

COOK

Sounds of Our Times

long play 1042

Compatible
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Brute Force Steel Bands

of Antigua, B.W.I.



Bingham

cover print - courtesy Alcon Steamship Co.

Mambos, Sambas, Meringues, Calypsos

THE STEEL BANDS

The Steel Band —

Not long ago there was a ban on steel bands in Trinidad. But now there must be 200 bands on the island, and the *sambas*, *mambos*, *boleros*, *rumbas*, *meringues* and *calypsos* they play are the rage of the Caribbean. Every tourist is carried away by steel band music, and the strange thing is that this unique and imaginative form of musical expression has not yet spread to the U.S.

By hammering in the ends of steel oil drums, biscuit tins etc., a metallic version of the tympani is achieved; notes are distributed around the head of the drum, outlined by the cold-chisel and white paint of the tuner. One end of the drum is cut off, and the resulting length and diameter determine whether it is *tenor pan*, alto, baritone or *bass-boom*. Played with rubbered or padded sticks, all the orchestral voices and ranges for accompaniment, melody and countermelody are represented in a group of 14-16 men, complete with maracas, gourd and wood blocks. Both new and old, popular and serious music are played, and a sizeable group of native composers and arrangers is busily forging a bright future for itself and for steel band.

A most extraordinary thing about steel band is the suddenness with which it has sprung up. It is almost entirely a post-war phenomenon; of course with lend-lease there were plenty of oil drums to be had for the cartage.

The sudden end of the war called for celebrations; festivals are manifold in the Caribbean, and oil drums provided economical and ubiquitous noisemakers. The din was frightful according to those who can bring themselves to remember. Inevitably, the new form spread to other islands, and in Antigua the steel seed flourished. Antigua's television-radio climate is barren. The only local entertainment is a single cinema, and the incentive to create music is strong, for there is more leisure time, and less to do with it than in Port of Spain. The Brute Force Steel Band of Antigua (self-named), Big Shell and Hell's Gate bands play regularly, tour frequently into the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico and beyond.



Brute Force Steel Band of Antigua in full dress. Six men are missing, but all showed for recording.

about brown skinned gal

The West Indian had no part or say in the events that led up to lend-lease; it was thrust upon him by circumstances which from his point of view were very similar to many other episodes down thru his ethnic evolution. But the fact that it had happened before made the moment of American invasion no less acute. The tradition of a political and cultural melting-pot does not make a new onslaught easier to take. The West Indian may have hedonistic aspects, but he is also well marked for his ability to sublimate his problems, for his cosmopolitanism, and for the ability to stand back and laugh at his own predicament.

Brown Skinned Gal is balladry of recent origin; the lines, —

*Goin' away in my sailin' boat
If I don' come back
You're on my mind baybee . . .*

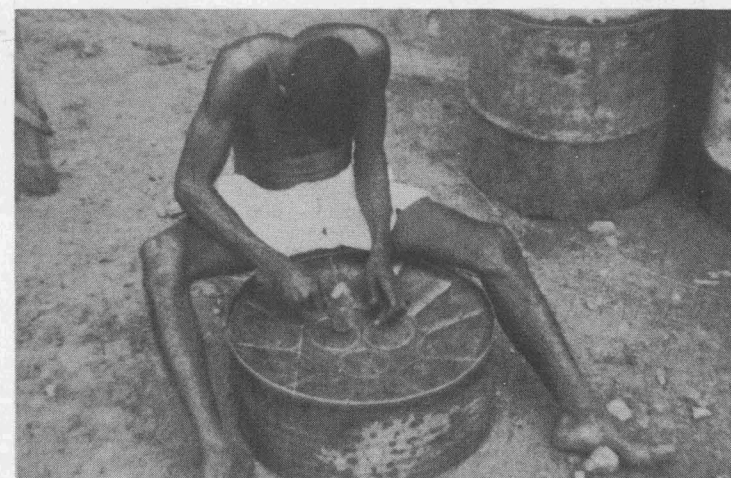
are in folk and "blues" singing everywhere, in one form or another. Like the words of many songs, in themselves alone, they are inadequate. But the tragedy and loneliness of the feeling are dispelled in the singing of the song.

the setting

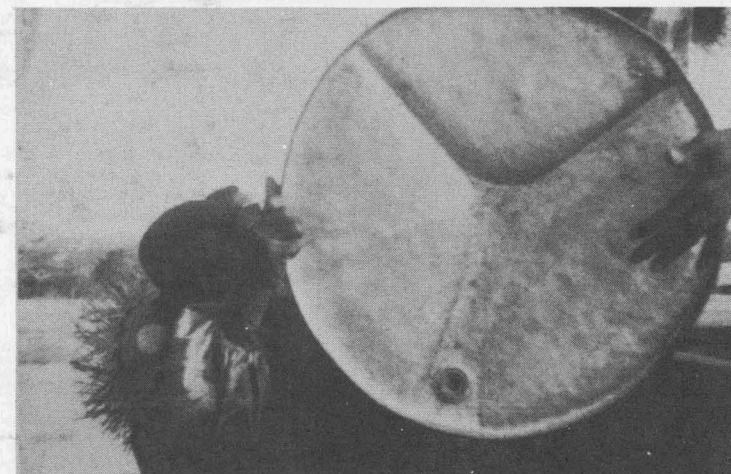
Here then, in the warm and pleasant tropical evening, men of the Brute Force congregate by the house of Mr. and Mrs. F. V. D. Griffith, near St. Johns. Griffith, retired harbourmaster of Antigua is also bandmaster of the police band, and for a lifetime has been a musical force in the B. W. I. Under the steps leading up to the veranda a musically astute cricket keeps time with the Brute Force as they play and sing, Mrs. Griffith entertains graciously as the concert goes along; friends, tourists, neighbors and strangers drop in, attracted by music in the night, and all are welcome.

Farther down along the beach is a club where visitors may enjoy a quiet evening swim and the excellent native rum. Here in the shadow of the tropical palms, the Big Shell Band plays, and in the interval following *La Paloma a la bolero*, the quick restless surf rhythms of Antigua's northern coast are heard as the microphone volume is increased.

So from Antigua, an obscure island in the British West Indies, where we find one man who uses an 1837 gravestone for his coffee table, where the parakeets scream in a French *patois*, comes — steel band.



Tuning—Ellie Manette's backyard in Trinidad is a hotbed of tinpany.



3-note bass-boom leaves truck near Bucket of Blood—Antigua.



Hell's Gate Band plays "Cantata"—the sound is of pizzicato strings.

Side A

THE BRUTE FORCE STEEL BAND of ANTIGUA, B.W.I.

Mambo Jambo
Mambo No. 5 (rumba)
Alec Betsa (calypso)
Del Magreto Del Batey (samba)
Hold 'em Joe (calypso)
Jingle Bells (calypso)
Brown Skinned Gal (calypso)
Under The Double Eagle March

Side B

Cantata (rumba)†
Meringue 1*
Meringue 2*
Meringue 3*
Leeward Island Mambo*
La Paloma (bolero)*
Saturday Night*

*The Big Shell Steel Band
†The Hell's Gate Steel Band

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