

Shannon Dudley

THE MAN BEHIND MUSIC FROM BEHIND THE BRIDGE

With a mix of personal experience, detailed research, scholarly discourse and musicological analysis, Shannon Dudley's new book *Music from Behind the Bridge: Steelband Spirit and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago* (Oxford University Press, 2008) is one of the best studies yet of pan.



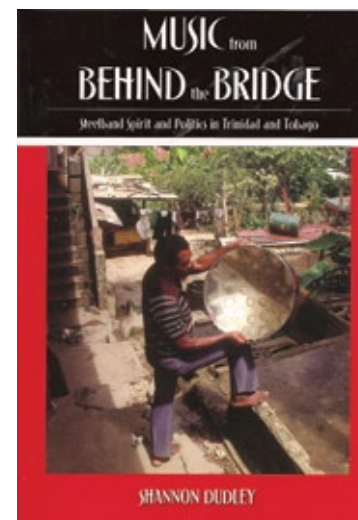
It joins classics like Steve Stuempfle's *The Steelband Movement* and the work of Kim Johnson as essential to anyone interested in the history, music and culture of pan. Dudley's book is especially strong in its consideration of the evolution of pan performance and culture during Carnival in Trinidad, both with the Panorama competition and the "Bomb" competition. The tune that was dropped like a Bomb amid secrecy and high delight of its patrons

early on Jouvert morning as steelbands paraded by and gave its arrangement of a pop or classical selection. This is not the work of an academic who came to the islands for a year and was never seen again. Dudley is no Johnny Come Lately to pan. He has a history in the music stretching back decades, and he continues to lead. He is currently an Associate Professor of Ethnomusicology at the University of Washington where he leads the university steelband and teaches a wide range of courses in music of the Americas and ethnomusicology. Growing up in Berkeley, California, Dudley first heard a steel pan while in high school when Andy Narell came and gave a demonstration of pan, while promoting the Cazadero summer performing arts camp where pan was to be on the program. Dudley first played a pan at Oberlin College, where despite his love of music he was pursuing a biology degree. He soon started performing in a student led steelband that was not a part of the university music program. After getting his degree, he spent two years in southern India where he led a choir at a local university and studied South Indian carnatic music. It was in

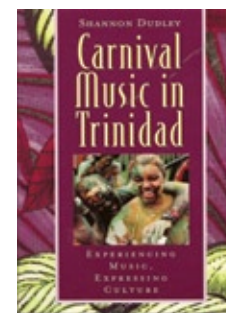
India where he realized that he did not want to pursue science or medicine, but that really his first and foremost love was music.

Upon his return to the United States, his love of pan led him on a pilgrimage to St. Paul, Minnesota, where he spent a year learning about pan from one of Trinidad's legends, Cliff Alexis. Then working with the Minnesota school system, Alexis put Dudley to work sinking, grooving and shaping pans. When Cliff Alexis received the invitation to come to Northern Illinois University and work with Allan O'Connor, the pioneer in bringing pan into the percussion programs in American universities, Dudley decided to follow. He spent almost a year working with Cliff Alexis, while taking a job with the university's public relations department. During this time Dudley was playing with the university steelband as well as a smaller group.

His love of music led him to apply for a graduate degree in ethnomusicology. He enrolled at the University of California Berkeley in 1986 and had originally intended to do his dissertation on South



Indian music. But his love of the steel pan soon drew him back to that as his subject. During this period he became involved with teaching pan at the East Bay Center for the Performing Arts in Richmond. It was an after school program for disadvantaged youth. He remembers this as one of the most rewarding experiences he ever had. Andy Narell then introduced Dudley to Patrick Arnold, who had started tuning pans for the after school program after relocating to the Bay Area from Canada. When Patrick Arnold brought up Our Boys from Tobago to live and work in the Bay Area, Dudley got involved in writing arrangements for Our Boys such as Bach's "Air for G String." By the mid-nineties, Dudley had joined Tom Miller's ensemble Pan Ramajay, both performing with them and playing on the group's second CD.



It was in 1989 that Shannon made his first trip to Trinidad and spent the Carnival season working with Pandemonium under the

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baton of Clive Bradley. He returned in 1992 and spent almost a year studying the history of pan, playing in various bands, taking in the whole rich experience of music and festivals as well as Carnival and doing research for his dissertation. He has since returned several times for Carnival, conferences and the recent launch of his new book. Interestingly, his book on pan was his second book. The first is *Carnival Music in Trinidad* (Oxford University Press, 2004). This short book, just over a hundred pages with a CD, is part of the Global Music Series, an excellent set of over a dozen "case studies", which Oxford University Press has published in the last few years on various types of music, all geared toward the serious ethnomusicology student. Dudley's book on Carnival offers an enjoyable quick look at calypso, pan, soca, and the myriad of other forms of music swirling around Carnival, such as rapso, chutney and all the hybrid forms like ragga soca and chutney soca. Chris Tanner, founder and director of the Miami University (Ohio) Steel Band, noted that it was "comprehensive yet brief, detailed but easy to read." With the CD and the focus in the text on the musical examples, it is the best introduction there is to carnival music in Trinidad.

Since 1996, Shannon Dudley has been teaching at the University of Washington where he spearheaded the effort to bring pan into the university curriculum. UW's Ethnomusicology Department is famous for its Visiting Artists program, inviting musicians from around the globe to provide extended residencies in Seattle. Dudley arranged for pan legend Ray Holman to hold the Visiting Artists position for two years, 1998 to 2000 at UW, a unique honor for a pannist and something that has not occurred anywhere else. Holman's residency also led to the purchase of a set of pans for the university. Over the two years, Ray Holman taught individual pan lessons, led ensemble rehearsals and gave a series of concerts with the newly formed steelband in a variety of settings, as well

as doing some unique collaborations with the jazz studies section of the UW Music Department.

Since Ray Holman's departure, Dudley has led the University steelband, which performs at the school of Music open house and the spring percussion performance concert. He continues to play and has a keen interest in pan. More recently he spent a year in Puerto Rico where he has been researching Puerto Rican steelbands as well as salsa groups like El Gran Combo.

For him, pan remains an essentially participatory activity, the performer and the supporters all caught up in a joyous celebration of life, all part of a rich Carnival tradition. As he noted in his first book, "Change and controversy, as much as continuity and tradition, have always been and always will be part of the bacchanal of Trinidadian carnival, reflecting the dynamism of a diverse and evolving society."

In *Music from Behind the Bridge*, Dudley emphasizes the African roots of pan from Orisha rhythms but is careful to note that, "Steelband musicians regularly transgressed the boundaries that their larger society erected between musical repertoires, appropriating and adapting both African and European musical traditions in imaginative ways." His chapter, "The Rise of the Arranger," provides portraits of Anthony Williams, Bobby Mohammed, Clive Bradley, Earl Rodney, Ray Holman, and Jit Samaroo, tracing an evolution of style and innovation in the art of Panorama arranging.

Dudley does a fine job of addressing the intricate nature of Panorama, the community involvement, the various threads of competition, and how pan evolved into a complex music that is still in its early stages. It is an essential book by a scholar with a true and abiding love of pan.

By: Ray Funk