STEEL PAN IS FOR EVERYONE

By Candice Hill

What's in a name?

Almost everyone has heard of the "steel drum," but I am often met with blank stares when I mention the "steelpan." (By the way, as an American, my experience is different than those raised outside of the U.S.). So what is the difference in the names? Both terms are correct, however, in Trinidad, where steelpan was invented, it is referred to as "steelpan," or simply "pan." To the inventors and performers, it is no longer an oil drum; it is a new instrument.

Technically speaking, a drum has a membrane, and since the pan has no membrane, it is not a drum. Outside of Trinidad, I often hear it referred to as a steel drum. In casual conversation I will refer to it as both a pan or drum so I can be inclusive to those who are unfamiliar.

Visit my website by scanning the code for all of the docs in this presentation:

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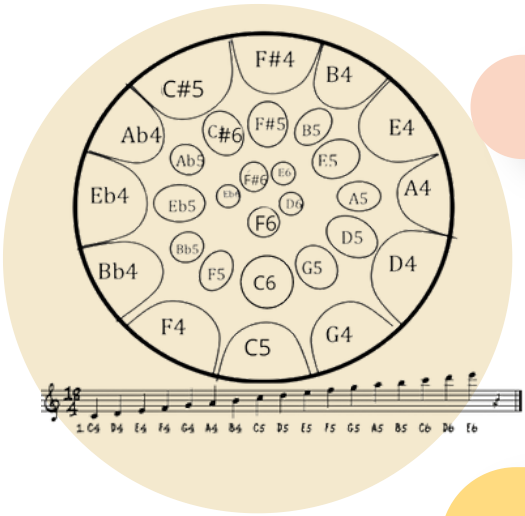
Instrumentation of a Steelband

Just like a symphony orchestra or marching band, steel bands are made up of different types of instruments with different ranges, from low to high pitch. In a steel band setting, each instrument has a typical role. In a solo setting, there are two types most often used: the tenor and the double seconds. Please note that any of the pans can be found in a solo or small ensemble setting, but it is the aforementioned that are the most typical. The following information will outine the ranges and types of pans, starting with the tenor and double seconds.



Tenor Pan

also called “lead” or “soprano”

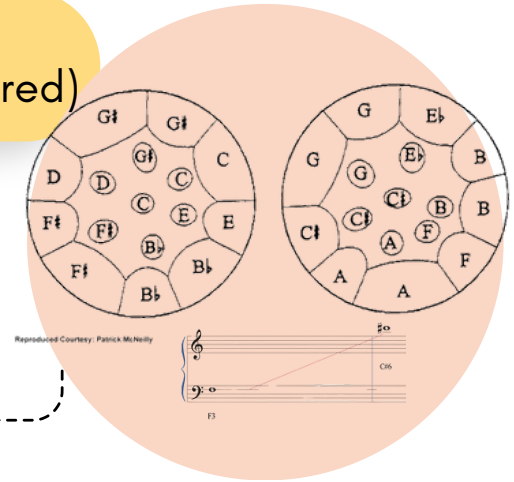
The name "tenor" does not refer to the range of the pan. The range is actually closer to a soprano, but tenor is the common name. The tenor pan is popular as a solo instrument and in a band setting, tenors generally play the melody or lead parts. Some tenor pans have a low C4 (middle C), as the lowest note. This is called a "Low C Tenor." Some pans do not have this C4, but instead, the D4 is the lowest, called a "Low D Tenor."

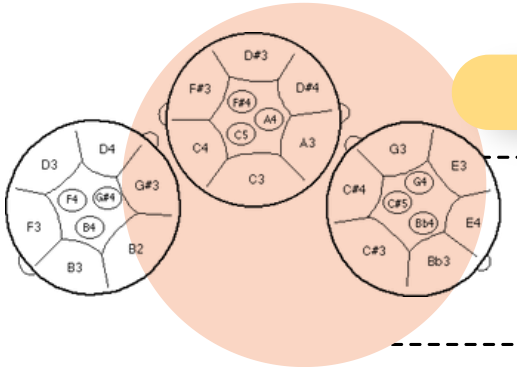
Double Seconds and Double Tenors (not pictured)

Double Seconds have a very impressive range, reaching lower than the double tenors. Seconds make an excellent choice as a solo instrument, and many performers prefer it to the sound of a tenor pan because of the more mellow timbre. In a band setting, seconds can be heard providing strumming patterns, as well as counter melodies and melodies.

Double Tenors have a range that extends lower than the tenor pan, and starts at F3

Double tenors have a slightly more mellow sound than tenors, but can play melodies or harmonies in a band setting.



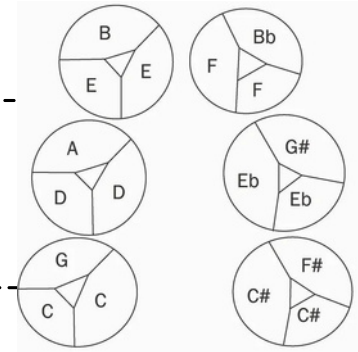


Cello Pans

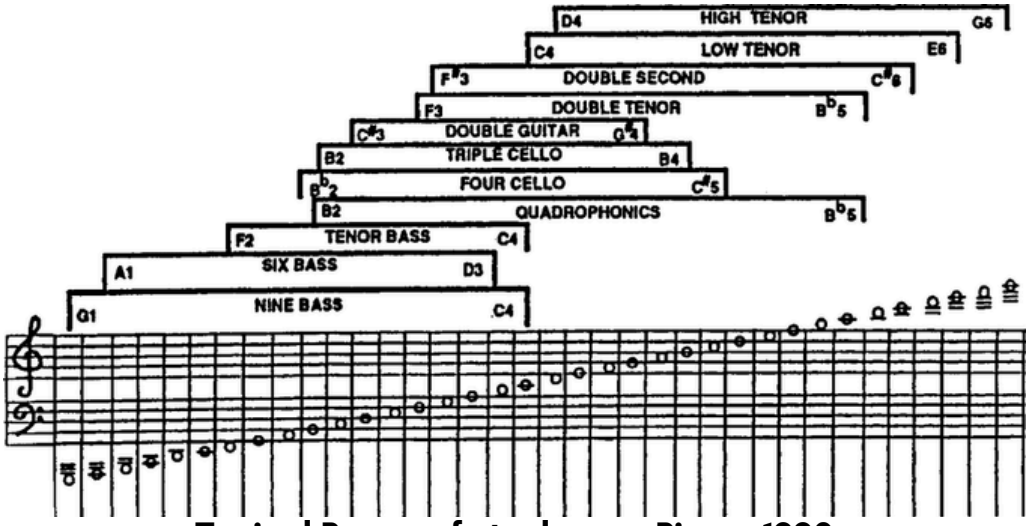
(Full Range on next page). The cello pans typically play a supportive roll in the steelband by driving the tempo with syncopated strumming patterns, and sometimes counter-melodies. Because the notes are lower in pitch, more space is needed for each note, therefore 3 pans are needed.

Bass Pans

(Full range can be found on the next page). Bass pans provide the lower bass tones. Bass pans can be found in a 4 Tenor bass arrangement, or more typical 6-Bass. Large bands even boast 8 or more bass pans to one player!



*Please note that because there are no standardized layouts for pans, there will be some variation in the sizes of notes, and sometimes slight variation in range between manufacturers/builders.



Typical Range of steel pans, Picary 1990

As you can see, there is a lot of variation of the basic instrumentation (multiple type of tenors, cellos and basses).

What do I need to start a steelband?

Start small: You don't need to purchase a full band all at once. You can incorporate piece by piece and add on as you grow.

You will need stands, sticks and maybe cases for each pan.
PLAN TO HAVE YOUR INSTRUMENTS PROFESSIONALLY TUNED

Budget for 1 instrument:
Tenor pan, stand and sticks

Budget for 3 instruments:
2 Tenor pans, 1 Double Second, stands and sticks

Budget for 6 instruments:
3 Tenors, 1 Double Second, 1 Double Tenor, 1 Cello

Budget for 10 instruments:
4 Tenors, 2 Double Seconds, 1 Double Tenors, 2 Cellos, 1 Bass

Keep adding instruments while trying to maintain a ratio of 2 tenors to each Double

RESOURCES

- National Society of Steel Band Directors NSSBD, www.weteachpan.org
- Pan Trinbago, World Governing Body for Steelpan pantrinbago.co.tt
- Book: Steelpan in Education: A History of the NIU Steelband by Andrew Martin, et al
- Book: Unheard Voices: The Rise of Steelband and Calypso in the Caribbean and North America by Dr. Myrna Nurse

RECOMENDED SOURCES

These sources were compiled based on my experience purchasing, or advising students on purchasing steelpans. There are certainly more out there, but these are the individuals or companies that I have direct experience with, so I am confident in their products. Keep in mind that a lot of companies offer packages for schools to help get you started, and will often be cheaper than buying the instruments individually. Find more information on my website, or feel free to reach out directly with any questions you may have. I offer in-person clinics on steelpan and everything related to steel bands. I also have a free Ebook with more information on the basics of steel pan on my website.

Kyle Dunleavy Pans
www.dunleavypans.com

Vista Pans
https://vistapan.com/vista_pan_pricing/

Barracuda Steel Drums
http://barracudasteeldrums.com/contact.html

Rick Henson
http://playsteeldrums.com/about-steel-drums/buy-a-pan/

Coyle Drums
http://www.coyledrums.com/price_list.html

Panyard
https://www.panyard.com/product-category/instruments/

Mannette (one of the first people from Trinidad to help invent the instrument)
http://www.mannetteinstruments.com

Need advice on where to purchase an instrument, help with repairs or maintenance, where to purchase sheet music, someone to clinic your group, other educational resources not listed above? Let's connect! Reach out anytime.

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