



BIJLMER

→ KIDS STEELBAND

In 1998, a small welfare foundation that managed a bicycle garage and repair shop in Amsterdam's suburb, Bijlmermeer commissioned Frauke Lühning to form a youth project using the steelpan. Bijlmermeer is not a popular tourist town even though it boasts of having residents from one hundred and thirty (130) nationalities and is considered to be the most cosmopolitan part of Amsterdam.

➤ Bijlmermeer consists of high rise blocks of flats built in the late 1960s. The 1970s saw waves of immigrants from the Dutch colonies of Suriname and the Antilles and from the 1990s onwards many West Africans. By the middle of the 90s, the neighbourhood had the highest crime rate in the Netherlands and the stigma of a ghetto.

Frauke studied classical and afro-caribbean music and started visiting Trinidad in 1995. In 1997, she joined the Phase II Pan Groove steel orchestra. Being a music teacher she was interested in the different ways of teaching music and was immediately captivated by the potential of the steelpan instrument and the viability of its use in children's music lessons.

During her 1998 stay in Trinidad & Tobago, she bought pans made by Bertrand 'Butch' Kelman and Bertie Marshall and shipped them to Amsterdam. The following years saw Frauke conducting numerous short projects in Bijlmer schools but the lack of a permanent location for the instruments made it impossible to form a band. Since 2000, she has managed to acquire a permanent location and has been slowly building an orchestra with the kids who wanted to continue playing after their school projects ended.

By 2005, the Bijlmer Kids Steelband had performed for many events. They reached the finals of the Amsterdam music school competition twice; even though they did not belong to that organisation. They have performed at various festivals all over the Netherlands, appeared on TV and played at galas in the presence of members of the Royal family. The group presently consists of fifteen children whose ages range

between 9 and 14. The majority of the children are of Ghanaian heritage. Their repertoire which lasts for more than an hour consists of soca, reggae, samba, pop and classical. The kids have a habit of sourcing music on the internet and getting Frauke to musically arrange it for them to play on the steelpan.

Since the 'Foundation Steeldrum Bijlmer' that manages the project has not been able to source any funding, their only income is generated from their performances at these concerts. Their classes are free as they want to encourage as many children possible and Frauke works as a volunteer.

She still visits Trinidad at least once a year to get inspiration and acquire new ideas. In the meanwhile, Frauke is doing her MA in ethnomusicology at the University of Amsterdam, where she writes about the history of steelband.

Since 2004, Frauke has been playing with the WITCO Desperadoes in Trinidad. The community work they do in the Laventille area reminds her of her work in Bijlmer. She has been one of their summer youth camp teachers since 2006.

One of their dreams is to have their own pan yard. The band currently practices in a sports hall and as they share the facility they are only able to practice twice a week. Frauke stated, 'It would be great to have a real pan yard where the kids could practice on a daily basis'. The kids' enthusiasm is evident in the vacation periods when Frauke organizes daily classes at 10 o'clock in the morning and at least ten children are present. She confirmed, 'Their thirst for the music coupled with this enthusiasm makes the project such a beautiful experience and is my driving force to go on when the going get tough'.

➔ www.myspace.com/bijlmersteelbandkids