

Trinidad Traditional Drumming

How-to Session by Josh Watkins

Session Description: While many music programs integrate the study of Steelpan and occasionally Tamboo Bamboo, Trinidad Traditional drumming is often absent. Integrating this historically significant tradition can be an exciting way to enrich students through musical expression and cultural understanding. It can also add variety to concert programs.

Concise History Timeline:

- First inhabitants of Trinidad and Tobago - Caribs and Arawaks
- August 1, 1498 Christopher Columbus landed and renamed the island “La Trinidad” in honor of the Holy Trinity
- Spanish Rule first
- 1797 - British rule
- 1833 - Great Britain outlawed slavery
- 1845 - Indentured labor primarily from India arrive in Trinidad
- 1881 - Clashes between the poor and the authorities led to riots during the 1881 Carnival and again in 1883 (known as the Canboulay Riots)
- 1884 - Peace Preservation Ordinance, a law banning noisy musical instruments in enacted
- 1890s - Introduction of Tamboo Bamboo- people began cutting bamboo into various lengths, and either stamping them on the ground or striking them against one another.
- 1930s - Metal containers replaced bamboo as the primary source for rhythmic music
- 1951 - Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra travels to Europe

Drums: Three drum set – Bass, Fuller, and Cutter

Tones: Trinidad Traditional Drumming is primarily made up of two tones sometimes called tone and variation. **Tone** is executed by striking near the center of the drum with the whole hand.

Variation is executed by striking the drum with the fingers near the edge of the drum. In the following notation the tone is on the bottom space and the variation is on the third space.

Warmup exercises:

I use exercises like these to teach the two tones and for warmups.



Signal: This signal is used in many different styles. The signal is used to communicate beginnings and endings of sections as well as starting and stopping.



Bongo:

Bongo is a traditional practice of drumming, singing, and dancing during the wake before a person's funeral. *Fun Fact, limbo originated in Trinidad and was part of the wake.

Cutter:

The cutter is the highest drum. The cutter plays the signal as needed and improvises. This is a sample of a standard "cut" that is frequently used in several styles.



Fuller:

The fuller is the middle drum and plays a consistent pattern. This is a pattern that is used in several styles. In some styles the fuller will play the same part as the bass.



Bass:

The bass is the lowest drum and plays a consistent pattern with little variation. This variation is played more in the southern part of the country.



Calinda:

Calinda is a style that is played for stick fighting (also known as Kalinda). In this style the bass and fuller play the same part. The interaction of the drumming and the fighters is an integral part of the build up. The + sign is used to communicate that the tone is muted.



If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at josh.watkins@utt.edu.tt.

Thank you!!