

# CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY

STEEL PAN SOCIETY by Juliet Sharpe

## STEELING THE SHOW IN CAMBRIDGE

The phenomenon began in October 2010 when a student from Lucy Cavendish College, Cambridge University decided that she was not going to miss playing in a band while studying for a three year degree in Geography. Juliet Sharpe, who previously played in the Luton Youth Steel Orchestra, Revellers Steel Band and as a guest with Pan Elders in Trinidad, enlisted the enthusiastic help of fellow students to form a new society, 'The Cambridge Steel Pan Society.'

As President, Juliet felt it was very important promote the history and culture of steel instruments instead of just simply forming steel bands. Therefore the activities of the society will range from just listening to steel pan music to educational workshops to visiting national pan events. Debbie Romain, the UK's foremost female pan arranger, who has been teaching steel pan for over 18 years, was commissioned as a musical director and things began to progress rapidly.

It wasn't long before the Steel Pan Society's first college band hit the headlines of the official Cambridge University website. Liberators, the first all-female college steel band stole the show, 11th March 2010, with their debut performance which was held at the sherry reception of the Lucy Cavendish Formal Hall. It was an innovative start to an evening of Cambridge dining.

Since then Liberators, so named to reflect the spirit of Lucy Cavendish College in Higher Education Facilities for mature women, has been invited to play at Cambridge University Graduations, Film Festivals, Conferences, Garden Parties and private engagements. The local press has also featured CUSPS in The Cambridge News and monthly magazine "The Journal." The title "Liberators" is also reminiscent of the liberation of steel pan and Caribbean Culture in one of the most traditional English settings.

"It wasn't easy getting CUSPS or Liberators off the ground" Juliet stressed, "We had to obtain funding to buy our first instruments, but we got by with a little help from our friends!" Starlight Community

Steel Band loaned Liberators some pans to get the players started and the Akeba Organisation supplied percussion instruments to finish off the band. Eventually CUSPS were able to get their first set of steel pans from the renowned Gerald Forsyth OBE and the rest is history.

The society aims to have speakers from the U.K. and across the world to visit the home of the first "Steel Pan Society" at Cambridge University. "There were some bands in the area but we wanted something a bit more special than just another band. When I first arrived at my college, there were people who had never heard of a steel pan – now as I walk around in the local area, I'm stopped and asked if I'm the 'Steel Pan Lady,' says Juliet with a smile.

However the work has just begun as the society will be looking to develop college steel bands across the network of over 30 colleges that make up this 800 year old institution.

CUSPS has successfully started to raise the profile of steel pan at Cambridge University and changed some of the stereotypical perceptions of steel pan. Thanks to Lucy Cavendish and the pioneering spirit of its 'Ladies of Steel' steel pan now has a home at Cambridge University.



CUSPS will be hosting Caribbean theme nights as well, where they can meet up with other steel pan players and bands on a social level. As a Cambridge University student society, CUSPS is providing an invaluable opportunity for students & others from across the country and indeed all over the world to learn how to play steel pan.

This rewarding and enjoyable experience is something they will all take home with them and use as an ultimate stress reliever in this intensive and competitive environment.

CUSPS now hopes to inspire a wide range of students and staff to be part of an annual tribute to steel pan in which the Cambridge Steel Pan Society Steel Orchestra will demonstrate the power of pan in concert and 'steel' the show in Cambridge each year. There is also another surprise that CUSPS has for 2011 so watch this space.

You can find CUSPS on Facebook or visit them on their web pages below or just email [js846@cam.ac.uk](mailto:js846@cam.ac.uk)

Official Webpage  
[www.lucy-cav.cam.ac.uk/pages/students/clubs-and-societies/steel-pan-society.php](http://www.lucy-cav.cam.ac.uk/pages/students/clubs-and-societies/steel-pan-society.php)

Cambridge University News  
[www.admin.cam.ac.uk/news/dp/2010031103](http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/news/dp/2010031103)

