

THE BAMBOUSHAY STEEL BAND

WITH:
GENE BLUESTEIN
DEREK HODGE
WINSTON HODGE
TOM GATTEN
ARIEL MELCHOIR
CHEMO RODRIGUEZ
KEITH WILLIAMS



FOLKWAYS FS 3835

SIDE I

Band 1: COCOANUT
Band 2: BEGIN THE BEGUINE
Band 3: KINGSTON TOWN
Band 4: NEVER ON SUNDAY
Band 5: COQUI

SIDE II

Band 1: CHOUCOUNE (Yellow Bird)
Band 2: MR. BENWOOD DICK
Band 3: PALO PALO
Band 4: MAMBO JAMBO
Band 5: MAQUINOLANDELA
Band 6: A CERTAIN SMILE
Band 7: BAMBOUSHAY

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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FOLKWAYS FS 3835

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THE BAMBOUSHAY STEEL BAND

*with: Gene Bluestein, Derek Hodge,
Winston Hodge, Tom Gatten,
Ariel Melchoir, Keith Williams
Chemo Rodriguez*



SIDE I

- Band 1: COCOANUT
- Band 2: BEGIN THE BEGUINS
- Band 3: KINGSTON TOWN
- Band 4: NEVER ON SUNDAY
- Band 5: COQUI

SIDE II

- Band 1: CHOUCOUNE (Yellow Bird)
- Band 2: MR. BENWOOD DICK
- Band 3: PALO PALO
- Band 4: NANSO JANSO
- Band 5: NAQUINOLANDELA
- Band 6: A CERTAIN SMILE
- Band 7: BAMBOUSHAY

by Gene Bluestein

The Bamboushay steel band is composed of students at Michigan State University who came from the Virgin Islands, Bermuda, and Michigan. (To complete the geographical distribution, I should add that I am from Brooklyn, though I teach at MSU.) Most of the drums were made under the supervision of Derek Hodge, who also plays the lead or first solo pan. The group is one of many that now exist in this country, developing a kind of music which originated in Trinidad during the last war.

Utilizing what was at the time a plentiful supply of oil barrels discarded by American naval units in Port of Spain, Trinidadians brought into existence a new instrument of great vitality and remarkable versatility. A brief outline of the way in which the drums are made will indicate the ingenuity and skill of West Indian folk musicians. The unopened end of the fifty-five gallon barrel is hammered into concave shape. (The main tool is a small sledge hammer.) After being heated over an open fire, the barrel is marked for a pattern of notes. The number of notes as well as the length of the barrel depends on the kind of pan desired: basses have two or three notes and retain the full size of the barrel; ping pong or lead pans have about twenty-six notes and use about a fifth of the length of the barrel. In addition to these the steel band uses tenors, baritones, and guitar pans. When each note has been separated from its neighbor by a light stippling with a cold chisel and a blunted nail punch, the crucial and most painstaking operation begins. As each area of the pattern is hammered up and down with a small hammer, it takes on pitch. In fact, the steel drum is the only instrument I know of which is tuned by being hit hard with a hammer. In order to prevent dissonant sympathetic vibrations from neighboring tones, the notes of the scale are laid out on alternating sides of the drum. A typical pattern looks like this:



Derek Hodge and Gene Bluestein



Tenor Pan

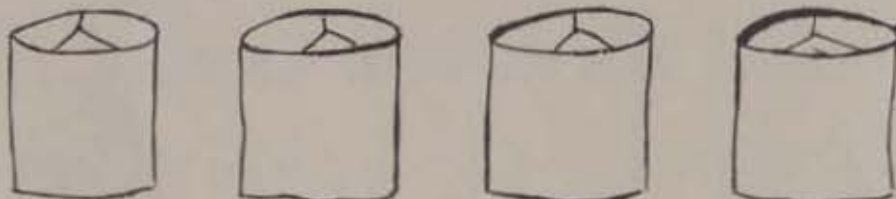
This arrangement of the notes makes it easier to play with great speed and also facilitates chording. The above arrangement makes it possible to play in the keys of G and D major. Most of our songs are played in G although in the song, Coconut we modulate.

The melody pans are struck with sticks whose ends are wound with rubber from bicycle tire inner tubes. (Red rubber seems to be better than black.) The bass and strum players use spongy rubber balls. The Bamboushay steel band uses four basses, a four-note bass, and two strum pans for basic rhythmic and chording effects. A ping pong and a tenor pan provide the melody. Various rhythm instruments may be used to complement the pans. These may range from a brake drum lining struck with a metal rod to more conventional rhythmic devices. On our recording we have used only maracas.

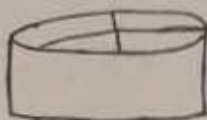
Like many folk instruments, the steel drum is closely related to dance. (Bamboushay is the name of a West Indian dance step.) In the West Indies steel bands provide music for parades, dances, and other celebrations. The bands adapt any kind of music, from calypso to cha-cha's and meringue's. In addition to American popular songs, the bands in recent

times have begun to adapt excerpts from light classical or symphonic music -- including selections like Schubert's Serenade or a theme from Tchaikowsky. Most of our selections are from folk or popular tradition. Coqui is a good example of a dance tune with much intricate rhythm behind it. Over a pattern of changing rhythmic motifs, Derek works out some fine melodic patterns. Choucoune highlights the mellow voice of the drums in a classic Haitian ballad tune.

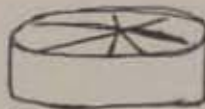
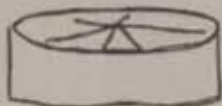
For more specific information on steel drums see Pete Seeger's The Steel Drums of Kim Loy Wong, which contains instructions for how to make and play steel drums. (An instructional record by Kim Loy Wong illustrates some of the sections of the book.) Pete and Tohi Seeger have produced a film dealing with steel bands in Trinidad which may also be obtained from Folkways Records, Inc.



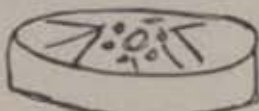
Four Standing Basses (3 notes each)



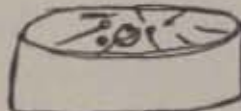
Four Note Bass



Strum Pans (for chording)



Ping Pong (melody)



Tenor (melody)

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