



# Smithsonian Folkways

**The Complete Evolution of Trinidadian Pan Music... Abridged**  
**A Smithsonian Folkways Lesson**  
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**Summary:**

Students will be exposed to opportunities for tracing the development of West African drumming, to Trinidadian tamboo bamboo, to the invention of the pan, to modern day pan ensembles through listening, identifying, recreating, and orchestrating these various musics.

**Suggested Grade Levels:** 9-12

**Country:** Ghana, Trinidad

**Region:** Africa, Caribbean

**Culture Group:** Afro-Trinidadians, Trinidadian

**Genre:** African Drumming, Tamboo Bamboo, Steel Pan

**Instruments:** Body Percussion, Chairs, Pencils, Glass Bottles, Metal Spoons, Metal Trash Can, Biscuit Tins

**Language:** English

**Co-Curricular Areas:** History

**National Standards:** 2, 3, 6, 9

**Prerequisites:** Students will have a precursory knowledge of the slave trade, basic jazz history, and students will be able to read basic notation

**Objectives:**

- Attentive Listening: identifying key characteristics of African music (drumming)
- Engaged Listening: identifying and playing along with Ewe Bell
- Discussion: relating African American history to Afro-Trinidadian History
- Attentive Listening: comparing/relating African characteristics to Tamboo Bamboo
- Enactive Listening: recreating Tamboo Bamboo music
- Discussion: comparing/relating Tamboo Bamboo characteristics to Steel Band
- Game: Voicing Steel Band Ensemble (identifying different roles of pans)

**Materials:**

- Doc Cam/Projector
- Sound System to play Smithsonian recordings

- “Top Cat Mambo” recording  
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/the-champion-steel-bands-of-trinidad/caribbean-world/music/album/smithsonian>
- “Sudanese Song with Drums” recording  
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/africa-south-of-the-sahara/islamica-world/music/album/smithsonian>
- “Tutsi Drums” recording  
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/africa-south-of-the-sahara/islamica-world/music/album/smithsonian>
- “Pow-wow Dance (flathead)” recording  
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/american-indian-dances/music/album/smithsonian>
- “Adzida – Afawu and Adzida” recording  
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/ewe-music-of-ghana/world/album/smithsonian>
- “Give Me My Top” recording  
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/bamboo-tambo-bongo-and-belair/caribbean-world/music/album/smithsonian>
- “Play You Boy Play” recording  
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/bamboo-tambo-bongo-and-belair/caribbean-world/music/album/smithsonian>
- “Fascinators Minor” recording  
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/the-champion-steel-bands-of-trinidad/caribbean-world/music/album/smithsonian>
- Photo of Pan
- Chairs
- Hard Floor (the Tamboo Bamboo lesson segment may be better experienced in a cafeteria or common area)
- Pencils/pens (to play chairs)
- One or two glass bottles each filled slightly with varying depths of water
- One or two metal spoons (to play bottles)
- Two copies of pictures of varying Pans: tenor, double guitars, cellos, double seconds, and bass

### **Lesson Segments:**

- 1. (Introduction)**
- 2. Identifying African Music Characteristic** (National Standards 6, 9)
- 3. West African Music – The Bell of the Ewe People** (National Standards 2, 6, 9)
- 4. Tamboo Bamboo** (National Standards 2, 3, 6, 9)
- 5. The Pan and Modern Ensemble** (National Standards 2, 6, 9)

## 1. Introduction

- a. As students are walking in have the music of a steel pan playing in the background, with the picture of the pan displayed on the overboard.
- b. Once class has begun, ask students what the picture is of.
  - i. Once the pan has been identified ask students where the instrument is from
- c. Introduce the lesson as the predecessors and evolution of pan music.

## 2. Identifying African Music Characteristics

- a. Anticipatory Set.
  - i. While students are walking into the room, have a steel pan recording playing: Top Cat Mambo
  - ii. Once the bell has rung, display a pan photo over the doc cam.
    1. Ask students to share with their neighbor what they think this is a picture of:





- ii. When students answer, ask, “why/how is this drumming and singing any different?”
- iii. Ask leading questions toward repetitive polyphony
  - 1. Define Polyphony for students and have them write it in their notes

**Assessment:** Did students identify the pan photo? Were students able to identify the regions and cultures from which the recordings came? Did students properly identify instruments in the recordings? Were students’ responses to questions meaningful? Did students identify the overlapping texture of rhythms?

### 3. West African Music – The Bell of the Ewe People

- a. Review definition of polyphony, and introduce the next listening as listening from West Africa, specifically of the Ewe people in Ghana.
- b. Engaged Listening 1: Adzida – Afawu and Adzida (note: this activity is much shorter and can be added as an extension to the previous lesson if excerpts are played)
  - i. 1<sup>st</sup> time: What instruments do you hear?
  - ii. 2<sup>nd</sup> time: Tap the beat with your foot and see if you can hear the repeated bell part
  - iii. 3<sup>rd</sup> time: Try to tap the bell pattern on your chair or desk with a pencil
  - iv. 4<sup>th</sup> time: Combine tapping foot (beat) and tapping pencil (bell)

**Assessment:** Were students’ answers to questions meaningful? Did students properly identify instruments in the four recordings? Could students tap the beat? Could students mimic the bell pattern? Were students able to combine both rhythms in a polyphony manner?

### 4. Tamboo Bamboo

- a. Anticipatory Set.
  - i. As students are walking into the room, have an African recording playing in the background: Adzida – Afawu and Adzida
  - ii. Once students sit, ask “Where is this from?”
    - 1. All students should recognize the music as African
- b. Transitional Discussion.
  - i. In Trinidad there are Afro-Trinidadians which are the equivalent to African Americans here in the states, and these people got to Trinidad by the same means as African people here, which is...? (slavery)
    - 1. When West Africans were taken from their homes they came to Trinidad, not to work on cotton or tobacco fields, but sugar cane plantations

2. The slave masters were Christians who did not want their slaves to worship their “Pagan” Gods so in an attempt to deprive them of their religious ceremonies (and by extension, religion), they denied slaves the right to play their skin-headed drums
  3. The slaves however, continued to worship using whatever natural percussion they could find
  4. When the slaves were freed, they carried on this tradition in musical ensembles with these instruments
- c. Attentive Listening 1: Give Me My Top.**
- i.** What did the Afro-Trinidadians substitute for their skin-headed drums? Can you identify the instrument of choice?
    1. Students will likely guess some type of wood and you can lead them to Bamboo
    2. Explain that bamboo is very prevalent on the island so they would cut the bamboo down with a machete, cut off the branches, and let them dry in the sun
  - ii.** Listen again
  - iii.** What commonalities does this music share with the West African music?
    1. Polyphony, percussion, nasal singing style
- d. Building on Polyphony.**
- i.** Explain that as the people cut more bamboo they discovered that bamboo could grow in great or small diameter and that the length as well would change the pitch of the bamboo when it was struck (show a diagram on the doc cam to provide a visual representation)
  - ii.** Boom: Bass Bamboo with a larger diameter of 5” and roughly 4’ long
    1. Would be struck standing up, in a downward motion on the ground
  - iii.** Foule: A mid and high range bamboo that has a smaller in diameter of 1-3” and is anywhere from 1’ to 4’ long
    1. The long foules would be struck on the ground in the same manner as the boom, and in order to acquire the higher foule sound, the long foules could be struck with a stick or two very short foules could be struck together to create only the high part (various bands play it differently)
    2. Please Note: Foule refers to whoever plays the foule rhythm
  - iv.** The Boom and Foules play in repetitive polyphony over one another
  - v.** Cutter: The cutter in modern day is played by a “bottle and spoon”

1. A glass bottle is filled partially with water (about 1/3 full) and struck on the side with the edge of a metal spoon
  2. This line is usually carried by one person in the tamboo bamboo ensemble playing very fast improvisatory lines (following some variation of a 16<sup>th</sup> note pattern)
- e. Enactive Listening 1: Tamboo Bamboo.
- i. Following the arrangement below, have half of the students stomp the Boom pattern mimicking the downward motion of the Boom Bamboo
  - ii. Have the other half of the students stand tapping the high foule part on the side of the chair
    1. Then have the foule students add in the low part of the foule by rocking the back of the chair
  - iii. The teacher or a very musically strong student should play the cutter line, which could be played as written below or with any variation/ improvisation

**Extension:** Students can trade parts. See if students can separate the foule part playing only high or low. Have students give the Cutter part a try at slower tempos. Speed up the tempo. In Trinidad, Tamboo Bamboo ensembles usually play these types of rhythms at about 135 = quarter note or even faster.

**Assessment:** Were students' answers to questions meaningfully? Did students identify the type of instruments used in Tamboo Bamboo ensembles? Did students make connections between African drumming music and Tamboo Bamboo music? Did students correctly identify polyrhythmic material? Were students able to stick to their rhythmic parts independently? Did students play together in time? Were students able to improvise the cutter line?

The image shows three staves of musical notation for a Tamboo Bamboo ensemble. The top staff is labeled 'Cutter' and contains a series of eighth notes with a 'z' above each note, indicating a specific playing technique. The middle staff is labeled 'Foule' and contains a series of eighth notes. The bottom staff is labeled 'Boom' and contains a series of quarter notes. All three staves are in 2/4 time and are grouped together with a large bracket on the left side.

## 5. The Pan and Modern Ensemble

- a. Anticipatory Set.
  - i. Have Tamboo Bamboo recording playing as students enter the room: Play You Boy Play



- ii.** Discussion: As Tamboo Bamboo bands became more popular so did competition among the ensembles in the ghettos (as this was a music of the poorer people)
  - 1.** Ensembles became more like gangs, with each band trying to out-do each other out on the road
  - 2.** Bands would try to see who could play louder to dominate the sound of the others
  - 3.** Rivalries became such a problem, that police often had to intercept fights to break them up
- b.** Demonstration with continuing story.
  - i.** An adolescent got the idea to play on other percussion like things (trashcans and biscuit tins), which made a louder sound
    - 1.** Beat on the underside of a small biscuit tin or trash can
  - ii.** They began striking the tins so hard they made dents and discovered that dents in the surface of a tin could affect the pitch of that tin
    - 1.** Dent tins
  - iii.** People began experimenting with making pitches in different tins, until someone decided to try this effect on an old discarded oil steel drum
- c.** Visual: Show a couple diagrams of different types of pan layouts (spider web, Invader, diatonic, etc.)







**d. Game!**

- i.** Organize the classroom into groups of 5-10 students
- ii.** Each team will be given a set of pictures of the different types of pans
- iii.** The first team to correctly voice the pans from highest to lowest wins
  - 1.** It may be easiest to have each team pick a representative
- iv.** High to Low Ordering: tenors, seconds, guitars, basses
- v.** While students are racing to put the instruments in order, have pan music playing in the background: Fascinators Minor
- vi.** Once students have correctly identified the voicing of the steel bands refer back to the Tamboo Bamboo arrangement and show a comparison diagram between Tamboo Bamboo and Steel Band

<b>Tamboo Bamboo</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Steel Band</b>
<b>Cutter</b>	<i>Improvising Line</i>	<b>Tenor/Seconds</b>
<b>Foule</b>	<i>Strumming Pattern</i>	<b>Guitars</b>
<b>Boom</b>	<i>Strong Beat</i>	<b>Bass</b>

**Extension:** Play trivia games with the teams to review previous knowledge from the earlier lessons. Have students listen to a more modern recording of a steel band and listen for the complex rhythms the drum set carries. See if they can recreate the rhythms.

**Assessment:** Were students' answers to questions meaningful? Were students able to successfully voice their ensembles? In the extension, did students retain the information from previous lessons?