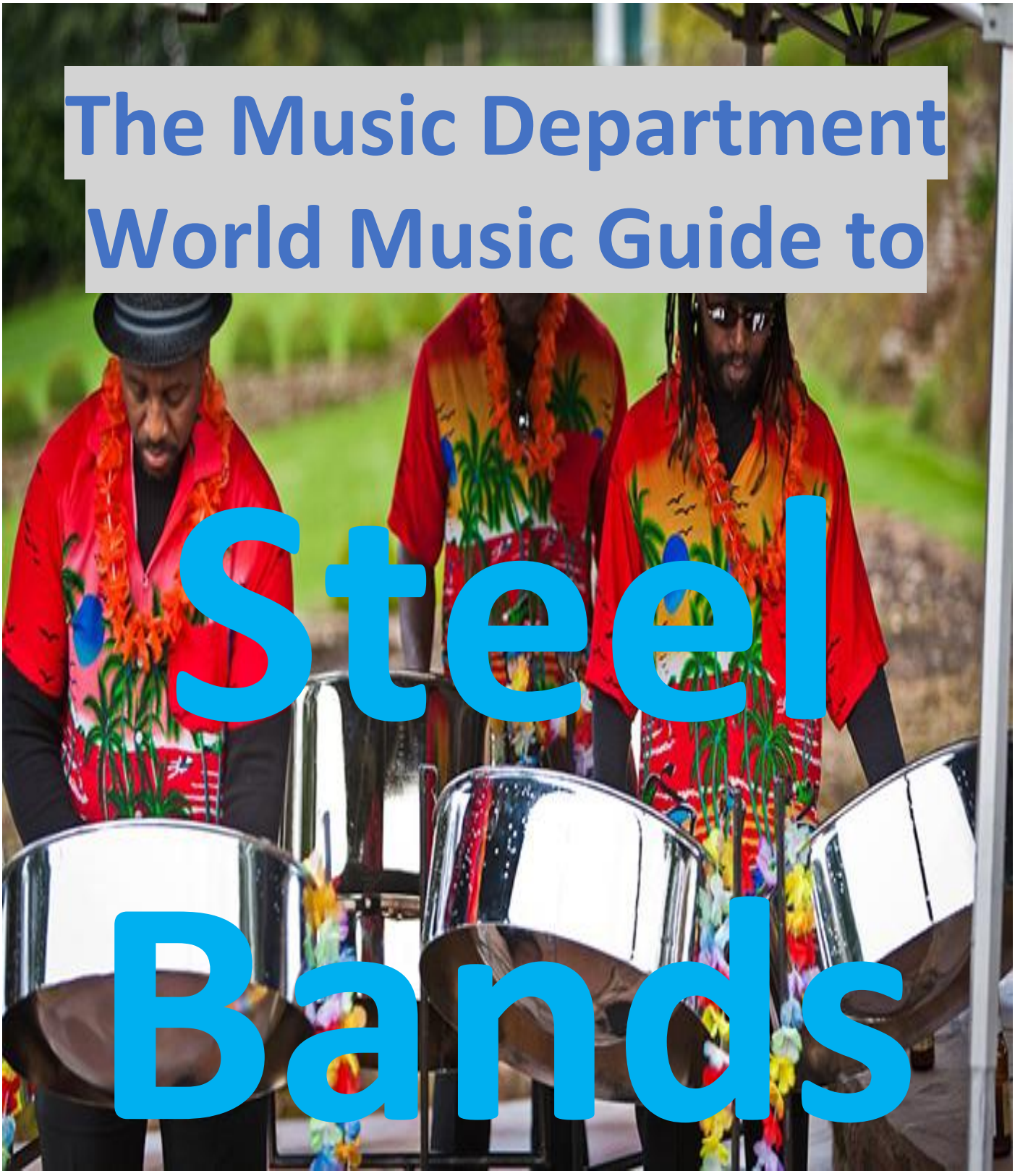
The Music Department World Music Guide to



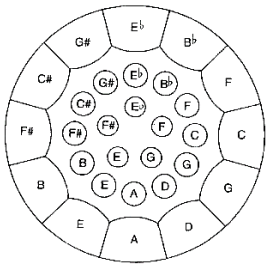
Steel Bands

Learning about Steel Bands

Steel Bands began in Trinidad (see map below) when a great many oil drums were left lying around after World War II. It was soon found that they could be turned into musical instruments. Steel Pans are made by cutting oil drums into different sizes and then beating the tops into concave bowls. Each individual note is then beaten into a small area of the bowl. Small rubber-headed sticks are used to strike each note.

These days, Steel Bands consist of a number of different-sized Steel Pans, and a **RHYTHM SECTION** of **LATIN-AMERICAN PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTS**. Each pan or pair of pans has its own name according to its pitch-range. Some of the pans have more than one name although they mean the same thing.

Names of the Steel Pans	The part they play in the band
Soprano, Ping Pong, or First Tenor	Usually play the melody
Double Alto, Double Second or Second Tenor	Play a second melody underneath the Soprano part
Single Alto	Play two-note Chords
Cello, or Guitar	Play Chords, Melody or Bass
Bass	Plays the Bass Part



The picture to the left shows the note positions on a steel pan. Because a wide range of pitches is available on Steel Pans, the Steel Bands is a very versatile ensemble. Many different styles of music can be performed, including traditional Caribbean, pop and classical music. However, the Steel Bands is most often found in outdoor carnivals playing traditional Caribbean music.

1. Which Caribbean island did Steel Bands originate from?
2. From what are Steel Pans made from?
3. How are Steel Pans played?
4. How many different types/sizes of Steel Pans are common in a Steel Band?
5. What do you notice about the layout of pitches/notes on a steel pan compared with a traditional piano keyboard?

6. Scan the QR code to the left and listen to solo demonstrations of the pitches of the different pitched Steel Pans now in descending pitch order. What words could you use to describe the **TIMBRE** or **SONORITY** of the sound of Steel Pans?

Listening to Changing Partners

Scan the QR code below and listen to *Changing Partners* performed by The Ebony Steel Bands who came from the islands of Trinidad and Grenada and answer the questions below as you listen. You may wish to listen to *Changing Partners* more than once to help you complete the questions.

1. How is the **DURATION** of the melody notes lengthened, so to prevent long notes from dying away too rapidly?

2. The backing chords are played by the Single Alto and Cello pans which perform a repeated musical pattern on the first two beats of each bar. What is the musical name for this?

3. The rhythm is kept steady by the bass notes, played by the Bass pans. How would you describe the rhythm of the chords played by the Single Alto and Cello pans?

Listen to *Changing Partners* again following the chord pattern shown in the box below. There are four beats in each bar (ignore the question marks for now)

I / / /	I / / /	I / / /	IV / / /	II / / /	V / / /	? / / /	? / / /
I / / /	I / / /	I / / /	? / / /	II / / /	I / / /	IV / ? /	? / / /

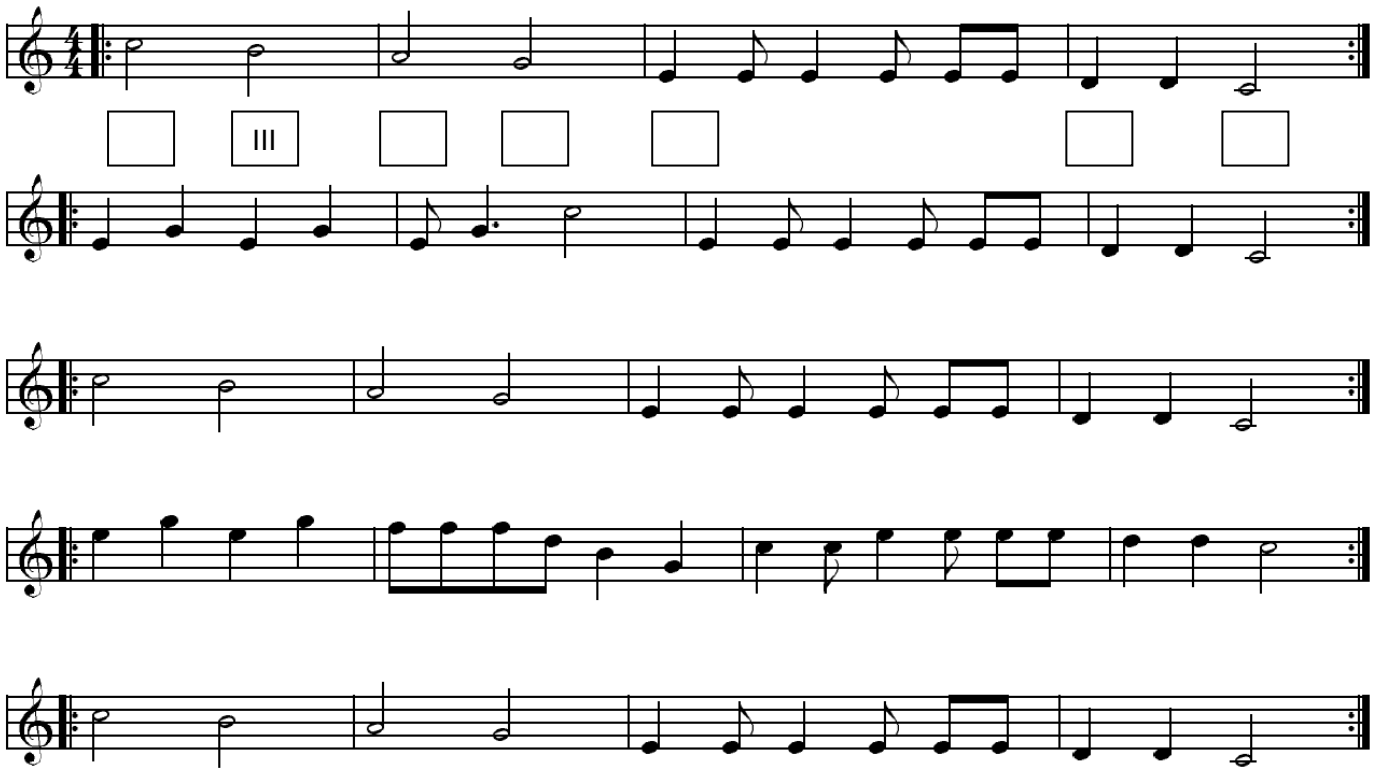
4. Next, listen to *Changing Partners* on more time (or more if you need to) and see if you can fill in the missing chords using chords I, IV and V.

5. The rate at which the chords change is called the **HARMONIC RHYTHM**. How would you describe the **HARMONIC RHYTHM** of this steel pan piece?

6. What type of **CADENCE** ends each of the lines above? A Perfect, Plagal, Imperfect or Interrupted Cadence?

Listening to Banana Boat Song

Scan the first QR code and listen to the melody line of 'Banana Boat Song' played on the piano, following the score below and remembering the repeat marks.



Next, scan the second QR code and listen to a Steel Bands ensemble playing 'Banana Boat Song', again following the score above and listening out for how the Soprano pan players, performing the melody, "roll" the longer notes to prevent them from dying away too rapidly. Answer the questions below as you listen. The piece begins with a short, two-bar introduction.

1. What **RHYTMIC DEVICE** is used in the melody line in bar 3, as well as at other points within the piece?

2. Describe the **FORM & STRUCTURE** of 'Banana Boat Song' using a different letter of the alphabet for each four-bar section.

3. The melody of the last two bars of each section is the same in most lines. In which line has it been changed and how?

4. Listen again to 'Banana Boat Song' and fill in the missing Chords for the first line (you will find it easier if you concentrate on the Bass pans as you listen) in the boxes on the score. Choose from chords I, IV & V.

5. What type of **CADENCE** ends each of the different sections?

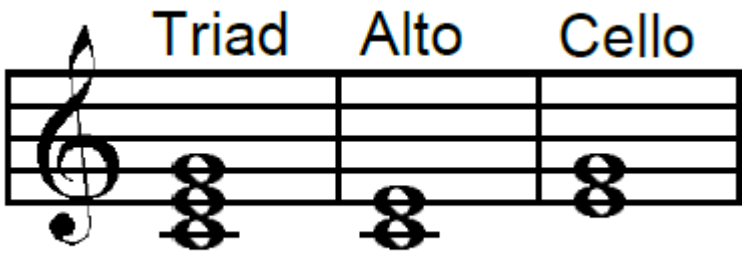
If you have a keyboard available, try and learn to play the melody of "Banana Boat Song" or on any other suitable instrument that you may play or have available. If you don't, you may be able to use online "virtual pianos" or free music software or online sites.

Learning about Chords and Rhythm Patterns in Steel Bands

The Single Alto and the Cello and Guitar pans have several functions in a Steel Band:

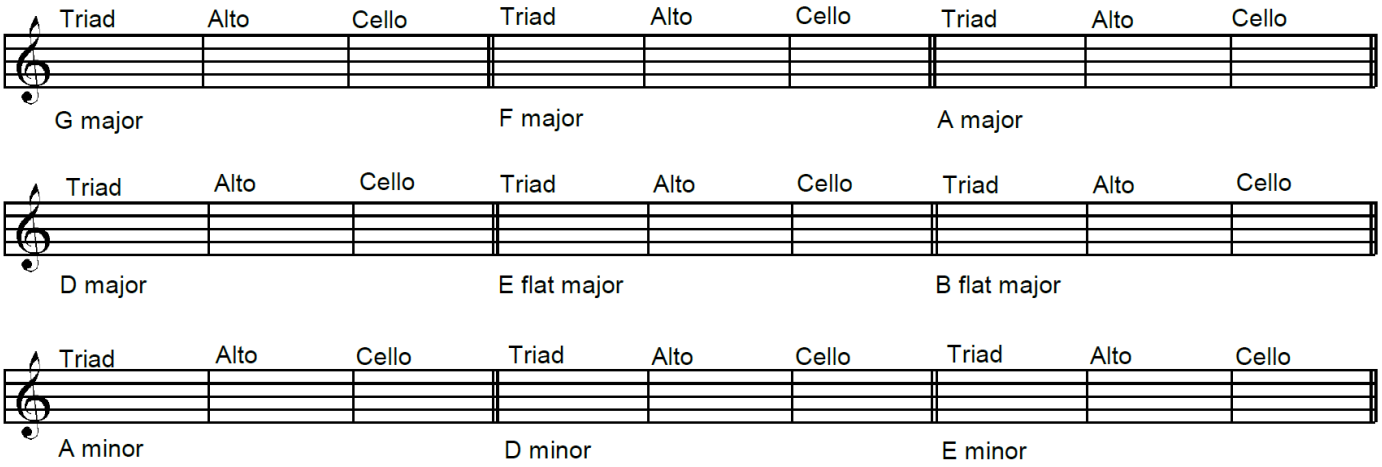
- They "fill in the middle harmonies" by playing two-part chords
- They provide rhythmic variations
- They can create atmosphere and special effects. The combination of chord drums playing softly or loudly increases the dramatic variation of the band as a whole.
- At times they can play their own melody, or passages of Double Alto melody or Triple Alto Cello melody when those parts need to be brought out.

Most of the time, the Alto and Cello/Guitar parts are based on **CHORDS**. In its simplest form, a complete chord, or **TRIAD** consists of three notes. The lowest note of the triad, from which the chord takes its name, is called the **ROOT**. The middle note is called the **THIRD** and the upper note is called the **FIFTH**.

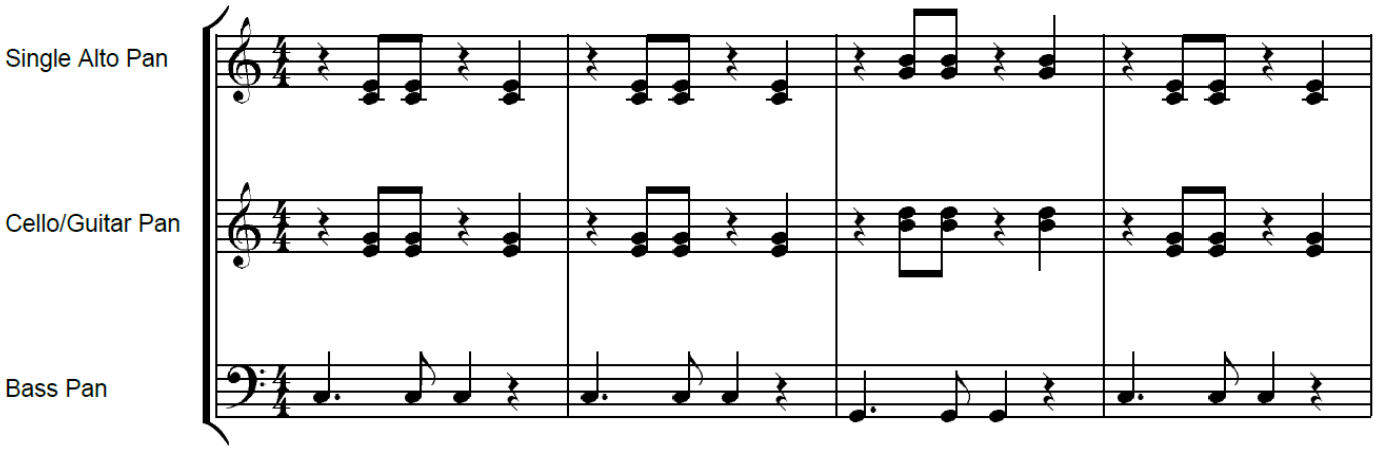


When arranging the notes of the triad for Alto and Cello pans, it is usual to give the Alto the root and the third, and the Cello the third and the fifth. The stave to the left shows the triad of C major with C being the root, E being the third and G being the fifth and shows how these notes would typically be distributed among the Alto and Cello Pans.

Try constructing the following triads, remembering to use appropriate sharps and flats depending on the key, and working out how the triad can be distributed for Alto and Cello Pans, writing the notes onto the staves below, or if you're completing this online, insert a blank page and type which notes you would use in each part using the # symbol for a sharp and an italic lower-case "B" – *b* – for a flat.



In Steel Band music, chords are rarely played as semibreves, as shown above. Scan the QR code and listen, following the bass and chord rhythm combination which is typical of how the notes are distributed:



If you have a keyboard available, try and learn to play bass and chord rhythm patterns shown above. If you don't, you may be able to use online "virtual pianos" or free music software or online sites or even programme or input the notes into a music sequencing programme on different tracks – you may even be able to find a "Steel Pan" tone/timbre/voice!

Scan the QR code and listen to "Long Time Gal", another traditional piece of Steel Band music and as you listen, either "tick off" the features you have been learning about in the box below as you hear them in the music, or better still give a timing on the audio track when you can hear this musical feature.

Feature	I can hear this!!	Feature	I can hear this!!
Soprano Pans playing the Melody		Repeated Sections	
Bass Pans playing the Bass line to a rhythm pattern		Sections ending with a Perfect Cadence (V-I)	
Single Alto and Cello Guitar Pans "filling in the harmonies"		Tremolo "rolling" effects on long notes	
Homophonic Melody and Accompaniment Texture		Syncopated Rhythms	

Steel Bands in Action

Scan the QR code and watch a number of Steel Bands actually performing “in action”. As you watch, answer the following questions:

1. Where are the different Steel Bands playing?

2. Which of the Steel Pans is playing the melody in each of the excerpts?

3. Where are these “melody pans” placed within the ensemble?

4. Who is leading the ensembles?

5. How are the performers “responding” or “reacting” to the music?

6. What percussion instruments can you see and hear providing the rhythmic accompaniment in the excerpts?

Guitar Timbre Sonority Bass Third Chords Phrase Riff Triad Fifth Soprano Cadence Root Tremolo Ostinato Texture Cello Repetition Duration Offbeat Syncopation Homophonic

Performing Linstead Market

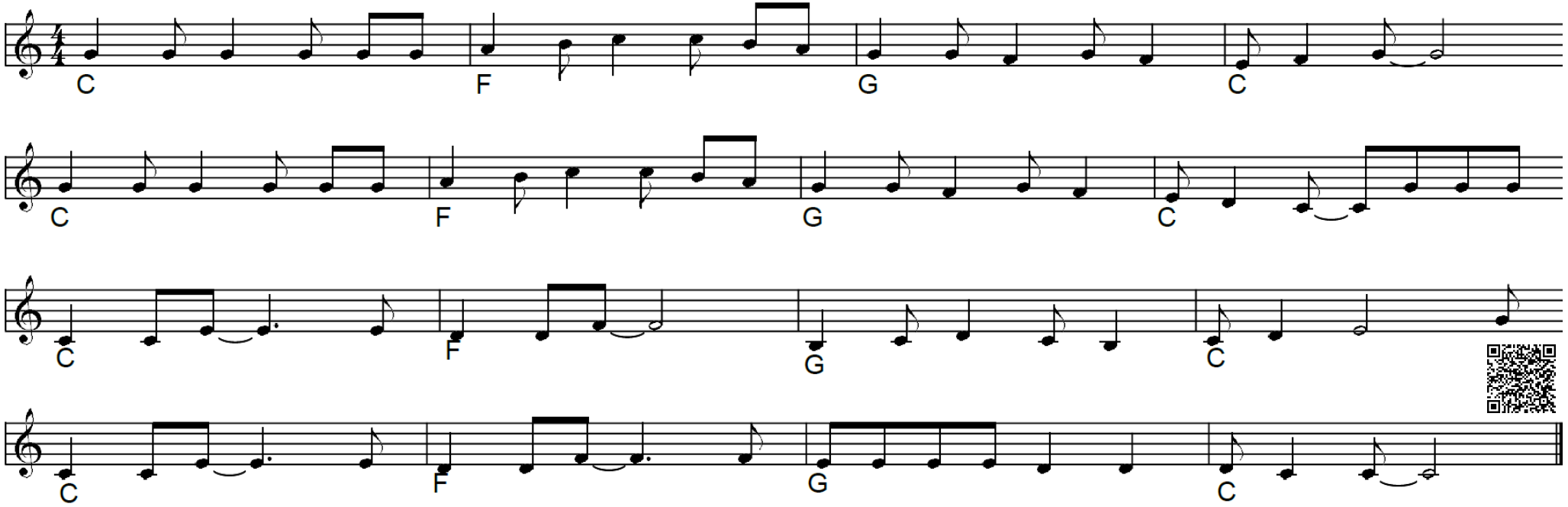
"Linstead Market" is a traditional example of a Caribbean melody for Steel Pans. You can listen to a recording of "Linstead Market" by scanning the QR code aboe. The piece begins with a two-bar introduction and note the use of repeated phrases – sometimes exactly, sometimes with a different ending and the use of syncopated rhythms.

Depending on what instrument you're using, whether at home or at school, learn to play the melody to "Linstead Market" and try and 'roll' the long notes in the style of Steel Pan playing – you can do this by simply repeating them a number of times quickly.

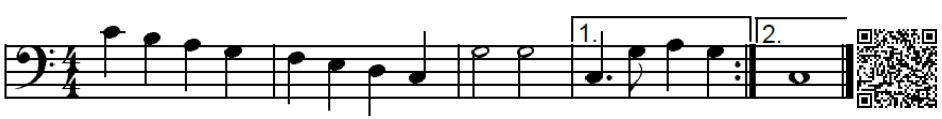
Stretch and Challenge: Create an accompaniment to "Linstead Market" using only chords I, IV and V - see if you can work out which chords work best with which bars or parts of bars

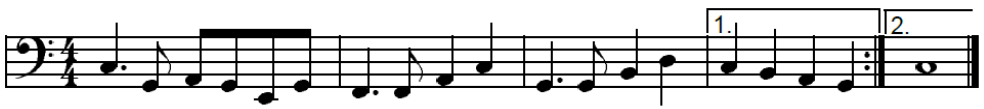
Performing Jamaica Farewell

The score below shows the melody to another famous piece for Steel Bands with the chords written underneath. Scan the QR code above to hear a Steel Band performing "Jamaica Farewell" and follow the score as you listen.



Depending on what instrument you're using, whether at home or at school, learn to play the melody to "Jamaica Farewell" and try and 'roll' the long notes in the style of Steel Pan playing – you can do this by simply repeating them a number of times quickly. If you don't, you may be able to use online "virtual pianos" or free music software or online sites or even programme or input the notes into a music sequencing programme – you may even be able to find a "Steel Pan" tone/timbre/voice! If you've got the option to add different tracks, then you can try adding these two Bass Ostinatos, or simply try learning them on your instrument, virtual piano or free music software or online site.





Teacher's Notes, Discussion and Answers

Learning about Steel Bands

1. Steel Bands originated from the Caribbean island of Trinidad
2. Steel Pans are made from old oil drums
3. Steel Pans are played with beaters/sticks which are rubber-tipped
4. There are five common types/sizes of Steel Pans within a Steel Band
5. The pitches of the different notes of a Steel Pan are laid out differently than a traditional piano keyboard which arranges the notes in pitch order.
6. Shimmery, shimmering, bright, glittering, sparking, twinkling, twinkly, glimmer etc.

Listening to Changing Partners

1. The **DURATION** of melody notes are lengthened by the players "rolling" the notes, to prevent them dying away with involves **REPEATING** them a number of times using alternating beaters – this is called a **TREMOLO** effect and produces the unique 'shimmering' **SONORITY** of Steel Pan music
2. The backing chords form an **OSTINATO** or **RIFF** pattern
3. The Single Alto and Cello pans perform **OFFBEAT CHORDS** as a form of accompaniment to the **MELODY** part.
4. – missing chords shown in green

I / / /	I / / /	I / / /	IV / / /	II / / /	V / / /	**I** / / /	**I** / / /
I / / /	I / / /	I / / /	**IV** / / /	II / / /	I / / /	IV / **V** /	**I** / / /

5. The Harmonic Rhythm is slow.
6. Perfect Cadence (IV) V -> I

Listening to The Banana Boat Song

1. **SYNCOPATION**
2. AABBAACCAA
3. The melody of the last two bars of each section has been changed in the fourth line (C) and the pitch has been changed by moving up an **OCTAVE** and altering the pitch of the first two notes to (high) c' from E.
4. I, (III), IV, I, I, V, I
5. Perfect Cadence.

Steel Bands in Action

1. The first and third Steel Bands are performing outdoors at carnivals/concerts, the second Steel Band is performing indoors in a concert hall
2. The Soprano Pans play the melody
3. They are normally placed at the front of the ensemble
4. There is no leader or "conductor" – the ensembles seem to be directing and leading themselves!
5. The performers are all moving/dancing in time with the music
6. Percussion instruments are most clearly seen in the second and third excerpts and feature a drum kit, woodblock, bongo drums, cowbell, tambourine, tamborim).