomp

1 2 3 4

Class: Stomp-Click-Click-Stomp

1 2 3 4

Now you can play endless games, mixing up your stomps and clicks and with the pupils creating their own interesting variations.

### 2 **Ping pong music**

Rather unsurprisingly, Tamboo Bamboo was in turn banned and so the workers made music with whatever they could lay their hands on. This included drums made from biscuit tins. The players noticed that where the biscuit tins had become misshapen, they played different notes or pitches, and so they actively began to hammer out different areas of the biscuit tin, so as to produce two distinct tones. This became known as "Ping Pong" music. Eventually, different Ping Pong bands would compete with each other to see who could produce the largest number of different tones from a biscuit tin drum.

Ask your pupils to bring to school an old biscuit, cake or sweet tin and hammer the left hand side of the bottom of the tin, leaving the right hand side as it is. You will now have two different tones or notes to play: one will sound high, the Ping note, the other low, the Pong note.

Using small beaters, you can now use your biscuit tin drums to play the examples of Ping Pong music, seen right:



(A)

Ping-rest-Pong-rest-Ping-Ping-Pong-rest - etc

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

(B)

Ping-Pong-Ping-rest-Ping-Pong-Ping-rest - etc

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

(C)

Ping-rest-rest-Pong-Ping-rest-rest-Pong - etc

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

You can repeat these exercises round and round, remembering to keep counting even beats and not to play when it says "Rest". You can also try different combinations of three groups playing together, e.g. start with one group playing exercise A, then add another group playing B, then another playing C. You can also experiment by making up your own mixes of

Pings, Pongs and Rests.

In the 1930s, the petroleum industry began to make an impact on the country, particularly by bringing increased wealth to the islands. Musicians started to experiment with the technique of "hammering" - shaping oil drums into tuned instruments - and by the end of the second world war, skilful tuners were able to hammer out a full chromatic scale from the 55 gallon oil drums left over from the American Navy base. These oil drums became the full steel pans used by bands we know today.

Videos of modern steel pan bands in action can be found at [panonthenet.com](http://panonthenet.com)

## USEFUL QUESTIONS

- > How did steel pan bands evolve?
- > What does the instrument sound like and how does it make you feel?
- > Look at the musicians playing the steel pans. How do you think they feel?
- > How did you feel when you were performing in your band? Why?



## Follow up and assess

> Your whole class can now combine all the musical activities above into your own performance. Start with the African drumming rhythms then add in the Tamboo Bamboo sticks with their rhythms and finally add in the

biscuit tins Ping Pong rhythms and you will see how they all fit together to make your own Caribbean band. You can also add shakers and any other instruments you like.