

The Celestial Sounds of Steelpan: A compendious revelation about the relationship between  
culture and the church in Trinidad and Tobago.

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**Abstract**

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In this dissertation, I explore the use of steelpan in the Seventh-day Adventist community and the Full Gospel Association in Trinidad and Tobago. Through ethnographic research, as well as my personal experience growing up in the SDA church, I examine how these congregations have tended to stigmatize the steelpan for its association with carnival, and how this prejudice relates to a variety of cultural and political issues--including national identity, African retention, class prejudice, colonialism, racialized histories, and the influence of North American culture. I aim to understand how Christian steelbands like the Maranatha Steelband, Pangelics Steel Ensemble, Mount D'or Gospel Steel Orchestra, Nazarene Steel Orchestra, and Pans of Praise Steelband were able to circumvent the rejection of the instrument in their communities. I argue that musical activists and certain church leaders are—in effect—resisting and subverting legacies of colonialism that continue to impact Afro-Trinbagonian communities as they assert the power of the instrument as a legitimate vehicle to worship of God.

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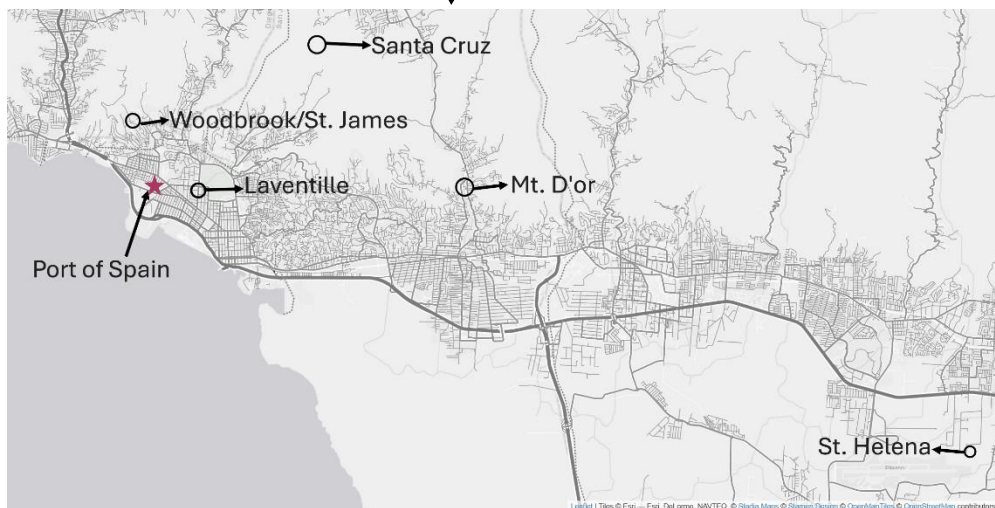
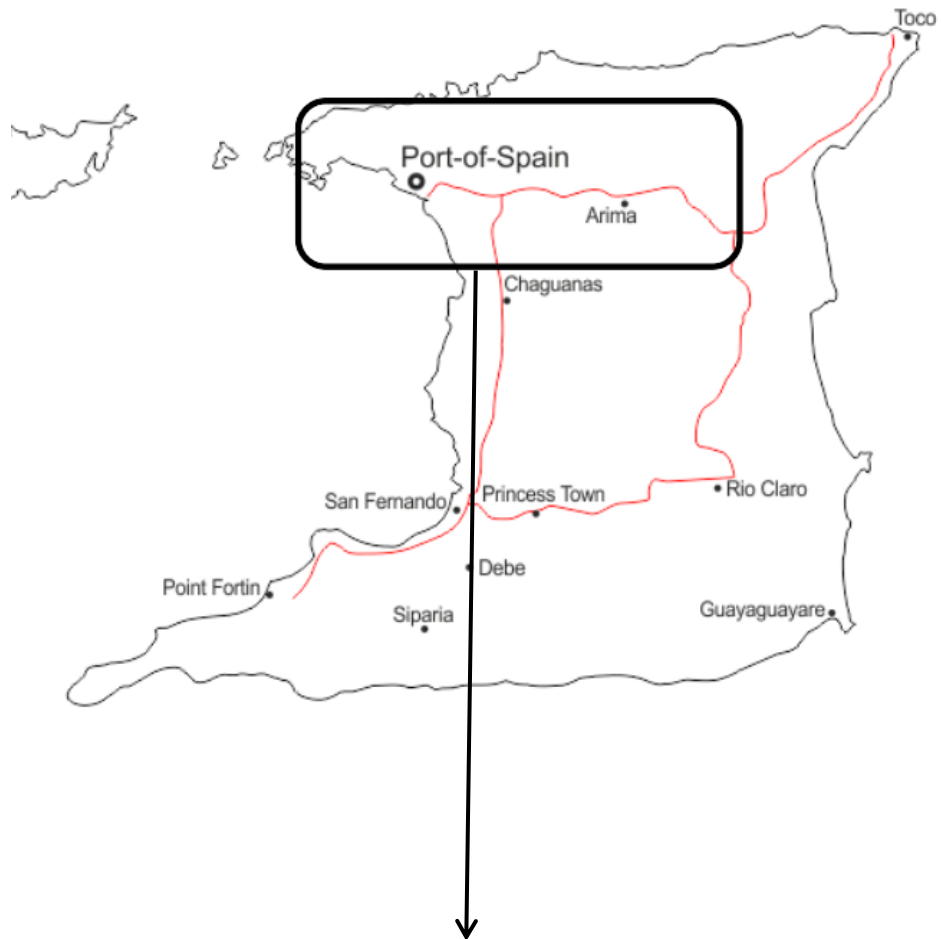
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# Table of Contents

<b>Map: Trinidad</b> .....	1
<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
• <u>Literature Review</u> .....	9
• <u>Carnival and Morality</u> .....	13
• <u>Christian music in Trinidad and Tobago SDA and Full Gospel Denominations</u> .....	20
• <u>Methodology and Positionality</u> .....	24
• <u>Terminology</u> .....	28
• <u>Chapter Outline</u> .....	29
<b>Chapter One: The Gospel of the Church</b> .....	31
• <u>History of Christianity</u> .....	34
• <u>North American Gospel Music in Trinidad, Jamaica, and Haiti</u> .....	38
• <u>Country or Country and Western</u> .....	49
• <u>The origins of Gospelypso, Gospel dancehall, and Jamoo Christian music in Trinidad and Jamaica</u> .....	51
• <u>Gospelypso</u> .....	51
• <u>Gospel Dancehall</u> .....	59
• <u>Jamoo</u> .....	54
<b>Chapter Two: The voices of Adventism leadership in Trinidad and Tobago</b> .....	61
• <u>Dr. Clive Dottin — Executive director at Caribbean Union of the Seventh-day Adventist (CARU)</u> .....	64
• <u>Dr. Andy Manzano — Associate Professor of Theology and Religion at USC</u> .....	69
• <u>Dr. Thomas Isaac — Professor of Religious Studies</u> .....	82
• <u>President Leslie Moses, President of the South Caribbean Conference</u> .....	88
<b>Chapter Three: Full Gospel Leaders Embracing Culture</b> .....	99
• <u>Dr. Osbourne Williams, Ps.</u> .....	101
• <u>Ps. Godfrey Emmanuel Mitchell</u> .....	110
• <u>Theodore Hicks</u> .....	116
• <u>Apostle Richard I.K. Williams</u> .....	121
<b>Chapter Four: Christian Steelbands on the Rise</b> .....	128
• <u>Maranatha Steel Orchestra</u> .....	130
• <u>Mt D’or Gospel Steel Orchestra (My Home Church)</u> .....	135
• <u>Pangelics Steel Ensemble</u> .....	142
• <u>Pan in School / Pan in the Classroom Project</u> .....	150

• <u>Nazarene Worship Center Steel Orchestra</u> .....	152
• <u>Pans of Praise</u> .....	159
<b><u>Conclusion</u></b> .....	166
<b><u>Bibliography</u></b> .....	178

Map: Trinidad



## The Celestial Sounds of Steelpan

### Introduction

*1 Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens.*

*2 Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness.*

*3 Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre,*

*4 praise him with timbrel and dancing, praise him with the strings and pipe,*

*5 praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals.*

*Psalms 150: 1-5*

This dissertation explores the ideologies and strategies that guide the use of music in Seventh Day Adventist and Full Gospel churches in Trinidad and Tobago, focusing especially on the use of the steelpan. It is inspired by my own feelings about playing the steelpan, which I have found to be a joyful experience that seems entirely compatible with the above passage from the King James Bible. These words speak to the power of music in the church and also to my experience of the steelpan. That experience was sometimes hard to reconcile, though, with my experience growing up in the Seventh-day Adventist<sup>1</sup> (SDA) denomination in Trinidad and Tobago. Members of my church often did not appreciate the musical contributions of the steelpan during worship services. In the late 1980s, Allan Samuel, a church member and current church organizational leader of the Mount D'or SDA, introduced the steelpan to the church. However, by the late 1990s, I observed that the instrument was moved to the church's basement. This decision was influenced by some leaders and members who—at the time—claimed that they wanted the space that the instruments occupied for church choir rehearsals (Samuel 2023). Since that incident, I have often wondered why the Mount D'or SDA church rejected the steelpan, moved the

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<sup>1</sup> An evangelical Protestant denomination that acknowledges the seventh-day Sabbath.

instruments from the worship hall to the basement, and allowed them to fade from use after three years.

My church's prejudice against the steelpan contrasts sharply with a widely held view in Trinidad and Tobago that the steelpan is not only an instrument for creating music, but a symbol of liberty, resilience, and identity. During the mid-1800s, the Afro-Trinidadian arts were forged and expressed during Carnival in response to European colonialism and racism. Many Afro-Trinidadians take pride in the way these art forms resisted colonial authority. These defiant and transgressive connotations of the steelpan tend to be viewed negatively, however, by the Seventh Day Adventist and Full Gospel church denominations in which I did my fieldwork. The challenge of integrating the steel pan into church services can therefore be encapsulated in the following question: In a colonial institution such as the Church, how do Trinbagonian Christians embrace local expressive forms that have anti-colonial connotations?

Since the introduction of North American Christianity in the mid-nineteenth century, the issues of internalized racism and anti-Blackness have persisted within the SDA and FG organizations. This has resulted in ongoing tensions surrounding steelpan music, culture, and the church. Trinbagonian Christians have historically stigmatized the steelpan due to its association with African drumming and Carnival. The suppression of drumming, initiated under British rule through the Peace Preservation Ordinance Bill in 1884, targeted African expression, as African spirituality was deemed taboo. Even after the abolition of slavery in 1938, European settlers continued to suppress African traditions in Trinidad and Tobago, particularly spiritual practices. Despite gaining independence in 1962, Trinidad and Tobago still grapples with the lingering effects of oppression sickness, particularly through the Christian church, as its beliefs often contradict the celebratory essence of Carnival, which represents a time of freedom and expression (Flunder

2005,5). Oppression sickness is internalized oppression that causes the oppressed to be infected by the sickness of the oppressor. The effort to mimic the dominant Christian culture or those “truly favored” by God has greatly infected the African American church tradition with classism, sexism, heteroprivilege, patri-archy, and closed doors (Flunder 2005,5). How does an inferior-feeling group of people feel superior? By finding someone else to make inferior.

Carnival arts—including steelpan, calypso and soca—are associated with defiance, boasting, violence, sexual double entendre, and the sexually suggestive dancing style called “wining<sup>2</sup>”. Many Christians perceive these behaviors as un-Christian, and therefore, Christians tend to keep their distance. Typically, SDA and FG members associate the steelpan with Carnival and bad johns who reside in the grassroots community. The term bad john refers to violent, hostile men who are involved in fights and crime, especially in the context of steelband clashes in the 1950s. Calypso and soca music have their own sinful associations with sexual double entendre and sexual dancing. Calypso and soca music are especially popular during the Carnival season in Trinidad and Tobago and are often arranged and performed for the Panorama<sup>3</sup> competition. However, their ties to the Carnival have raised concerns among SDA and Full Gospel (FG) denominations.

The Carnival celebrations, such as calypso, soca, steelpan, and dancing (wining), including the instrument's association with bad johns, have led to a reluctance among some churchgoers to accept this instrument, as they associate it with local culture. Renowned SDA music icon, Dr. Vernon Andrews, stated in his article “Adventist Music in the Caribbean,” that “the (SDA) church initially frowned on the use of the steel pan as an instrument of worship” because of its association with Carnival leading to its rejection from the institution (2020, 2). Furthermore, Doctor and Pastor

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<sup>2</sup> A rhythmic dance that involves the pelvic or circular motion of the waist.

<sup>3</sup> Panorama is an annual steelband competition that was founded in 1963 .

Clive Dotting, Executive Director of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty at Caribbean Union of the SDA church in an interview, claimed that

“there was discrimination with steelpan even within the church. The church kind of went along with what I would call aristocracy where steelband was shown as a very secular instrument and not for church.” (2023)

Christians perceive Carnival and its environs as transgressive and immoral, and going against Christian and Godly principles.

During one of my classes at the University of Washington (UW) while pursuing my doctoral degree, we listened to two different renditions of the hymn “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” One version was performed in the Trinidadian Spiritual Baptist tradition, while the other came from the southern United States. Though I grew up in Trinidad, I realized that my familiarity was largely with the U.S. rendition, most likely due to my upbringing in the SDA church. This spurred my interest in learning more about the influence of North American music in Caribbean churches. In my own church, that influence has largely eclipsed local musical aesthetics. This epiphany left me feeling astonished, as I realized that I was more adept at identifying North American Christian music than the Trinidadian examples presented by Dr. Shannon Dudley. As a result, I became committed to deepening my understanding of the origins of the SDA church and the various forms of U.S. gospel music.

Trinidad's colonial legacy has fostered a persistent mistrust of Afro- and Indo-Trinbagonian cultural expressions, favoring North American traditions. North American traditions are deeply internalized within the nation's population, particularly in local churches. My research explores how Afro- and Indo-Trinbagonian communities engage with European ideologies, incorporating

them into their spiritual beliefs and values. Accepting North American customs in the church may serve as a means of empowerment within the SDA and FG denominations, which was fostered through the nation's long history of colonial experiences. Interestingly, despite the historical mistrust of African practices in the church, African American culture is much more acceptable than the local Afro-Trinidadian tradition.

My research examines the tensions between church ideologies and local music, especially the steel pan, specifically within Seventh-day Adventists and Full Gospel Assembly. There is a concern about distinguishing the instrument from the Carnival culture from which it originated and guarding against certain practices associated with local culture. I explore various theological views of music in these churches and the stigma attached to local culture as a product of the colonial past. Through conversations with certain SDA and FG leaders, as well as Christian steelpan players affiliated with these organizations, I try to understand their views on Carnival and the steelpan. In particular, I ask why North American traditions are preferred in Trinbagonian churches over local genres which have contributed to the tensions of music and steelpan in the SDA and FG communities. People I interviewed include pastors Clive Dottin, Andy Manzano, Isaac Thomas, and Leslie Moses of the SDA denomination; pastors Osbourne Williams, Godfrey Emmanuel Mitchell, Richard I.K. Williams, and pannist Theodore Hicks of the FGA; and representatives of five steelbands affiliated with the SDA and FG communities in Trinidad and Tobago: the Maranatha Steel Orchestra, the Mount D'or Gospel Steel Orchestra, the Pangelics Steel Ensemble, the Nazarene Worship Center Steel Orchestra, and the Pans of Praise Steel Orchestra.

I chose these five steelbands due to their esteemed reputation since the first SDA steelband known as Maranatha Steel Orchestra was established in 1975. My research emphasizes the mission

and vision of each group while discussing their challenges, accomplishments, and the styles of music they have performed for audiences from the mid-1970s to the present. Despite facing discrimination from certain Christian groups in Trinidad and Tobago regarding their presence in the church, each steelband has persevered, continuing to perform gospel music nationwide with the support and participation of young Christians as part of youth and music ministry. The rise of steelpan in churches—which led to the development of these five steelbands—began in the late 1970s (Coker 1999), largely spurred by the pan-in-school/pan-in-the-classroom project and Christian leaders who are attempting to welcome local culture into their worship services. I decided to explore the SDA denomination due to my childhood experiences with the steelpan. In discussing this with friends and fellow members of the FG ensembles, I discovered that other FG steelbands shared similar stories regarding the rejection of the instrument. Therefore, I chose to examine and compare both SDA and FG denominations. By analyzing the discourse of both these religious communities, I aim to better understand how they distinguish between godliness and worldliness, and how this distinction informs the politics of culture among Christians in Trinidad.

Through these interviews, I discovered that these leaders actively pursued the inclusion of steelpan through President Moses' metaphor of baptism, fostering community integration, and engaging in cultural subversion. The concept of steelpan's baptism symbolizes the moral and ethical transformation of the instrument. It represents the recontextualization of something once deemed sinful and secular, imbuing it with a new significance of sacredness and Christian service. The institutionalization of steelpan, particularly through the "pan in school/pan in the classroom" initiative, played a key role in shaping Trinbagonian Christian perspectives and contributed to the proliferation of the instrument within the Seventh-day Adventist and Full Gospel denominations.

The integration of steelpan in the SDA and FG denominations has provided an opportunity for youth engagement and recruitment, fostering community development through music ministry while incorporating local musical elements. Young Christians and young adults in their communities establish a connection between the church and the broader community through steelpan music and culture. Thanks to their commitment to joining and playing in Christian steelbands, these youth have helped ensure that musical ministries flourish, evolving into active music departments that make meaningful contributions to worship in SDA and FG churches.

Through their efforts, which I see as subversive of dominant SDA and FG attitudes toward and practices of music in worship—and what is considered appropriate Christian music more generally speaking—these leaders champion steelpan music within church and worship environments. Their commitment to uplifting young adults, particularly those from urban areas and high-crime communities, has instilled hope in the youth. Some leaders have chosen to separate their steel bands from church affiliations to freely express their musical vision and integrate local styles and rhythms as they see fit. Others have organized events such as crusades and community concerts and have included steelbands in their worship sessions.

Lastly, I will demonstrate the impact of government-funded music programs that have established a connection between local churches and public-school education, leading to the gradual acceptance of the instrument in SDA and FG institutions. I show that through their advocacy for steelpan music in churches, SDA and FG leaders, with support from local youth and young Christians in both denominations, including government-funded school music programs, are playing essential roles that contribute to, advance, and legitimize the use of the instrument in SDA and FG worship services. I recognize that these efforts to accommodate and advance the steel pan, as a form and expression of local Trinbagonian culture that is strongly associated with

Afro-Trinidadian culture and Carnival culture, continue to come up against legacies of colonialism, including hierarchies and prejudices, particularly anti-Blackness and anti-Africanness. Ultimately, I argue that through their efforts to make space for and legitimize the use of the steel pan in SDA and FG worship services, SDA and FG leaders are in effect resisting and subverting ongoing legacies of colonialism that continue to impact Afro-Trinbagonian communities as they assert the power of the instrument as a legitimate vehicle to worship of God.

### **Literature Review**

Most of the scholarship on Carnival, calypso, and steelpan emphasizes a narrative of resistance and transgression. Stephen Stuempfle explored the colonial history of Carnival and the emergence of the steelpan during the twentieth century. He notes that before emancipation in 1838,

“Carnival in Trinidad was primarily a celebration for the Europeans and French planter class. Africans and free coloreds in pre-emancipation Trinidad both in public and private were excluded from participating in Carnival.” (Stuempfle 1995, 19)

Felix Blake had also discussed segregation of Carnival between Afro-Trinidadians and Europeans, stating that,

“before the 1834 emancipation, Carnival celebration was only for the white upper class and middle class. Africans were strictly forbidden to participate in the Carnival festivities except to provide entertainment such as music and dance for the upper class.” (1995, 65)

The difference between 1834 and 1838 was that in 1834, the British Parliament abolished slavery throughout most of the British colonies whereas in 1838 the Apprenticeship system was implemented. Meanwhile, Donald Hill examines the early forms and history of calypso and Carnival in Trinidad from its African-derived roots to where the genre began to evolve as a medium of lucrative entertainment in calypso tents (1993). Shannon Dudley sums up the popular narrative of the steelpan's invention as a triumph over colonial repression:

“In 1884, the colonial legislature passed the Peace Preservation Ordinance, which among other things restricted drumming during Carnival. The rest is history, as drums were replaced during Carnival by an ensemble of bamboo stamping tubes called tamboo bamboo, and it was out of these bamboo ensembles that the steelband emerged around 1940.” (Dudley 2007, 4-5)

African artistic expressions were expressed as forms of resistance and transgression against European oppression and racism, post emancipation, and today they are expressed through Carnival, which shaped Trinbagonian culture (Dudley 2007; Hill 1972; Goddard 1991; Herskovits 1972; Johnson 1994).

Although I found virtually nothing in the academic literature about the relationship between steelbands and Protestant Christianity in Trinidad and Tobago, there is clear evidence of the moral stigma attached to the steelpan and other carnival arts. During the mid-twentieth century, as the steelpan emerged as a means of expression for people in urban communities, it faced negative perceptions from the middle and upper classes due to its association with bad johns and grassroots culture. The steelpan's strong connection to Carnival led some Christian denominations to view it as embodying the “moral evils of Carnival” (Rommen 2007, 6). Carnival is an annual celebration that arrived with French Catholic settlers in the late nineteenth century. The carnal and

often violent eruptions during Carnival and steelpan were further exacerbated by European fears of African cultural expressions, resulting in negative stereotyping of panmen (Dudley 2007, 82, 104). It also significantly impacted the acceptance of the steelpan in SDA and FG churches in Trinidad and Tobago.

Like the steel pan, calypso music is viewed negatively by many Christians for its association with Carnival, and there has been more attention in the academic literature to this topic. Studies have been published on the cultural significance of *gospelypso* (gospel-calypso), such as Timothy Rommen's book *Mek Some Noise*, and gospel-reggae in Melvin Butler's *Island Gospel*. These works examine the church's attitudes toward popular music. Rommen and Butler explore the moral and ethical issues of musical style that challenge their reception among Trinidadian and Jamaican Full Gospel and Pentecostal believers. The concept of the "negotiation of proximity" discussed by Rommen refers to the process by which church members develop preferences for musical styles that are culturally and geographically distant from them because local styles are too obviously tainted by a colonial discourse about what is respectable and what is not, and may be seen as a direct threat to one's salvation (2007, 66; 2019, 40). Local Trinbagonian music style is negotiated for North American types of music. This notion resonates with my own experiences and provides insight into the steelpan's rejection in Christian churches on the island.

This negotiation of proximity, in which North American styles are favored over local styles can also be related to Peter Wilson's paradigm of "reputation and respectability" in Caribbean culture. Wilson argues that "respectability derives from the values of the original colonizing power (Britain) and subsequently reinforced by the island's various (and often American-funded) Christian churches" (Burton 1997, 158). The practice of devotion, loyalty, and obedience to European and North American authorities relates to the colonial history of striving to be seen as

“good enough.” Afro-Trinbagonian cultural expressions like Carnival are seen by some Afro-Trinbagonians as antithetical to this striving, and to the sacred spaces of home and church where women enforce standards of respectability. The Carnival arts are associated instead with the street, in spaces where men compete with one another for “reputation” through the contests of words, music, and battle that characterize calypso, steelband, and stickfighting.

However, change is on the horizon. The steelpan, an instrument condemned by Christian organizations for decades due to its connection to Carnival, African drums, and African spiritualism, is now being embraced in churches. I believe this research is critical in understanding how and why an instrument that once created significant tension within religious groups is now being welcomed, championed, and supported in their community--and also, what may be the ongoing barriers to that acceptance. Rommen’s book provided information regarding the various musical affinities in a particular style of music that is “appropriate” for worship in Protestant churches like SDA and FG. However, his work and the other scholarly literature presented in this dissertation did not give answers to the progression of steelpans in churches and the emergence of steelbands such as the Pangelics Steel Ensemble. Therefore, this research shows how Pangelics and other Christian steelbands mentioned above dealt with and circumvented the church’s attitudes towards the steelpan.

My research explores the following questions: What musical affinities and elements determine whether a particular style of music is considered appropriate for worship services in the Seventh-day Adventist and Full Gospel churches, and why are they prioritized? How have certain steelbands successfully gained the trust of the church? How have the opinions of Trinbagonian Christians regarding steelpan music changed over the years, and who are the people who have worked to bring about this change? I present my findings so that other Christian communities and

pannists can work towards building an amicable relationship between the community and the church, especially for young people.

### **Carnival and Morality**

In order for us to understand the function of the “negotiation of proximity,” we need to understand the colonial history of Trinidad and the way it conditions the sociopolitical climate of Afro-Trinbagonian culture. During the 1500-1600s, the Spanish Catholics' arrival in Trinidad was to conquer and “Christianize” the Arawaks and Caribs who were Indigenous to the island. The Spanish forced the Indigenous peoples to plant crops like citrus, sugarcane, and coffee, as well as to embrace Catholicism. In the late 1700s, French Catholic planters arrived in Trinidad, bringing with them enslaved West Africans and Carnival.

In 1798 the British seized control of Trinidad from Spain, bringing with them the Anglican Church. Nevertheless, the white elites remained dominated by French creoles who continued to practice their Carnival celebrations. After slavery was abolished in 1838, the newly freed West Africans began to participate in the public Carnival giving rise to the so-called “jamette”<sup>4</sup> Carnival. The Jamette Carnival included the recognition of West African deities and African-derived characters, dances, and music, such as calypso and the steelpan, as a form of resistance and transgression. White people had their own celebrations and condemned the Jamette Carnival since Africans had joined.

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<sup>4</sup> From the French word *diameter*, or boundary; the jamette Carnival was practiced by people on the social margins.

Today, most Trinbagonians take pride in this Carnival tradition and consider it to be a national cultural achievement in the liberation of Trinidad and Tobago. Although Carnival was introduced to Trinidad by Spanish and French Catholics, it was frowned upon by the British, especially after the newly freed West Africans began participating following 1838 emancipation. As North American Christianity arrived in Trinidad through North American missionaries in the 1860s, they also agreed with British authorities, condemning the Jambou Carnival, as well as other Afro- and Indo-Trinidadian traditions like Spiritual (Shouter) Baptist and Hinduism. As a result, Christian churches in Trinidad and Tobago engage in a negotiation of proximity, as Rommen calls it, by which local music is considered less safe and acceptable compared to music from North America and European countries.

Central to the Carnival celebration are two forms of popular music that originated in Trinidad and Tobago: calypso and soca. Calypso, often referred to as Kaiso, is a prominent style of Caribbean music that originated in Trinidad and Tobago during the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its foundations lie in African songs, rhythms, timbres, and European folk traditions. Soca music, whose name has been explained as a contraction of (So)ul (Ca)lypso, is a modern evolution of musical ideas found in calypso (Munro 2016, 4). Ras Shorty I, formerly Lord Shorty, is recognized as the inventor of "Sokah," a genre combining East Indian and African rhythms, beginning in the 1970s (Rommen 2007, 130). Today, soca music is one of the most popular genres in Central and North America, particularly in the Caribbean. Calypso and soca music are especially popular during the Carnival season in Trinidad and Tobago and are often featured in the annual panorama festivities, however, their ties to the Carnival have raised concerns among Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) and Full Gospel (FG) denominations. Both genres also

dominate the steelbands' repertoire, therefore, the steelpan's association with these musical styles is one reason for Christians to mistrust it.

Another reason for this mistrust is the history of violence associated with steelbands. Protestant churches were cautious about embracing steel pans due to their desire to distance themselves from the instrument's ties to the Badjohn stereotype that occurred in the late 1930s to early 1940s. The steelpan originated in the late 1930s and early 1940s (Batson 2004; Blake 2005; Burton 1997; Dudley 2007; Stuempfle 2005). In the late 1940s and 1950s, musical rivalry between neighborhood bands became intense, which led to conflicts between bands in urban areas. By 1946, the development of the steelpan had made significant progress, resulting in increased involvement from urban community members. The Carnival of 1947 saw violence erupt between neighborhood steelbands during the festive season. These conflicts were primarily driven by strong territorial claims of community among band members and disputes over women in the village claimed by multiple bands. Additionally, competition in music likely fueled these tensions (Batson 2004; Bernard 2020; Blake 2005; Burton 1997; Dudley 2007; Stuempfle 2005). Those who instigated these conflicts were known as Badjohns, who were often involved in altercations with both rival steelbands and the police (Blake 1995; Riggio 2020; Stuempfle 1995). Andy Manzano, a Theology Professor at the University of the Southern Caribbean stated during an interview that "a steelband side was akin to what we would now call 'a gang.' Therefore, no church wanted pan in their worship" (Interview with Manzano 2023).

During the 1950s, middle- and upper-class individuals began participating in steelpan playing. This shift was facilitated through the establishment of college boy bands<sup>5</sup> and the creation of the Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra (T.A.S.P.O) in 1951. The perception of the instrument changed as a result of TASPO's participation in the Festival of Britain in 1951. Since then, the steelbands' musical accomplishments have become a source of pride for many Trinidadians, but they have not completely shed the stigma of violence.

The nineteenth-century *Jamette Carnival*, often referred to as the "street Carnival" or the predawn *Cannes Brûlées* (Canboulay or burning of the cane) included elements of the emancipation Carnival. This celebration emphasized resistance and ritualized violence, asserting one's right to power despite the authorities (Riggio 2020, 209). Reports from the *Port of Spain Gazette* in 1861 indicated that the Carnival had fallen into the hands of the idle and vagrants (Crowley 1996, 57, 58). Developed by Africans around 1840, Canboulay became an integral part of the Carnival (Stuempfle 2005, 20). By 1868, bands of women paraded the streets in extravagant attire with names like "Black Ball," "Dahlia," "Don't-Care-A-Damn," "Magenta," "Maribun," "Mousseline," and "True Blue" (Crowley 1996, 59). These women wielded batons (called *boutous*) and were reported to have danced and fought in the streets. This behavior became a concern for the higher classes. Central to the *Jamette Carnival* was stickfighting and the presence of black masquers, which became dominant characteristics of the *diametres* (or *jamettes*)—the underclass—who, according to the elites, gradually took over Carnival (Crowley 1996, 61). Stickfighting, known as *kalinda* or *calinda*, was a crucial aspect of the Carnival rituals in Trinidad from the emancipation period until it was banned following the riots in 1881 (Burton 1997, 174).

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<sup>5</sup> Often refers to steelbands that gained popularity in the 1940s and 1950s, particularly among middle-class, white, and light-skinned individuals, many of whom were attending or had attended local colleges.

Stickfighting involved women, known as chantwells, singing and chanting, while men provided rhythm using drums and various improvised percussion instruments such as tin cans, bamboo tubes, bottles, and spoons (Burton 1997, 174-175). During the jamaette Carnival, revelers portrayed various European characters, including Punchinellos, Pierrots, pirates, and Turks. Africans not only mimicked the planters but also themselves in the Canboulay processions, thus reclaiming their liberty (Stuempfle 2005, 20; Batson 2004, 196). This was a form of protest against the injustices of slavery (Burton 1997, 200). However, the police and British authorities were not receptive to these developments. The white elites and Europeans viewed the celebrations as unpleasant and disruptive.

In 1884, the white elites and European attitudes toward Carnival and African music culminated in the enactment of the Peace Preservation Ordinance, which granted the Governor the authority to prohibit processions, drumming, dances, and assemblies (Stuempfle 2005, Dudley 2007, Blake 2005, Batson 2004, Burton 1997). Although the Peace Preservation Ordinance was only partly effective in suppressing these African traditions, the Jamette Carnival revelers discovered alternative means to assert their resistance. As these events unfolded, Trinidad's religious landscape expanded and diversified. Trinidad was now British territory. But there were North American missionaries who supported British authority in suppressing Afro and Indo-Trinbagonian culture displayed during Carnival.

In addition to Carnival, Europeans in Trinidad were skeptical of Afrocentric traditions. Christian mistrust of the steelpan can also be related to a general mistrust of African musical and spiritual practices. In 1858, Governor Keate called opponents of the Carnival, who described the early morning music, possibly related to Canboulay, as barbarous, disgraceful “noise from semisavages emerging from God knows where, exhibiting hellish scenes and the most demoniacal

representations” (quoted in Pearse 1956a: 187; Burton 1997, 202). Eshean Arjoon, founder and arranger of Pangelics Steel Ensemble in an interview, reported that churchgoers were misinformed by international Christian leaders about the steelpan and

“a lot of people got the wrong impression of the steelpan because there was a fleet of persons in that area from our denomination saying that the steelpans were actually instruments of the devil because it originated from Africa, African drums, and used to channel evil spirits. So, Christians wanted to stay away from it, although, because they felt it might conjure up some evil spirits” (2023).

In an interview, Allan Samuel founder and leader of the Mount D’or Gospel Steel Orchestra told me that “people are worshipping the devil by the way they dress and carry on themselves (during Carnival). The way they dance, wine, drink, behave, and all that stuff” (2023).

In another interview, Dr. Thomas Isaac, a professor of Religion and Theology at the University of the Southern Caribbean, asserted that Afro-Trinidadian culture has been marginalized within Trinbago Christianity due to European mistrust of African spiritual practices. He noted that certain Protestant denominations reject the steelpan primarily because of its association with Carnival. Furthermore, the rise of new religious expressions, including Orisha in Trinidad, Santería in Cuba, Vodou in Haiti, and Candomblé in Brazil, which were derived from African spiritual traditions, caused deeper concerns for Europeans. These traditions are frequently perceived as witchcraft and are associated with rituals that evoke evil spirits. However, the blending of cultural practices is not the sole concern for Protestants. Isaac contends that “Protestantism often demonizes foreign cultures, and a lot of these things (cultures) have no biblical basis” (2023). In fact, the book of Psalms mentions popular instruments used during biblical times, such as the lyre, harp, tambourines, and cymbals, for worshipping God, including

joyful and expressive music. Hence, at the beginning of this chapter and throughout the rest of the dissertation, I refer to specific Bible verses about music and worship that contradict SDA and FG practices. This illustrates that cultural music was used as a form of worship in the Bible and there is no mention of European or North American styles of worship. While Afro-syncretic religions such as Orisha and Spiritual Baptists exist in Trinidad, SDA and FG denominations have consistently adhered to a Eurocentric tradition on the island and throughout the Caribbean in order to avoid any dealings with Afro-Trinidadian local practices.

Isaac also discusses his views on Protestants' reaction and attitudes against Roman Catholic doctrines and traditions. The Protestant Reformation further entrenched this rejection of Catholic customs, resulting in some Protestant churches deeming Carnival as immoral due to its links with Catholicism. In his lecture, "Carnival, Culture, and Christianity," at the University of the Southern Caribbean, Isaac elaborated on how the Catholic Church embraced Carnival as a strategy to assimilate non-European cultures, intending to "Christianize" them (Glasgow 2023, 2:22:45). He contends that the acceptance and incorporation of culture facilitated the integration of diverse cultural practices into Catholicism, where purgatory acts as a means for sinners to attain Heaven. In contrast, Protestantism posits a more binary view, where individuals are deemed either good or bad, determining their fate of either Heaven or hell. This concept points to the discourse of the relationship between culture and Christianity.

During the 10th Annual Harold Baptiste Lectureship titled "Carnival Culture & Christianity" held on February 2nd, 2023, Pastor Dr. Pat Glasgow, a former president of the West Indies School of Theology (WIST), addressed the delicate balance between cultural forms and cultural values. Glasgow emphasized the importance of distinguishing between the "expression of culture" and "cultural values," noting that one can showcase certain cultural expressions without

necessarily embracing the underlying values (Glasgow 2023). He argued for the need of the Christian church to adopt certain cultural forms while remaining vigilant against the values that may accompany them.

Trinbagonian culture is intrinsically linked to Carnival, which often carries connotations of boasting, competition, lewdness, and disruptiveness. For Glasgow and Trinbagonian Christians, the challenge lies in incorporating elements of culture that do not compromise their Christian values. In other words, calypso music, Panorama performances, and similar cultural forms are acceptable to express, as long as they are not embraced as cultural values—which are equivalent to worldly values—because that would contradict Christian values and beliefs. In the forthcoming chapters, I will explore how Christian leaders and musicians navigate the selection of cultural forms for their worship services while maintaining their commitment to Christian principles. This examination will focus on the specific aspects of cultural identity that are deemed acceptable, the boundaries that individuals within the Christian community establish regarding culture, and the rationale behind their choices to embrace or reject particular traditions. In particular, these interviews highlight the evolving role of the steelpan in the church and how its perceptions and purposes have transformed over the years.

### **Christian Music in Trinidad and Tobago SDA and Full Gospel Denominations**

In the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) and Full Gospel denominations in Trinidad and Tobago, traditional European hymns and contemporary North American gospel music are the preferred styles used in worship services. European hymns and contemporary gospel are considered the most celestial forms of music, deemed appropriate for worshipping God. Due to

the SDA's North American origins, European hymns and contemporary gospel music became the staples of musical selections within the denomination.

Seventh-day Adventists trace their lineage back to Pentecost<sup>6</sup>. According to renowned bible story author A.S. Maxwell, they maintain a strong connection to the early Christian Church (first century AD to the 4th century AD), reflected in their spirit, teachings, and objectives. SDA recognized the Seventh-day Sabbath, as prescribed in the fourth commandment of the Bible, Maxwell notes,

"Their Sabbath is the New Testament Sabbath. Their advent hope is the same as that which glowed in the hearts of Peter, James, and John. Their teaching on baptism by immersion aligns with the beliefs and practices of the first disciples, as does their solemn yet simple celebration of the Lord's Supper" (Murray 1998, 205).

There are specific leaders who are credited for the development of the SDA church and are known to be the founders of Adventism.

Ellen G. White is recognized as one of the SDA founders and a prophet inspired by the Holy Spirit in the SDA denomination. Her impact is so significant that the Smithsonian named her one of the "100 Most Significant Americans of All Time" (Frail, 2004). Prophets have a long history in the Bible, with figures like Abraham, Moses, Joseph, Hosea, Obadiah, and Jeremiah all recognized for their ability to perform miracles and communicate messages from God. In 1664, Stephen Mumford migrated from London and established the first Seventh-Day Baptist Church in America in 1671. In the eighteenth century, the Seventh-Day Baptists were joined by Rachel Oakes, a Methodist who spread the Sabbath message in states such as Washington and New

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<sup>6</sup> The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles of Jesus.

Hampshire. This message was embraced by Frederick Wheeler, a Methodist Adventist, in 1844. According to Murray,

“Wheeler, in turn, conveyed it to Free Will Baptist Adventist Thomas M. Preble, who persuaded Joseph Bates, an ex-sea captain and temperance advocate. Bates subsequently helped James and Ellen White accept the Sabbath message.” (1998, 206)

White's divination during the nineteenth century in the United States is particularly significant in the SDA church. She claimed to have received over two thousand visions and dreams from God, which she shared with the public and Adventist pioneers. Her writings were based on the content of these visions and were viewed by many as the Biblical gift of prophecy.

Sister White expressed her thoughts on the ideal sound of church music in her book, *Testimonies for the Church* (1885, Pacific Press Publishing Association). She advocated for a subdued and melodious approach, drawing inspiration from the sweet songs of birds. In her view, the misconception that louder singing equates to better music is misguided since noise does not equate to music. Her words serve as a guide for churches to avoid using loud instruments that may disrupt the peaceful nature of the sanctuary.

Between 1880 and 1881, a small group of Sabbath keepers, led by James R. Brathwaite, arrived in Tobago. These missionaries devoted themselves to teaching Sabbath-keeping doctrines to the local population and familiarizing them with the worship and religious practices common in North America. Their commitment to the origins of Pentecost (Holy Spirit) is very significant to their fundamental beliefs.

Unlike the Seventh Day Adventist, the term “Full Gospel” is not a denomination per se. The “Full Gospel” believers, also referred to as the Full Gospel Assembly or Full Gospel Association, represent a coalition of Protestant denominations in the Americas. As Anderson (2004, 228) defined, the “Full Gospel” embodies a Christological framework where Christ is viewed as the central figure—Savior, Healer, Baptizer, and Coming King. The Full Gospel encompasses several denominations and non-denominational strands of Protestantism in Trinidad, primarily with a Pentecostal orientation (Rommen 2007, 4). In this context, I use the term “Full Gospel” to refer specifically to Pentecostal and charismatic denominations, excluding Presbyterians, Anglicans, and Catholics. In Trinidad, Full Gospel believers have formed an association that actively engages in political efforts to ensure the maintenance of “religious orthodoxy of a certain, member-defined nature” (Rommen 2007, 17). In other words, the coalition helps to support and maintain fundamental values and beliefs that they have prioritized. This association extends beyond Trinidad's borders, encompassing members in Jamaica, Haiti, the United States, and Canada.

While the Seventh-day Adventist and Full Gospel movements originated from Protestantism, their practices exhibit considerable differences from each other. A key distinction lies in the SDA's observance of the Seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday), whereas the FG holds worship services on Sundays. Both movements originated in North America, where missionaries shared European worship practices with Christians across the continent and beyond. Significantly, North American musical styles have also been integrated into Trinbagonian Full Gospel worship.

For the purpose of this research, I chose not to focus on other denominations like Roman Catholic, Anglican (Church of England), Presbyterian, Baptist, Spiritual Baptist, Moravian, Jehovah's Witness, and Ethiopian Orthodox Christians because they do not uphold all of the same

beliefs as the FGA mentioned earlier. Furthermore, Pentecostals believe these denominations are “too far removed from the teachings of the full gospel to warrant membership in the association” (Rommen 2007, 18). In addition, Hindus and Muslims are not included in the list of religions above because they are not considered orthodox religions. Nevertheless, the steelpan has also played a role in these sacred communities and has raised concerns regarding the instrument's religious, spiritual, and ethnic background and reputation as an unstudied topic. As the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago, a multi-religious and ethnically diverse nation, the prejudice against steelpan is apparent across various religions, not limited to Protestantism, and has sparked discussions beyond this study.

### **Methodology and Positionality**

During my ethnographic research, I conducted fieldwork through personal interviews with members of the Seventh-day Adventist and Full Gospel music communities, along with participation in and observation of their worship services. My research is intended to contribute to the scholarship surrounding steelpan music and religious music in the West Indies. I had the opportunity to speak with influential band leaders, including Eshean Arjoon of the Pangelics Steel Ensemble, Keva-Ann Blackman of Pan of Praise, Ralph Wade (deceased) of the Maranatha Steel Orchestra, Allan Samuel of the Mount D’or Gospel Steel Orchestra, and Lincoln Henry of the Nazarene Worship Center Steel Orchestra, as well as several current band members from these groups. Furthermore, this project seeks to examine how the Maranatha Steel Orchestra, Pangelics Steel Ensemble, the Mount D’or Gospel Steel Orchestra, the Nazarene Worship Center Orchestra, and the Pans of Praise Steel Orchestra successfully gained the trust of Christian denominations, particularly the SDA and the FG denominations, enabling them to perform at numerous church

events. I document and analyze their impact and experiences within the SDA and Full Gospel communities, with the goal of making this information locally accessible and available to these communities.

Before embarking on my graduate studies at the University of Washington, I was deeply engaged in the art of steelpan music. In 2010, I earned my “Advanced Steelpan Tuning” certificate from the University of Trinidad and Tobago. The following year, I began my first year in the “Certificate in Pan” program at the University of the West Indies (UWI). During this time, I became a member of the Pangelics Steel Ensemble, an experience that reignited my passion for music ministry. I dedicated much of my time to practicing in the pan rooms at UWI and rehearsing with Pangelics. Steelpan has been a significant part of my life and continues to be so to this day. Through my involvement with Pangelics, I actively shared inspirational music with others while receiving guidance from UWI faculty on steelpan playing. After more than ten years of seeking peace with my faith and my relationship with the steelpan following my experience at Mount D’or, I emerged with valuable insights. These challenges have not only prepared me for my research but have also connected me with important people and resources relevant to my study.

I aspire to address significant issues of neocolonialism, racism, and sociopolitical tensions between Caribbean music and Christian worship that are understudied in the field of ethnomusicology. Identifying as an Afro-Trinbagonian was both vital and at times challenging when it came to accessing certain communities while delving into contemporary issues during my studies at the University of Washington; however, I believe that the insights gained can significantly contribute to the discourse and gradual changes occurring within the Protestant community in Trinidad and Tobago and finding a balance that most Trinbagonian Christians can agree with. This research provides a unique insider perspective that underscores my role and

positionality as a Black Caribbean scholar contributing to these critical themes in a discipline where scholars are predominantly white. Since I began my fieldwork on this topic and made multiple visits to Trinidad, I have had the opportunity to share my research interests with others. Through conversations and emails, many people have expressed their fascination with the discourse surrounding pan and the church. The targeted audience for this project extends beyond scholars and researchers in the field of ethnomusicology; it also encompasses the people of Trinidad and Tobago, including both Christians and not mutually exclusive to those intrigued by the complex relationship between music and culture in ministry. I hope to encourage leaders to recognize the value of local art forms and national treasures, which have positively shaped generations. I am excited to be part of these discussions that are currently unfolding on the island and encourage the reimagination of the steelpan's role in society and the Christian church.

While in Trinidad, I interviewed both leaders and regular members of the Full Gospel Christian Association in Trinidad to better understand their perspectives on the incorporation of steelpan music in their worship services. I engaged with steelband leaders and members of the national steelband organization, known as "Pan Trinbago," and attended various concerts and performances organized by the steelband community. I spoke with Marcus Ash, the former Education Officer and current External Relations Officer of Pan Trinbago, to gather information about registered Christian steelbands in Trinidad and Tobago, as well as their contributions to the pan fraternity and, importantly, to the dissemination of the gospel. I also talked with Joseph Lett, one of the founding band members of the Maranatha Steel Orchestra. Furthermore, I participated in worship services at the Mount D'or and Woodbrook SDA churches, engaging in thoughtful

discussions with leaders from the SDA South Caribbean Conference<sup>7</sup> and the Caribbean Union Conference<sup>8</sup> (CARU) in Trinidad and Tobago regarding their viewpoints on the increasing presence of steelpan music within the SDA church. I also visited Full Gospel denominations to participate in their church services and document their worship's traditional practices and routines. These experiences during my fieldwork research provided me with valuable insights, enabling me to compare the traditions of the SDA congregation with those of the FGA churches.

Fortunately, I had a personal conversation with Pastor Moses, the current president of the South Caribbean Conference (S.C.C) in his office located at the S.C.C. headquarters in Saint Augustine, Trinidad, about the Seventh-day Adventist doctrine regarding the steelpan in general and in the church. Additionally, I worked with Mrs. Mariella Pilgrim, head Librarian, Dr. Karen Eccles, Librarian, and Judith Smith, Library Assistant of the West Indiana and Special Collections Division at the Alma Jordan Library at the University of the West Indies St. Augustine Campus, Trinidad & Tobago in gaining access to newspaper articles on the issue of steelpan in churches in Trinidad and Tobago. Both the South Caribbean Conference and the West Indiana and Special Collections Division were valuable organizations that provided essential information to support my claims on why SDA and Full Gospel churchgoers rejected the steelpan.

During my time in Trinidad, I had the privilege of attending services at several churches, including Woodbrook Pentecostal and SDA, Woodbrook African Methodist Episcopal, the Church of the Nazarene, the Nazarene Worship Center, Covenant Life Transformation Ministries, Mount D'or SDA, and Laventille Open Bible Church. I actively participated in their worship services and

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<sup>7</sup> South Caribbean Conference oversees the churches nationwide, provides leadership, and manages donated funds.

<sup>8</sup> Caribbean Union is a church administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Inter-American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

recorded my observations in a notebook. Following each service, I sought the opportunity to meet with the pastor to share details about my work and to explore their willingness to engage in a discussion or interview regarding their perspectives and experiences with the role of pan in the church. Through these observations, I discuss the various styles of worship and compare the SDA style to the FG practices.

### **Terminology**

In this dissertation, I will use specific local Trinbagonian terms that are familiar to Caribbean readers, as well as some terms of my own. The terms and their meanings are as follows:

- East-Indians refer to South Asians in Trinidad and Tobago. This term has been used since they arrived in 1844 under British rule.
- Culture- Trinbagonians use the word “culture” to refer to expressive arts, food and language that are distinctively Trinbagonian. In the realm of expressive arts, moreover, “culture” is almost always understood to include the Carnival arts of steelpan, calypso and mas’ (masquerade). This word is commonly used to invoke pride, unity, and patriotism in a Trinbagonian identity. It is, however, important to note that this word will sometimes be used in more specific terms like “Afro-Trinbagonian culture” or “Carnival culture” that is in juxtaposition to “culture” and “Christianity”.
- Americentric- This word—that I created for the purpose of this project—refers to American traditions which encompass both Eurocentric and Afrocentric practices that exist in North America. To elaborate, North American Christianity is more popular than the Eurocentric type that came with Spain and British settlers.

These definitions aim to provide better context and clarity in the upcoming chapter, supporting my arguments and conclusions.

### **Chapter Outline**

I support and develop this dissertation's argument that SDA and FG leaders are resisting and subverting ongoing legacies of colonialism that continue to impact Afro-Trinbagonian communities as they assert the power of the instrument as a legitimate vehicle to worship of God in the next four chapters. Chapter One offers an in-depth exploration of the diverse styles of music used in SDA and FG churches of Trinidad and Tobago. It discusses the origins, functions, and popularity of hymn songs, Country and Western, and Contemporary/Urban gospel and Worship and Praise music, particularly within the island's Seventh-day Adventist and Full Gospel churches. This chapter delves into the roots of local gospel genres such as *gospelypso*, gospel dancehall, and jamoo, highlighting their connections to SDA and FG church communities. Furthermore, this chapter examines the impact of secular and ethnic traditions, including Carnival and African spiritualism, on the evolution of local music genres. Drawing on Rommen's concepts of "negotiation of proximity" and "ethics of style," it analyzes the motivations behind churchgoers' preferences for specific types of gospel music. These preferences are significantly influenced by their ideologies and perspectives, shaped partly by the arrival of North American Christian missionaries and contemporary pop culture and pop music.

Chapters Two and Three critically examine the views of eight leaders and musicians from the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) and Full Gospel Assembly (FGA) denominations in Trinidad and Tobago whom I interviewed. I explore conversations with Doctor and Pastor Clive Dottin, Dr.

Andy Manzano, President Leslie Moses, and Dr. Thomas Isaac of the SDA, alongside Pastor and Doctor Osbourne Williams, Pastor Godfrey Emmanuel Mitchell, Pastor Richard I.K. Williams, and Theodore Hicks from the FGA. Our conversations centered on their connections to North American Christianity and their views and experiences with steelpan music within the church. Through a review of these interviews, I flesh out and underscore the values and ideologies that shape their positions on music in the church. Finally, I compare the SDA and FGA perspectives on worship styles, religious practices, and the role of steelpan in their churches.

Chapter Four explores the activities of four Christian steelbands within the SDA and FG denominations in Trinidad and Tobago: the Maranatha Steel Orchestra, the Mount D'or Gospel Steel Orchestra, the Pangelics Steel Ensemble, the Nazarene Worship Center Steel Orchestra, and the Pans of Praise Steel Orchestra. More critically, this chapter discusses how these bands have successfully navigated Christian perspectives on percussion instruments, such as the steelpan, while addressing the associated stigma of African spiritualism and the secular nature of the instrument. I pay particular attention to the engagement of young Christians in the steelpan culture, highlighting educational initiatives that contribute to its increasing acceptance within the church.

The Celestial Sounds of Steelpan — Chapter One  
The Gospel of the Church

*"Worship to God must not betray one's culture."*

*Pastor Clive Griffith 1998*

The origins of Protestant Christianity in Trinidad and Tobago can be traced back to the Eurocentric worship traditions introduced through Spanish and British colonialism and then re-established by North American Christian missionaries in the nineteenth century. Many Seventh-day Adventist churches and the Full Gospel Association still follow the North American practices unique to these denominations. White Adventist or Pentecostal churches in the U.S. have traditionally used hymns, psalms, and Western styles of music for their worship services. Meanwhile, Black Adventists and Pentecostals have included hymns, urban/contemporary gospel, and Negro folk spirituals in their congregations. In Trinidad and Tobago, however, Adventist and Pentecostal churches have incorporated both White and Black North American styles of worship into their services. Despite achieving independence from Britain in 1962, British and North American traditions continue to shape the religious practices on the island. I argue that while North American Christian music styles and traditions are dominant, local styles of gospel music are on the rise in Trinbagonian churches through the intervention of certain local Christian leaders such as Dr. David Ibeleme, Noel "the Professor" Richards, and Pastor Clive Griffith advocating for national cultural representation in Christian churches. Dr. David Ibeleme, Noel "the Professor" Richards, and Pastor Clive Griffith's work will be a focus of this chapter

This chapter explores and defines the various types of European hymns, North American gospel music, and Trinbagonian styles of gospel music like 'Country and Western' and

Contemporary gospels, *gospelypso*, gospel dancehall, reggae gospel, and jamoo. I also examine the history of Carnival, focusing on the arrival of Christianity and North American missionaries who reinforced European colonial ideologies and racism that led to Christian prejudice against Afro and Indo-Trinidadian culture. However, in my research, I found that Dr. David Ibeleme, Noel "the Professor" Richards, and Pastor Clive Griffith have publicly defended local styles of gospel music and its contribution to music ministry. I then analyze Rommen's 'negotiation of proximity' and 'ethics of style' paradigms to explain why SDA and FG churchgoers prefer North American styles of gospel music in Trinidad and Tobago. I also explore a more complex negotiation scenario between North American and local styles practiced in Jamaican and Haiti Pentecostal services, which Butler explored in his research. Lastly, I explore the musical practices and choices of the Greenlake SDA church in Seattle and compare it to SDA churches in Trinidad. This chapter contributes to the larger discourse of Christian leaders' ideological beliefs in determining "good" versus "bad" music for the church.

Since the arrival of North American Christian missionaries to Trinidad in the nineteenth century, Protestant denominations have preferred North American church traditions and practices and in the process have excluded local musical styles like *gospelypso*, gospel dancehall, and jamoo. North American traditions dominated the Christendom on the island, causing tension between SDA and FG churchgoers and leaders. Although the North American style of SDA and FG denominations increasingly became popular in 1980s, there was a negative response to or disregard for local culture and music. As explained in the introduction, Afro and Indo-Trinidadian cultures were viewed by White elites as barbaric and disruptive, and this attitude has been internalized by many Black and Indian Trinidadians as well. According to Caribbean scholar Austin Bisnauth, European colonizers saw the beliefs of the indigenous people (Arawaks and Caribs) as

“undoubtedly shaped by a hostile nature and spirit” (1996, 10). Edward Long, a slave owner claimed that “Creole Blacks...may, with a very moderate instruction in the Christian rules, be kept in good order, without the whip. They would be more docile and more diligent than the heathen Negro” (Bisnauth 1996, 102-103). Furthermore, Catholic authority imposed physical punishment on the Indians in order to deter them from indulging in ‘heathen’ practices (Bisnauth 1996, 20). Africans and Indians were viewed as untamed and practiced non-Christian customs that were viewed as ‘heathen’ traditions. These perceptions have permeated contemporary Christianity and been upheld by Christian leadership and authority inherited from European colonizers and North American missionaries.

This deference to non-local aesthetics represents a conservative tendency in Trinidad congregations that is different from what I observed with SDA members in Seattle, Washington, where I attended church during my doctoral studies. I interviewed Shelly LaGrone and Dana Waters, members of the Greenlake SDA Church (GLC) in Washington state. Through LaGrone and Walters interviews, I was able to comprehend why GLC preferred and chose certain music for their services. LaGrone was a delegate of the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal (SDAH) committee in the early 1970s and was involved in deciding and choosing songs for the new editions of the SDAH. Waters is a long-standing member of the GLC. LaGrone was able to explain the decision made by the SDAH in choosing songs for the hymnal. Waters shared with me the history of GLC and the reason why they prefer European styles of hymns. As I analyzed my discussions with LaGrone and Walters, I found that the members and musicians at GLC showed precedent for using culturally relevant musical styles. Their choices were largely influenced by personal preferences and their significant historical ties to European traditions, given that they are predominantly a Scandinavian congregation. While in Trinidad, SDA and FG churchgoers adhere to the belief that

church music should sound like European ballads, hymns, or even contemporary gospel music. Songs and musical styles that encapsulate these genres are considered appropriate and acceptable unto God.

SDA and FG in Trinidad and Tobago have prioritized European and North American gospel music for their worship services. The North American musical acceptance also includes African American contemporary gospel music. North African American contemporary gospel artists such as Andraé Crouch, Shirley Caesar, Helen Baylor, and Donnie McClurkin's music were favored in the SDA and FG churches. As a result, I found that churchgoers favored African American gospel and considered the local style of gospel music to be inappropriate and ungodly. It appears that there are hierarchal motives in deciding which style of gospel music and ethics of style associated with the genre are appropriate for church services among Christian leaders and churchgoers. Although the tensions between North American and local gospel music exist, certain Christian leaders have chosen to defend local culture and the contribution of local music to the music ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **History of Christianity**

The Spanish first arrived in Trinidad during the 1500s, following Christopher Columbus's discovery of the island in July 1498. At that time, Trinidad was already inhabited by the Arawaks and Caribs, the Indigenous peoples of the region. Author Bridget Brereton estimates that the Indigenous population numbered between 30,000 and 40,000 in 1498, which had declined to approximately 15,000 to 20,000 by 1592 (Rommen 2007, 10). The principal institution of Spanish colonial authority, known as the *encomienda*, was established after the founding of the first Spanish

settlement, the “Territorial Abbey,” in Saint Joseph in 1592. The Spaniards sought to implement the *encomienda* as a means of conquering, civilizing, and “Christianizing” Trinidad. An *encomendero*—a Spanish landholder—was granted a portion of land that included the right to extract tribute from the Indigenous peoples residing there, typically in the form of labor or crops. In return, the *encomendero* was expected to convert 'his Indians' to Christianity and ensure their recognition of the Catholic Church as the ultimate authority in matters of faith. The Catholic Church oversaw and enforced these arrangements (Bisnauth 1996, 13; Rommen 2007, 10). However, the policies enacted were not solely aimed at the Christianization of the Indigenous peoples. Since the Spanish arrival in the early 1500s, Trinidad embraced its Hispanic heritage.

In 1687, Capuchin missionaries arrived in Trinidad with the aim of assisting Columbus in implementing Spain's *encomienda* system. Their primary focus was on securing labor for the plantations rather than converting the Indigenous peoples. After enduring years of oppression, the Amerindians revolted, resulting in the Arena Uprising of 1699 (Rommen 2007, 11). By 1783, Trinidad had transformed into a lucrative agricultural slave colony, as Spain permitted Catholic foreigners to settle on the island. That same year, Spain issued the Cedula de Población, which sought to encourage French planters and landowners from various Caribbean islands, including Haiti, Martinique, and Guadeloupe, to relocate to Trinidad along with their enslaved laborers (Blake 2005, 65). The arrival of these French planters, who were granted land and various incentives, significantly shifted Trinidad's cultural landscape from Spanish to French-Creole. Due to the French arrival, the work of the Capuchin missionaries facilitated the considerable expansion of Catholicism on the island.

With the advent of the *encomienda* system, British colonials employed Christianity as a tool to “civilize” and convert the non-European population of Trinidad (Austin-Broos 1997;

Bisnauth 1996, 13; Brereton 1979, 5-6, 16-17; Rommen, 2007). Since its introduction to the island in the sixteenth century, Christianity has undergone reform and 'creolization,' allowing for a more inclusive embrace of individuals from diverse communities who were previously marginalized within religious practices. Despite this evolution, the role of music continues to be a contentious issue within churches throughout Trinidad and Tobago (Anderson 2014; Austin-Broos 1997). Christianity through the *encomienda* was brought by the Spanish and used as a weapon to control and conform the Indigenous people on the island. The tensions in gospel music in Trinidad and Tobago are a result of colonialism and racism through Christianity.

The nineteenth century saw the arrival of the Anglican Church, however, various forms of the Presbyterian, Baptist, and Moravian Church continued to thrive in contemporary Trinidad (Rommen 2007, 13). Then in 1868, the Canadian Presbyterian Church sent missionaries to evangelize and convert East Indian Hindus and Muslims who arrived in Trinidad between 1844 and 1913. It is important to note that none of these religions (with the exception of Roman Catholic) predated the Baptist presence in Trinidad.

Trinidad saw a huge influx of Hindus and Muslims who came with East Indians from India during the Indentured Labor that ended in 1913. In 1912, Rev. Batson, a Christian missionary brought the African Methodist Episcopal Church to Trinidad from North America followed by Pentecostalism that came to the island with Canadian missionaries Robert and Elizabeth Jamieson in 1923 (Anderson 2004, 81, Bisnauth 1996, Brereton 1979, Rommen 2007, 15). Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC) in 1926 grew a large population causing them to have a separate denomination called Pentecostal Assemblies of the West Indies (PAWI) in 1958. The Church of God in Christ arrived in 1927 by U.S. missionary Mattie McCaullie along with the Open Bible Standard Church in 1955. The Open Bible Standard Church became independent in 1972 and is

arguably the most popular and well-recognized Pentecostal denomination in Trinidad (Anderson 2014, 80-81; Rommen 2007, 15). Since Pentecostalism was listed as a combined group by the Trinidad government's 2011 census, the total population was estimated at 84,066 members in the faith followed by Roman Catholicism and Hinduism. Pentecostalism has since established independent churches that were founded by apostles who do not claim affiliation with the larger institution.

Trinidad and Tobago has become a multicultural nation with over twenty practicing religions that are listed in the Trinidad and Tobago 2011 Population and Housing census. In spite of this, Christianity, more specifically, Roman Catholicism is the leading religion in Trinidad and Tobago. Religions that exist in Trinidad are – the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Anglican, the Assemblies of Yahweh, Baha'I Faith, Baptist, Christian Science, Church of Christ, Church of God, Church of the Nazarene, Congregational, Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Greyfriars Church of Scotland, Hindu, Islam, Latter Day Saints, Moravian, Orisha, Pentecostal (Protestant/Full Gospel), Rastafarian, Roman Catholic, Salvation Army, Seventh-Day Adventist, and Spiritual 'Shouter' Baptist.

In 2011, Roman Catholicism was documented as the largest religious denomination with 285,671 followers (cso.gov.tt). Hinduism is second in its wake followed by Pentecostal/Protestant in third place. The number of persons claiming affiliation to Pentecostal/Evangelical/Full Gospel more than doubled from 76,327 in 2000 to 159,033 in 2011, an increase of 108.4%. According to the Trinidad and Tobago government's Population and Housing Census of 2011, approximately 23 percent of people claimed to be of Hindu and Muslim faith (cso.gov.tt). The term Protestant came from the Protestant Reformation that occurred during the sixteenth century and challenged the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. Protestant Christianity encompasses various

denominations that arose from the Reformation, including the Anglican Church. It is a broad category with many various denominations and views.

### **North American gospel music in Trinidad, Jamaican, and Haiti**

The SDA church hymnal, also known as SDAH, contains gospel songs of old standard and familiar hymns and tunes for the useful purpose of the hymnology of the church and for singing during church services. In 1939, the SDA General Conference Committee authorized musicians to bring into being a new songbook for the denomination (General Conference Committee 1941, 5). Hymns from the old songbook were reprinted into the new version while musicians composed new music. The new SDAH was established in 1941 and then in 1988, comprised European-style hymns and tunes.

In 1849, James White published the first SDA hymnal, which consisted of only forty-three hymns. These forty-three hymns were a blend of lyrical elements and biblical scripture set to European secular melodies. By 1880, more hymns were added, sparking debate about whether SDA churches should sing hymns accompanied by instruments or a cappella (Hooper and White 1988, 15). In 1855, SDA church leaders decided to include music notation in the hymnal for organ and piano instruments (Hooper and White 1988, 16). In 1863, the SDA General Conference published the first official hymnal, aiming to include songs of "worth and poetic merit, which express the faith and hope of the church" (Hooper and White 1988, 21). Initially, hymns were composed of public and private prayers (Rutler 2016, 7). According to LaGrone, the SDAH committee was very careful in selecting music for the new hymn and wanted the public's feedback about their favorite songs. (2024). Hymns from Ireland, Scotland, and England were popular in

the Western world and Australia due to their English, Celtic, and Welsh origins (Rutler 2016, 23). Ralph Vaughan Williams, a prominent English composer, wrote and published folk songs and hymns, including "All Creatures Great and Small," "God Be With You," and "A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing," which are sung in both Protestant and non-Protestant denominations (Hooper and White 1988, 660-661). Of these, "All Creatures Great and Small" caught my attention as it was the second song in the SDAH, and I often noticed it while searching for other songs in the hymnal.

The hymn "All Creatures Great and Small" uses "LASST UNS ERFREUEN", which translates to "Let us Rejoice" in German. This tune is based on a popular German song called "Canticle to the Sun" by Saint Francis of Assisi—who is an Italian composer—while the lyrics were written by William Draper, an Anglican clergyman (Hooper and White 1988, 45). According to Witkowski (2021), in his poem, Saint Francis expressed gratitude for various elements of nature and even included a verse for Sister Death. It is worth noting that the origins of this tune have secular and pagan connotations, originally meant to express gratitude for natural elements or deceased loved ones. In 1730, Charles Wesley wrote the popular hymn "And Can It Be", with the tune named "Sagina", after a plant belonging to the pink family (Caryophyllaceae) that grows in low-lying marshy areas and provides fodder in the springtime for grazing and sleeping (Hooper and White 1988, 245). German songwriters had also composed early hymns found in the SDAH.

As the SDA denomination increased in the US, there was a demand for more hymns coming out of Europe and adding North American tunes as well. From 1900 to 1920, the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church saw the creation of new music specifically for church and worship. European and North American composers were primarily responsible for contributing to the church's hymnology, and this period allowed the development of rhythmic and easily singable melodies for use in public evangelism and community events, particularly in Sunday school

services for children within the Anglican Church of God in England. Other composers, such as Baptist William B. Bradbury, Robert Lowry, and William H. Doane, were recognized for their musical contributions to Christian hymns. These Protestant gospel songs gained popularity in England, Australia, and the United States and were considered a variant expression of American folk hymnody (Interview with LaGrone 2024). Since the nineteenth century, Christian songwriters and composers like Martin Luther have created music specifically for church purposes. They adapted classical styles of music that were popular during that time to lyrical content that emphasized a Christian or spiritual experience or divine interventions. The Europeans who fled religious persecution and settled in the New World practiced musical styles similar to their European traditions, such as ballads, classical, and folk, that were used in churches. Overall, hymns were set to European folk tunes (Hooper and White 1988). These are the foundations of the SDAH and other religious hymns that were used in churches or worship.

The hymnody of Protestant music comprised arrangements or adaptations of folk songs or secular tunes from European composers and musicians. During the Middle Ages, medieval music encompassed sacred, secular, and liturgical music that was used for worship services in the church. Mason Lowell, a prominent hymn and psalm composer during the nineteenth century in Medfield, Massachusetts, was known for using, writing, and adapting melodies from classical composers to sacred texts. According to the SDA Companion, Lowell's tunes were "arrangements from secular songs or classics that he had gathered on his visits to Europe, particularly in Germany in 1837 and from 1851 to 1853" (Hooper and White 1988, 646). There are thirteen of his tunes in the SDAH, including Antioch, Hamburg, Harwell, Cleansing Fountain, Dennis, Work Songs, Mendebras, Sabbath, Oak, Bethany, Olivet, Rodman, and Laban (Hooper and White 1988, 646-647). These examples show musical connections between secular and sacred music during the early

developments of SDA and other Protestant denominations, and they are still being used for worship services today. This goes to show that musical syncretism between sacred and secular music was allowed in the church as long as it had European and or North American elements. Songs were sung in acapella until the introduction of instruments during the first two-three centuries A.D where Greek and Mediterranean influences began to infiltrate church music. European songwriters and musicians often composed folk and secular songs that were used for religious music which was a common practice and tradition during medieval times in Europe, however, in the U.S new styles of gospel music emerged.

North American gospel music is a popular genre in the SDA and FGA in Trinidad and Tobago since the 1970s. In the U.S., gospel music is broken down into smaller categories. For instance, Christian rock, Southern gospel, urban/contemporary gospel, hymns, and Country and Western, praise and worship, inspirational, and spirituals are a few of the popular gospel types in the U.S. Within the US context, musical styles are organized into race and class categories in a very subtle way. However, gospel music generally functions as a catchall category for Protestant music in Trinidad and Tobago (Rommen 2007, 5). Therefore, gospel music is scrutinized based on style and musical elements rather than content and who the songs give recognition to. According to Maultsby, “during the seventeenth century in the U.S, Blacks conformed to the cultural expectations of whites. On Sundays, holidays, and other occasions, however, they demonstrated their cultural independence by participating in African rituals and other exercises. The clergy objected to these activities, stating them to be incompatible with the teachings of Christianity. In 1680, the Reverend Morgan Godwin expressed his disapproval: ‘Nothing is more barbarous, and contrary to Christianity, than their...Idoltrous Dances and Revels’” (Maultsby 1983, 12). Since then, Gospel music in the US had evolved, incorporating various styles and instruments.

In the 1920s, Urban gospel music emerged from Rhythm and Blues music. Gospel music included hymns, spirituals, and blues elements. Thomas Dorsey is recognized as the “father of gospel music” and is known for bridging both spirituals and urban sounds in gospel music. “Precious Lord” and “There Will Be Peace in the Valley,” are Dorsey’s most famous gospel songs. Charles Albert Tindley is the “Grandfather of Gospel Music,” for it was Tindley who virtually invented the style a generation before Dorsey began composing, and it was Dorsey's hearing Tindley's hymns at an annual meeting of the National Baptist Convention in Philadelphia that led Dorsey to begin writing religious music (Disciples Ministry, 2025). Tindley is credited as the basis for the U.S. Civil Rights anthem “We Shall Overcome”. Another of his hymns is “Take Your Burden to the Lord and Leave It There” (1916), as well as “What Are They Doing in Heaven?” (1901). Dorsey and Tindley are North American gospel pioneers who have ushered in a new style of gospel music in the twentieth century.

In the U.S., tensions surrounding the syncretism of gospel secular genres such as blues, soul, and R&B have sparked debate among some African American Christians. Gospel artist Shirley Caesar believes gospel music should bring non-Christians to Christ. In an interview, Caesar claimed that her “primary purpose as a Christian and as a gospel singer has always been to reach as many people as possible with the message of Jesus, regardless of race, gender, demographic or socioeconomic status” (Burnim 2017, 18). In contrast, Edwin Hawkins, a well-known gospel composer and arranger, criticized Kirk Franklin’s 1993 album on the grounds that the gospel message was perhaps being lost “via the translation to secular contexts and transcultural audiences” (Burnim 2017, 83). Additionally, Ethnomusicologist Portia K. Maulsby shared a comment of a radio announcer on a Chicago soul music station who stated his concern about the authenticity of Franklin’s gospel music and the crossover of these genres. “I don’t know what to

call it; it sounds like gospel and it sounds like soul” (Burnim 2017, 83). The crossover or mix of musical features that straddles sacred and secular realms caused concerns for and conflict between Christians regarding traditional gospel music. It is clear that while some Christians viewed these crossover or mixed songs as a way to evangelize and reach non-believers, others disagreed with this perspective.

Trinbagonian SDA and FGA interpretations of popular "gospel music" differ significantly from those of the United States. In Trinidad, "gospel music" serves as a broader category that includes many of these U.S. styles regardless of their ethnic roots or their connections to popular culture. The primary concern is to avoid including songs that are performed in local styles tied to Carnival, similar to the debates among US Christians regarding the blending of blues and rap with gospel music. I refer to Rommen's concept of 'negotiation of proximity', which highlights the challenges Christians face in accepting secular musical styles that feel intimately familiar. Furthermore, gospel music that resembles North American styles—such as urban contemporary gospel, country, western gospel, and hymns—is often regarded as more sacred. As a result, these musical forms are predominantly utilized in church services due to their perceived roots in the US, reinforcing a North American colonial history through identity and being embraced as "good." This points to Rommen concept of the "ethics of style" which suggests that “the ethics of style is most fruitfully applied to instances where musical style is contested” and it is “most evident in contexts where communities are actively concerned with shaping or maintaining their identity. The greater the need for defining or protecting identity” (2007, 45). Interestingly, musical styles like reggae and dancehall, originated in Jamaica, are also more played in Trinidadian worship songs than calypso or soca. In other words, if the music is closely aligned with familiar local styles like calypso, soca, and jamoo, it is less likely to be chosen for church services. As mentioned

previously, *gospelypso's* connection with calypso, carnival, and bacchanal is a barrier to its acceptance in Full Gospel circles (Rommen 2007, 22). However, US gospel songs that are perceived to be “crossover” music are favored in Trinbagonian SDA and FG denominations.

Notably, Protestants in Trinidad have been avoiding conversations involving North American Christian struggle with systemic racism, which has resulted in the unfettered adoption of American contemporary music by Trinidadian churches. According to former general vice president of the General Conference, Calvin B Rock, “in the SDA denomination, calcifying segregationist attitudes towards Blacks in Adventism” became a noticeable issue even for one of the founders and leaders, Ellen G White (Rock 2018, 23). In the 1890s, the tide of racial oppression surged throughout the US, affecting the efforts of the gospel message. Layman and Howard graduate James Howard claimed that “a worldly spirit and prejudice against the colored people have risen in the Adventist Church,” which was taken to various nations around the world through missionaries (2018, 19). Local Christian leaders have failed to address or take into consideration the internalized racism in the U.S Adventism and the crossover—bridging negro folk spirituals with blues, r&b and hip-hip—which produced contemporary gospel music in the U.S since the 1920s. Rommen asserts that in the context of gospel music in Trinidad “generally functions as a catchall category for Protestant music, in effect reversing the North American trend toward compartmentalization” (1997, 5). In other words, all types of Protestant musical practices are grouped as “gospel”. European and African North American gospel music are all fully embraced in local churches in Trinidad to the present. By the 1990s, television broadcasting such as the Trinity Broadcasting Network and other gospel stations became popular on national and international media. Radio stations would broadcast contemporary Urban gospel music from the North, and in the process, suppressing local ethnic styles.

Some SDA and FG churchgoers believe that the Americentric worship traditions and practices play a significant role in fostering good relations between the US and local churches. North American missionaries introduced European forms of Christianity to Trinidad in an attempt to convert the local practices due to misguided perceptions of local culture. In encounters with Hindu and Muslim communities, the missionaries found unfamiliar religious practices that conflicted with their own beliefs. Due to their limited experience with ethnic cultures, missionaries relied on their own traditions, teaching their version of Christianity to the local population, and, in turn, local Christian denominations would suffice to be in “good standing” with North American Christianity.

In present-day Trinbago Christian culture, another European Christian tradition practiced is formal clothing and sermon preaching style. This includes three-piece suits with ties for men and a range of evening or cocktail dresses with hats for women, both of which are standard attire for business functions and church gatherings. The subtle use of African American dialect and vernacular during sermons in Trinidad's SDA and Full Gospel churches is also quite common. The use of formal clothing, African American dialect, and American gospel music can all be understood as part of the same process of negotiating proximity—favoring the foreign over the local in Trinidad and other countries like Jamaica and Haiti.

Interestingly, according to Butler, Pentecostal churches in Jamaica and Haiti have complex negotiations when it pertains to music for church (Butler 2019). Butler stated that his observation of “One God Apostolic” in Jamaica from the United Pentecostal Church (UPC), a predominantly white organization based in the United States whose large repertory of music is now shared between the United States and Jamaica (Butler 2019, 32). However, African American churches have created their own style of music for their worship services. He claims that “Black Pentecostal

congregations in the United States have long developed their own repertoires and styles of music with varying degrees of overlap with the practices of other ethnic and racial religious groups” (Butler 20219, 32). But then, his visit to the New Testament Church of God Sunday service in Montego Bay felt familiar as instrumentalists mostly played with a rock or R&B accompaniment. Occasionally, the rhythm section would switch into reggae-sounding grooves (Butler 2019, 33). This means that North American gospel remains at the forefront of Caribbean church services, while subtle entrances of local sounds are infused into the worship services. The interplay between local Caribbean sounds and North American musical styles is complex, and in choosing between them frequently reflects the positionality of the church’s leadership, congregants, and relationship to North American denominational organization. In theory, worship styles may differ from church to church in Trinidad, Jamaica, and Haiti, but the reality is that North American tradition is the dominant practice. The juxtaposition of European tradition and local cultures has rippled all the way to the twenty-first century, causing tensions and debates among Christian leaders and churchgoers. The complex negotiation that Butler witnessed in the Caribbean is also applicable in Trinidad and Tobago due to North America's strong Christian ties to the island.

With the United States being one of the world's most powerful and influential countries, Caribbean Christianity has clung to its North American customs, traditional worship practices, and music because there is a hierarchical concept that American traditions are of better standards, if not the best. For example, North American clothing is very popular in Trinidad and Tobago. During the 1990s, the fashion appeal of Timberland boots gained significant popularity in Trinidad and Tobago, despite being designed for cold climates. The increased demand for this footwear in Trinidad can be attributed to the influence of North American media, particularly channels like the

Black Entertainment Network (B.E.T) and Music Television (MTV), which broadcast on the island.

Another example of North American pop culture influence is R&B and soul music. R&B and soul also have a strong presence in Trinidad, with some radio stations dedicating entire days to playing these genres. As a result, Trinbagonians have become very familiar with North American R&B, soul music. After all, R&B and soul music are the genres that have syncretized with gospel, creating contemporary and urban gospel. These musical influences not only occur in Trinidad but in Jamaica and Haiti as well.

Butler explains that North American R&B, soul, and other popular music genres are embraced in Jamaica and Haiti; however, local styles are debated. In fact, North American music is also popular among the Christian community because these genres are familiar in style and are influenced by urban and contemporary gospel. Again, I refer to Rommen's "negotiation of proximity" in Jamaica and Haiti's secular and sacred communities. According to Butler, Pentecostals in Haiti share similar beliefs about establishing a global church that practices Americentric traditions. Some Haitians prefer konpa<sup>9</sup> music for church services, while others view it as secular (worldly) and compare it to reggae and dancehall in Jamaica (Butler 2005 10, 25, 254). Previously, I mentioned that Rommen's previous claim that the strong connections of Carnival and bacchanal in calypso are overtly prevalent in *gospelypso*, hindering its acceptance in churches. However, some nationalists believe that the highlight of local musical practice can be beneficial in sharing the gospel (good news) (2007, 22). Similarly in Haiti, Bulter explains local Christian views on konpa music. "Some assemblies embrace the konpa rhythm as a vehicle for heated

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<sup>9</sup> Konpa is a dance music genre that originated in Haiti.

musical praise with a “local color,” while others feel konpa’s associations with dance bands and secular entertainment render it inappropriate for use in praise and worship and unfit for Christian consumption” (Butler 2005, 10, 254). The issue also applies to Haitian migrants living in the US. The concept is to create a uniform Pentecostal organization that is consistent regardless of its location. This is driven by the desire to be unified and establish a strong sense of community. However, the agreed-upon unified style is based on North American tradition.

To summarize, African American congregations in North American have engaged in their own negotiations of proximity, debating the morality of incorporating musical elements of blues, R&B and hip hop into church music; but these debates have generally not been visible to Caribbean congregations. Christian churches in the Caribbean, in their own negotiations of proximity, tend to ignore the distinctions between Black and White gospel styles, and the influences of U.S. popular styles and instead treat “gospel music” as a catch-all category of North American worship music. The SDA and FG denominations in the Caribbean have welcomed a variety of North American contemporary gospel music into their worship spaces, regardless of social or political controversies that may surround them in the U.S. SDA and FG denominations in Jamaica, Haiti, and Trinidad and Tobago have all relied on “negotiation of proximity” and “ethics of style” when choosing music for singing in church services. Even though U.S. African American gospel music and Trinbagonian gospelypso have engendered the same kinds of debates about secular/sacred boundaries, SDA and FG congregations in Trinidad and Tobago are more comfortable with North American styles because they are less aware of the ideological tensions they provoke in U.S. church congregations.

### **Southern Gospel and Religious Country or Country and Western**

Southern Gospel Songs are popular and preferred genres in certain Protestant denominations, specifically in Trinidad and the Lesser Antilles. Because southern gospel is intertwined with folk music in the U.S., and also with commercial Country and Western music, I will refer to the musical style of these songs as “country music.” Country music, along with European hymns, became the standard style of music in Adventism worldwide. Both genres have dominated worship traditions in the SDA and FG in Trinidad and Tobago. Country music consisted of traditional and anonymous folk tunes that were about love, death, trauma, and infamy, which emerged from the Appalachian region in the United States. Immigrants from England, Scotland, and Ireland preserved the British Isles repertoire, such as ballads and fiddle tunes. There was an overlay of Evangelical songs, which became popular through recordings known as “old time” or “old familiar tunes” (Hartman; Miller 2017). Ballads and fiddle tunes were also broadcast on the radio, which increased their popularity.

Although Country music has emerged from European musical styles, it also encompasses African and Mexican musical elements unlike Southern gospel. According to Gary Hartman, "Country music is based on the folk music of the British Isles, with English, Irish, Scottish, and Welsh poetry, folklore, ballads, and sea chanteys laying the foundation for many of the early songs that became known as country music in the United States" (Hartman and Miller 2017, 29) Various ethnicities, including African Americans, Mexican Americans, German Americans, Polish Americans, and French Americans, have also left their mark on country music over the years.

As immigrants moved to the southern United States, they adapted their traditional folk songs to suit their new surroundings. For example, the song "Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie" originated from an old English sailor's song called "Ocean Burial" (Hartman; Miller 2017, 29).

These ballads and fiddle tunes were primarily used for dancing, with ballads serving as storytelling songs in a simple verse form or traditionally known as the “ballad form”. The fiddles provided melodies and tempo to the lyrics. Because of their new surroundings, country music evolved.

Evangelical Christianity also made its mark on country music, where the boundary between sacred and secular music, as well as worship and entertainment music, was not aggressively scrutinized (Hartman; Miller 2017). Two of Country Music’s influential recording artists with faith-oriented tunes were the Carter Family (for example, their song, “Can the Circle Be Unbroken”) and Roy Acuff (for example, “Great Speckled Bird”). SDA and FG denominations have embraced and included these songs, the artists, and their music as part of the church repertoire in Trinidad and Tobago. North Americans share religious country music with Adventism and FGA in other nations because of their cultural familiarity with the genre while vilifying local cultures and practices of the areas they visited. The use of religious country songs in church also makes secular country and western music popular as a style to for leisure and recreation.

The preference for religious Country music in worship service has reinforced anti-Africanness in SDA and FG churches in Trinidad and Tobago. African drums became a symbol of witchcraft and evil, locally known as Obeah. This stigma was a result of the historical ban on African drums during the period of slavery due to fears that they could be used for communication and resistance. Although the drums returned after slavery was abolished, concerns about their use persisted, with some describing the drumming as calling upon the devil. In my interviews, certain leaders would refer to African drumming and its association with Spiritual Baptist and Orisha as Obeah or devil worship. The North American missionaries convinced many Afro and Indo-Trinidadian people to convert to Christianity while teaching North American Christian customs. Therefore, Country music, among others, was practiced and became a dominant style of music for

Christian worship in Trinidad and Tobago SDA and FG churches while rejecting local genres and contributing to practices of African retention.

## **The origins of *Gospelypso*, Gospel dancehall and Jamoo Christian music in Trinidad and Jamaica**

### ***Gospelypso*:**

*Gospelypso* is a unique fusion of gospel and calypso music with melodic and harmonic elements. It gained prominence among young believers in Trinidad and Tobago during the 1990s to express their faith and share the Christian gospel through music and ministry. The genre originated as a response to the civil rights movement and in solidarity with the Black Power movement in the United States in the 1970s, which resonated with young advocates and university students in Trinidad. Motivated to spread the Christian message and support the Black Power Movement, a group of young believers established "Youth for Christ" and pioneered *gospelypso* as a distinctively Trinidadian style of gospel music performed in calypso form. Moreover, "the black power movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s forcibly articulated the need for and right to autonomy, thereby strongly influencing the thinking of Trinidadians" (Rommen 2007, 50-52). This decision was significant as it created a local style of Christian worship music to compete with the established nonlocal gospel music that had been popular in Trinidad for decades.

In Trinidad and Tobago's Christian music industry, *gospelypso* has emerged as a vibrant genre within various Full Gospel organizations, including non-denominational Pentecostals and New Testament churches. This genre is often showcased at nationwide concerts and youth social gatherings. I have had the opportunity to witness *gospelypso* performances by individuals from

diverse ages and backgrounds. *Gospelypso* shares similarities with Calypso, particularly its witty and rhyming lyrical style. For example, on Sunday, October 13, 2024, Joan Paul, a member of the Revelation Life Center, Early Church Movement (E.C.M.) INC. performed her *gospelypso* song “The Downfall of Man”. She was accompanied by the drumset and keyboard musicians. Her lyrical style and rhythmic gestures during the performance were similar to Calypso, which also contained rhyming in the second and fourth lines of the verses. The lyrics included scripture from the New Testament and some of her life experiences being deceived by Satan (Lucifer/enemy). Typically, *gospelypsonians* use their music to convey their journeys of relinquishing earthly pleasures to embrace Jesus Christ. On October 13, 2024, I attended my goddaughter Raina's Christening at the Revelation Life Center, Early Church Movement (EMC) in Santa Flora, Trinidad, where Joan Paul, a long-standing member, shared one of her gospel compositions, “The Downfall of Man”. The second verse stated:

“Accept Christ Jesus with all your heart  
 And all of these things will forever depart  
 Obtain your blessings like the number seven  
 Accept the Lord and go to Heaven.”

Joan Paul’s message is about accepting the Lord, leaving all earthly things behind, and eventually going to Heaven when Christ returns.

### **Gospel Dancehall:**

In the 1990s, the genre of Gospel and Dancehall gave rise to gospel dancehall, which gained popularity among Pentecostals who considered themselves part of the "kingdom reformation" (Rommen 2007, 22). This genre combines the techniques and sonic textures of

Jamaican dancehall and gospel music. Initially originating in the late 1970s, Dancehall music is a symbol of pride in the ghetto, of black identity, and of African culture. For downtown people, especially the youth, the dancehall provides a medium through which the masses are able to ideologically challenge the hegemony of the ruling classes and state apparatuses”, but it would also contain sexual connotations (Stolzoff; Rommen 2007, 97). By the early 1980s, Dancehall became a voice for the oppressed living in Jamaica. Gospel dancehall and *gospelypso* were often placed into similar categories by conservative Trinbago Christians. Gospel dancehall, rooted in gospel reggae, is produced and recorded by Jamaican dancehall artists such as Chevelle Franklyn, Papa San, and Stitchie. Much like *gospelypso*, gospel dancehall aims to reach Christian believers through its lyrical style and biblical content for locals who relate to the musical aesthetic of the genre. Interestingly, churchgoers in both SDA and FG denominations in Trinidad and Tobago are more likely to use reggae/dancehall sounds than calypso sounds. During my experiences attending various SDA churches in Trinidad, I noticed some churches in the Port of Spain region, accompanying congregational singing with reggae beats through bass guitar and sometimes drum sets. In addition, my fieldwork visits to Pentecostal churches in Curepe and Tunapuna—which are communities near Port of Spain—also include reggae styles of accompaniment for their worship services. In other words, Trinbagonians prefer gospel dancehall and gospel reggae beats but would still prefer North American gospel music. This is another example of Rommen’s negotiation of proximity theory. The rise of gospel dancehall in the 1990s led to the genre’s popularity in the Pentecostal community in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Jamoo:**

Jamoo, also known as Jehovah's music, is a blend of soca, calypso, jazz, and African popular music. Lord Shorty, a prominent music figure in Trinidad, pioneered the genre in the early 1970s (Rommen 2007, 23). His aspiration for himself and his family was to lead a virtuous and exemplary life. His spiritual journey led him to embrace and accept Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior. Shorty believed that his soca music was superficial and sought to craft something more profound. In 1977 and 1978, he introduced jamoo, a musical rhythm with a slower tempo than soca. The term "Jamoo" is derived from "Jehovah" and "music," signifying "Jehovah's music". Jamoo features a soulful and slower sound compared to soca, blending the Djembe, and the Calypso Guitar. The fusion of these instruments along with inspirational and biblical texts, gives jamoo a soulful and groovy quality. Today, Jamoo music has evolved to incorporate additional instruments such as the bass guitar, keyboard, steelpan, and synthesizer, all contributing to the melodious jamoo sound.

Additionally, SDA and some Full Gospel churches do not embrace jamoo music due to its connection with Rastafarianism. Most Christians argue that Rastafarianism symbolizes the belief in the human prophet Haile Selassie, who is regarded by some Rastafarians as the reincarnation of Jesus Christ (Aarons 2017, 5). The religion's strong ties to specific practices such as Ital<sup>10</sup> dietary requirements, wearing their hair in dreadlocks, music, chanting, smoking of cannabis, and following patriarchal gender roles go against SDA and FG beliefs and values. These practices are considered to be immoral pleasures for the world. The establishment of Rastafarianism resulted from combining ideologies of black empowerment, social justice, and spiritual fulfillment into one

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<sup>10</sup> Ital means food is celebrated adhering to a particular diet to increase liveliness.

movement to resist British colonial culture (Aarons 2017, 4). Jamoo's connection to African traditions is seen as antichrist practices because Haile Selassie is regarded as God in Rastafarianism. This is the main reason why SDA and FG reject the genre.

Overall, *Gospelypso*, gospel dancehall, and jamoo music are not welcome in the SDA and some FGA churches because they are associated with secular genres and urban/working-class communities and are connected to Afrocentric religions like Rastafarianism<sup>11</sup>. *Gospelypso* artists faced challenges integrating their art with Trinidad's broader Full Gospel community. Additionally, Dr. David Ibeleme, pastor of the Victory Christian Outreach Church (VCOC) in Belmont, Port of Spain, introduced the "Victory *Gospelypso* Tent" after arriving from Nigeria in 1998. Ibeleme criticized the Eurocentric worship tradition in Trinidadian churches, stating that the introduction of Christianity to the Caribbean came with a colonial mentality that imposed foreign culture. He argued that calypso music, being fundamental to Caribbean identity, should not be deemed un-Christian as there is no biblical instruction on the rhythm or beat of Christian music. Ibeleme advocated for the incorporation of local musical styles such as *gospelypso*, drawing parallels with African worship traditions where most "Born Again" Christians worship and sing in African rhythms. He emphasized the need for Trinbagonian Christian to embrace their Caribbean culture in order for spiritual revival to occur. The stigma surrounding *gospelypso*, gospel dancehall, and jamoo is connected to a misunderstanding of the purpose of these genres and their connection to African culture.

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<sup>11</sup> The Rastafari movement that emerged in Jamaica in the 1930s has gained worldwide attention for its pan-Africanist orientation, commitment to equal rights, and focus on repatriation to Africa (Aarons 2017, 3). Rastafarian is an Abrahamic religion developed in Jamaica during the 1930s and considers Haile Selassie as Christ incarnate (Jah).

Local religious leaders, notably Noel "the Professor" Richards, revered as the King of *Gospelypso*, have long championed the genre. In the early 1970s, Noel "the Professor" Richards penned a song, "*Gospelypso*," in response to criticism of his music, now hailed as the anthem of *gospelypso*. In the mid-1980s, Richards and other genre pioneers, including Francis Warner, Skippy Motthey, Charles Mottley, Ralph Brathwaite, Earl Phillip, and Marilyn "Destiny" Joseph, formed a band called "Chorus," drawing inspiration from the genre. During their performances, they faced criticism from local Christians, listeners, and audiences. In an article for "The Express," journalist Natasha Coker noted the general public's rejection and criticism of Richard's music. "You are getting involved in the things of the world, and you are bringing them into the church," remarked a listener in 2000. His other songs, such as "Chinee," "True or Lie," "Try Jesus," "Savannah," and "*Mek Some Noise*," share musical aesthetics with calypso and address social issues such as HIV/AIDS, crime, and livelihood. In 1999, *gospelypso* artists had their first *gospelypso* tent. Under the direction and organization of Earl Phillip, the Jubilee House *Gospelypso* Tent began during carnival season. The *gospelypso* tent is a cultural reference to calypso tents that were used as a venue for Calypso entertainment during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some liked the idea of a *Gospelypso* Tent, while others thought that having a tent around Carnival time was the same as Calypso. According to Richard, "people would not come to the venue because they referred to them as tents" (Coker 2000). He continued to explain that "whatever we are calling it, it remains the same. In fact, it is not for the saved, it is for the unsaved. We are giving them an alternative" (Coker 2000). As Reverend Vernon Duncan argued, "Every nation has its own language. If you don't use your own language, you are being deceptive, and that's the opposite of truthful. God is Truth and we are supposed to be spreading the Truth. How can we expect to reach people with the gospel if they are constantly aware of our

untruthfulness?" (Rommen 2007, 115). Unfortunately, the *gospelypso* tent closed in 2001 due to financial reasons. Richards has continued to advocate for the genres because he believes that *gospelypso* can appeal to non-Christians.

The emergence and evolution of *gospelypso* symbolize local culture, national recognition, and spiritual inspiration for some Trinbagonians in the style of the genre that is similar to Calypso as shown by the example of Joan Paul. Pastor Clive Griffith is the leading priest at the Saint Clement's Anglican Church in Port of Spain and is renowned for his dedication to the Afro-Christian tradition. He has been acknowledged by the local newspaper "The Guardian" for embracing an African name, Kwame Mohlabani, and incorporating worship styles with African rhythms. He has emphasized the importance of African culture in worship, stating that "worship to God must not betray one's culture" (Guardian 1998). Griffith has been outspoken about the intersection of worship and culture in Trinidad and Tobago. Some Christian leaders believe that Christianity and culture should be separated when in reality, SDA and FG practice North American Christian culture during their worship services and in churches. There were many conflicting responses and different viewpoints among Christian leaders regarding culture and religion and whether they should be joined or separated within Christian denominations. But one thing is for certain: *gospelypso* is a response to oppression, because young Trinbagonian Christians used the genre to reach other young adults during a time when Afro-Trinbagonians formed an uprising in response to the Black Power Movement (Revolution) in 1970. *Gospelypso* used to reach and seek future leaders of the nation of Trinidad and Tobago through the gospel music ministry of Jesus Christ.

Similar to Calypso and the steelpan, dancehall has been tabooed and viewed as immoral for Jamaican Christians due to its lyrical associations with violence, immodest dress, sexual

wantonness, and drug use. This is why gospel dancehall is rejected in Jamaican SDA and FGA denominations because of its connection to dancehall music. Butler points out that there is a sacred/secular boundary or border between the church and dancehall (2019, 7). Consequently, Jamaican Christians are reluctant to include gospel dancehalls in the church due to their secular or worldly connections (Butler 2019, 4). According to anthropologist Norman Stolzoff (2000), dancehall "is a symbol of pride in the ghetto, in black identity, and of African culture" (Butler 2019, 58). For Trinbagonians, the concerns regarding dancehall and reggae music are less significant than those for calypso and *gospelypso* music in Trinidad, primarily due to their unfamiliarity with the secular origins of these Jamaican genres. In reference Rommen's "negotiation of proximity", Trinbagonian SDA and FG churches favor North American gospel and various rhythmic styles of music that originated in other places. The stigma of Afrocentric and Afro-spiritualism of *gospelypso* and jamoo has cautioned the SDA and FG Christian community regarding the use of these genres explained above. Dancehall's connection to secularity and sexual promiscuous history has caused tensions for gospel dancehalls in the SDA and Full Gospel communities in Jamaica but even less concerning for Trinbagonians.

As mentioned before, Dr. David Ibeleme. Noel "the Professor" Richards and Pastor Clive Griffith, among other leaders, have publicly advocated for *gospelypso* music in Trinidad and Tobago. Ibeleme highlighted that the taboo of *gospelypso* was generated by colonial ideologies on Christian music rather than biblical evidence. These ideologies also separate culture from Christianity and spiritual revival. Noel "the Professor" Richards reaffirms that *gospelypso* is for people seeking Christ and needing a connection. He claims that *gospelypso* provides a familiar connection to Christianity because it is an alternative to what people already know or are familiar with. Pastor Clive Griffith stated that Christian music should not go against culture, and in this

case, African culture. Griffith's statements on African culture in music return to the discourse on negotiations that determine which Afrocentric music is acceptable. As explained earlier, African American music and reggae gospel beats are more likely to be welcomed in church music than *gospelypso* in Trinidad and Tobago. Regardless of these local musical avoidances in the Christian community, Ibeleme, Richards, and Griffith have used their platform and authority to point out that decisions about what musical styles to use in church are often based on colonial practices without biblical support.

In this chapter, I examined the origins of European and North American gospel music, such as European hymns, Country and Western gospel, and urban contemporary gospel, which are favored in Caribbean Protestant Christianity. I also analyzed local Christian genres such as *gospelypso*, gospel dancehall, and jamoo. I used Rommen's concepts "negotiation of proximity" and "ethics of style" to theorize how Christian Trinbagonians viewed and chose gospel music for their church services. *Gospelypso*, gospel dancehall, and jamoo were rejected by certain Protestant Christian denominations due to their associations with Carnival, African spiritualism, and their origins in urban communities, and therefore, relying on North American styles whose musical history is least familiar. This chapter establishes a foundation for understanding the discussions regarding the presence of North American music in Trinbagonian churches and explores how some Christian leaders are challenging the colonial legacy in these institutions through music and local culture.

Although *gospelypso*, gospel dancehall, and jamoo were genres that Trinbagonian Christians tend to keep their distance from, leaders like Dr. David Ibeleme. Noel "the Professor" Richards and Pastor Clive Griffith encouraged their communities to embrace these styles of music. They explained their philosophy of embracing culture and local music in the church and publicly

advocated for them. For some Trinbagonian Christians, however, their stance is perceived to align with carnival, and therefore with transgression. This perception reflects an internalization of the British colonial resentment of carnival. Most hymns used in church services are a combination of secular tunes and spiritual lyrics. Unfortunately, *gospelypso*, gospel dancehall, and jamoo, which reflect biblical/spiritual texts set to local musical styles, have often been regarded as inappropriate or ‘heathen’ music. The hierarchical determination of African American music and local African, where African American music is preferred over local styles, highlights the persistence of colonial reasoning and misguidance embedded in the SDA and FG denominations in Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, and Haiti. Ibeleme, Richards, and Griffith recognize the Eurocentric prejudices and are trying to remedy them.

Ultimately what church leaders want is for music to help people connect to the Holy Spirit. While SDA and FG church leaders sometimes fear that calypso and soca music will distract people from God, the counter-argument is that these styles of music resonate with individuals on a deep personal level and can help bring them into the church’s fold. The use of secular musical styles to engage worshippers has ample precedent in the Christian church, and continues to be important for SDA and FG churches in Trinidad and Tobago. In Chapter Two I will explore the awareness of SDA church leaders that prejudices against local music can be counter-productive, and their concern for attracting young worshippers, in particular, through the use of the steelpan.

## The Celestial Sounds of Steel – Chapter Two

### The voices of Adventism leadership in Trinidad and Tobago

*“Music becomes acceptable as long as you don’t know the story behind it”*

*Dr. Andy Manzano*

The statement above highlights the recurring theme of “negotiation of proximity” among the Trinbagonian SDA denomination, discussed in chapter one. The preference for North American gospel music has been passed down through generations within the Trinbagonian SDA tradition—where churchgoers have become accustomed to these customs and practices. Inasmuch, the ethics of North American gospel music are less concerning because of its origin, allowing its acceptance and rejecting local styles and instruments like the steelpan in the sanctuary. This chapter, then, investigates the tensions between SDA church leaders’ and Christian ideologies of musical styles and the steelpan in local SDA churches. I argue that the moral and ethical effort of Seventh-day Adventist leaders such as Pastor Clive Dottin, Pastor (President)<sup>12</sup> Leslie Moses, Professor Andy Manzano, and Dr. Thomas Isaac contributed to the increasing acceptance of steelpan in the SDA church.

The leaders mentioned above are trying to change the churchgoers’ attitudes towards steelpan and local culture in an attempt to find a balance where both local and international traditions can coexist. The common denominator from their interviews was their efforts in navigating a balance between embracing the local and creating a godly community that resists some trends of the broader society while still being true to fundamental beliefs. During an interview, Dr. Andy Manzano confirmed that African styles and practices were taboo in Trinidad’s

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<sup>12</sup> President of the South Caribbean Conference (SCC) of the Seventh-day Adventist.

Christianity (2023). For example, Obeah has contributed to local Christians' and non-believers' views and opinions regarding African traditions. One of the stigmas associated with African culture is mysticism. As a result of colonialism, African spiritualism has caused tension between Afro-Trinbagonian culture and Christian churches, including Seventh-day Adventists. Slave owners were particularly wary of those who practiced "supernatural power" to promote resistance or harm others, and as a result, many traditions were actively suppressed (Campbell. J 1976, 39; Olmos, Fernández 2011, 156). European and North American missionaries brought their own version of Christianity to Trinidad between the 1500s and 1800s while cautioning against local Afrocentric traditions that did not align with their customs.

These four SDA leaders are concerned and progressive about challenging colonial historical practices and traditions. Some critical points during our discussion were the ways in which they aim to limit local cultural practices used in church services while guarding against certain practices. Each interview had a shared concern about including local culture and choosing certain aspects that would not hinder a Christian's journey to salvation.

Interestingly, the steelpan gained recognition after international diplomatic acceptance. In 1980, SDA diplomatic leaders embraced the Maranatha Steel Orchestra after their performance at the General Conference (GC) in San Antonio, Texas. It was only then, according to Mikey Morrell—a former member of the band—that the steelpan received grace from SDA local churches. After the band's international exposure and acceptance, local churches began to allow steelpan music for the church services. These leaders have both individually and professionally advocated steelpan for the sole purpose of its contribution to the music ministry since the 1980 CG session. Before that time, there were tensions between SDA leadership and the members regarding the steelpan; therefore, the Southern Caribbean Conference of the SDA remained silent. SDA churches had the

authority to choose whether to have steelpan music without any input from the SCC leaders. Remarkably, the baptism of the steelpan helped shift churchgoers' perspective on the instrument.

In the SDA church, the steelpan has been declared “appropriate” for church and worship services through baptism. According to Moses, the instrument is now ‘baptized’ and, therefore, gaining acceptance into the SDA church. He uses this metaphor to explain that the steelpan being baptized is a “symbolic term used to describe the mental and emotional acceptance” of the instrument (Moses 2023). However, the baptism and acceptance of the steelpan in churches had very little impact on churchgoers embracing other local and African traditions in the SDA denomination in Trinidad including *gospelypso*, instruments (drums), and other traditions. Moreover, if musical instruments are expected to be baptized in order to be used for services, then European instruments like the pipe organ, piano and violin must have undergone the same procedure (Williams 1980; McKinnon 1987). The legalism of tradition in Protestant Christianity and its concern about becoming too inclusive, similar to Catholicism, has created strong resistance to including other music styles and instruments. From these interviews, I found that churchgoers are concerned about the competitive image of the instrument and prefer a more modest performance style.

Then, I provide a brief overview of Sola Scriptura's functionality and the attitudes of the laity that influence the decisions regarding ethics within the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church. Isaac offers specific insights into Sola Scriptura, discussing its impact on modern Christianity and its connection to the Bible and early Christian teachings. He also examines the origins of Sola Scriptura and its significant role in the development of Protestant Christianity.

At the end of my fieldwork, I realized that leaders like, and not limited to, Evangelist Clive Dottin, the Associate Youth Director, Youth Director, Communication Director, Religious Liberty

Director, and Church Ministries Director of the SDA Union, and Dr. Andy Manzano, Professor of Theology and Religious studies at the USC of the SDA were advocates for steelpan's inclusion in Adventist churches since the 1980s. These leaders have used their prestigious positions to defend the instrument and support the social, musical, and spiritual contributions of the gospel ministry. Firstly, I will discuss Dottin's point of reference regarding the impact of the steelpan in the SDA denomination. Secondly, I will present an overview of Dottin, Manzano, and Isaac's religious and cultural theories of why the steelpan was initially rejected in SDA churches. Thirdly, the discourse surrounding the South Caribbean Conference's involvement and the steelpan's positionality in the church will be addressed.

**Dr. Clive Dottin – Executive Director of the Caribbean Union of the Seventh-day Adventist (CARU)**

Clive Dottin currently holds the director position at the Department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) of CARU. The primary focus of PARL is to foster a culture of human rights in collaboration with other religious groups, such as Muslims, Hindus, and Mormons. In 1958, Dottin joined the SDA church through Bible study and home visitations with Adventist pastor Nemhard during his mid-teen years. Since becoming a minister of the SDA church in 1975, Dottin has actively shared the gospel message in various nations, including the US, Canada, and the UK.

Arjoon had informed Dottin about my research, and we arranged to meet at his office at the SDA Union Division in Saint James. In an interview, Dottin claimed that he always advocated for the steelpan. He stated that

“the issue of steelband for me was my love for justice. Chief (referring to the interviewer), I fight for Hindus, Muslims, Catholics, Baptists, everyone. There was discrimination against the steelpan even within the church. The church kind of went along with what I would call aristocracy where steelband was shown as a very secular instrument and not for church” (2023). Mellonee Burnim, in her chapter “Crossing Musical Borders: Agency and Process in the Gospel Music Industry,” in an interview with Edwin Hawkins, a well-known gospel artist, stated that the “subtle concern about gospel music is the intent of the message, instead, the message was being lost via secular context” (2017, 83).

Church members expressed concerns about the secular origins of the steelpan in fear that the gospel message would be lost or forgotten.

Nevertheless, despite the steelpan’s stigma, Dottin defended the instrument and believed that the steelpan would positively affect the youth in low-income communities. He stated in the interview that people have asked him “would pan be in heaven? And I ask the question, what sin has pan done? They see violin and harp and thing as a heavenly instrument but not the pan” (Dottin 2023). The strong influence of American worship traditions has prevented the inclusion of other musical styles. Christian missionaries emphasized converting enslaved Africans and indentured Indian workers, perceiving them as immoral due to their agricultural labor and social behaviors regarding certain issues. In her book *Jamaica Genesis*, Diane Austin-Boos argues that “missionaries perceived the enslaved as fallen beings whose conduct in domestic affairs and presentations of the person was not only ‘African’ and immoral but also made worse by slavery” (1997, 7). Missionaries have steered local Christian converts away from their ancestral traditions by demonizing them and imposing North American style as righteous and celestial. As a result, the

steelpan, which emerged from African heritage and is a product of the resistance against oppression, racism, and colonization by white Europeans, became an instrument of evil in Christianity.

Furthermore, the steelpan's association with Carnival, which is known for its secular revelry and social disruptiveness, led to its rejection in churches. However, Dottin saw the instrument's potential for revitalizing youth in low-income communities.

“I personally felt that the steelband was the perfect instrument for reaching the youth in the ghetto or, as I would say, Youth behind the bridge<sup>13</sup>. I was convinced that the steelpan had to play a particular role in our evangelism, tent crusades, and especially the ghetto” (Dottin 2023).

Ironically, the steelpan emerged from a grassroots community that carries a local stigma of violence and crime. As a result, the Maranatha Steel Orchestra, founded by the Laventille SDA church members who were also Laventille residents was stigmatized for their connection to the community. Due to constant prejudice from Adventists regarding the steelpan, Dottin recognized the need to create a place of refuge for newly converted SDA pannists in the church. People who had played in secular bands before becoming Adventists needed an outlet. Dottin claimed that Christian steelband including Mount D’or were

“mushrooming because somebody with pan talent joined the church and they needed an outlet because they weren’t play panorama anymore, or on the road in Carnival. So I thought that when you have a panside in a church, that creates an

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<sup>13</sup> “Behind the bridge” is a local term that is used to identify the grassroots community better known today as Laventille.

opportunity for panmen in the world not having forget their craft. But play a role in the church and arrange gospel for pan” (2023).

In an interview with Joseph Lett, a former member of the Maranatha Steel Orchestra and a well-respected individual of the Point Fortin community, he mentioned that Dottin was one of the few Adventist leaders who allowed the Maranatha band to play for his crusades after their return from GC in 1980. Dottin believed that the steelpan could bring others to the gospel of Christ.

“In the 1980s, it became an international attraction in the church. Not just the Caribbean has steelpan, but there are steelpan out there. When the GC accepted the steelpan in 1980, it did a lot for steelpan in general” (Dottin 2023). Dottin contends that the participation of young Christian men from Laventille, the showcasing of steelpan in GC, the embrace of steelpan by GC representatives, and the formation of US and European steel bands in the 1980s were pivotal factors in fostering the acceptance and advancement of the steelpan in Trinidad and Tobago.

Sadly, according to Dottin, steelpan music was not the only problematic musical style in the church (Dottin 2023). African gospel was another genre that was considered inappropriate for worship services. Nonetheless, Gospel Afrobeats from African Adventists have recently become popular in the mainstream media.

“I would argue and say that in the past thirty years, the GC has been radicalized when it comes to culture. And part of it is because they want to reach the unreached. I think in Trinidad, the Adventists, we are beginning to accept tassa drums in SDA churches through cultural SDA Union events. So, we are beginning to accept non-traditional Western kinds of instruments. I think right now, the Conference is

advising globally that every unit, union, or regional conference should have a director of music and that music should be cross-cultural. The more the churches get cross-cultural, the more we will see that revolutionary trend in the church. Moving from far-right and conservative to the left, and trying to find a balance” (Dottin 2023).

According to Dottin, he and other Adventist leaders have asserted that Adventism has been actively engaged in the process of decolonizing worship traditions within the denomination since its inception in the US in 1844. In an effort to expand its reach globally, Adventism has been advocating for cultural diversity in various countries. Unfortunately, the odds are against them (Adventism). In an attempt to maintain conservatism and avoid what is perceived as overly expressive forms of worship, Adventist churchgoers have adopted moderate white North American worship styles and practices while rejecting local forms considered extreme in the Western world (Arjoon 2023). Throughout history, certain Christian denominations, including SDA, have disregarded traditions such as loud singing, drumming, rhythms, and dancing (stick-fighting) in Trinidad and consider these practices as extreme due to their African and secular origins. It is worth noting that these same "extreme" traditions, expressed by enslaved West Africans before and during the abolition of slavery in Trinidad, played a pivotal role in liberating enslaved African people and contributed to the nation's eventual independence in 1962. Keep in mind that the steelpan was a significant contributor to emancipation in Trinidad and Tobago and is recognized as a cultural symbol worldwide.

Dottin confirmed that the Maranatha Steel Orchestra gained international recognition following their performance at the 1980 GC in New Orleans. In Trinidad, the participation of young Laventillian Christian adults, the exposure of the steelpan at the GC, the positive reception

of the steelpan by GC delegates, and the formation of US and European steelbands during the 1980s all contributed to the widespread incorporation of the steelpan in SDA churches in Trinidad and Tobago. Addressing the debate on intertwining religion and culture, Dottin assured us that the SDA denomination is gradually evolving and adapting to modern-day society. In Trinidad, Dottin believes that the SDA church is undergoing a radical transformation, leading to the inclusion of various instruments, including the tassa, harmonium, and steelpan in gospel music. He foresees a change in Adventism through the incorporation of tassa drumming and harmonium, which underscores the process of *creolization*<sup>14</sup> within Adventism in Trinidad and Tobago.

Dottin claims to have advocated for steelpan, and people who are discriminated against because of political factors, including race, religion, politics, and socio-cultural behaviors, through his public service ministry; meanwhile, Manzano argues that SDA churches did not accept pan because of its association with Carnival, which is considered cultural and secular. Moreover, it was tabooed for its origins in Afrocentric religious cultures, including Spiritual Baptist, Orisha, and African drums. Interestingly, there is a debate about the style of playing the steelpan, as it can be seen as entertainment or competition rather than worship, based on the instrument's performance.

### **Dr. Andy Manzano – Associate Professor of Theology and Religion at USC**

Andy Manzano serves as an Associate Professor of Theology and Religion at the University of the Southern Caribbean (USC) and as a pastor in the South Caribbean Conference in Trinidad

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<sup>14</sup> *Creolization* as an interpretive category means that under and working-class, or grassroots (as it is called in Trinidad), arenas are understood to be where creolization of Afro and Indo knowledge and practice occurs daily. The “mixing”, melding, and meeting of entities (Khan 2004, 177, 182; Ballengee 2019).

and Tobago. His academic journey at USC began in 2010, and he transitioned from his role as a minister for the SDA church to a full-time professor in 2012 after completing his theological studies in 1998. Before joining USC, Manzano was an active El Socorro SDA church member, starting in 1983.

On Tuesday, September 19th, 2023, I had the privilege of meeting with Manzano at his office for a formal interview regarding the steelpan in the SDA church. Seated at his work desk, we engaged in a meaningful discussion while I diligently recorded his narrative using my Zoom audio portable recorder. During his formative years, Manzano became involved in an African drumming group in the Port of Spain area, where he spent his youth. Then, at age twenty, he joined a steelpan group called “Potential,” located in the Malick/Barataria region. He was profoundly involved in percussion ensembles so much that he performed with the “Knighting Gale” group from March to November, playing drums and preparing for the Best Village Competitions<sup>15</sup>, then joined the Potential Steel Orchestra from December until the panorama competitions during the Carnival season. His profound involvement with local and cultural musical traditions contributed to his solemn advocacy of the steelpan in the church.

During the interview, Manzano stated that he enjoys listening to various styles of Afrocentric music. In fact, African folk music is his favorite style of music.

“For me, I listen to African singing, the chants, and what I would call traditional stuff. I don’t have any issue with that. I also like good gospel music and Spanish background because my name is Manzano; I have a very, very deep love for Latin

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<sup>15</sup> Best Village Competitions are where community groups compete for prizes in folk literature, folk music, folk dance, local foods, and folk art (Munro 2016, 47-48).

American music. In terms of Western music, my preference of music is jazz because it is very relaxing, and I prefer the instrumentation” (Manzano 2023).

He believes there is a taboo surrounding understanding African heritage in Trinidad and Tobago and throughout the Caribbean, especially regarding the African drums. In *Island Gospel*, Butler describes people’s opinions regarding African drumming. Butler quoted a member from the Pentecostal community in Jamaica, who claimed that “the drumbeat brought in a spirit of discord” (2019, 13, 113). Furthermore, the interviewee expressed the “‘undesirable’ influence of drumming on praise and worship, remarking that some people can be entranced not by the Holy Spirit but by a ‘drum madness’ that she likens to ‘African’ rituals” (Butler 2019, 113). Likewise, according to Dottin’s theory regarding drumology, some Christians are concerned about the use of drumming in worship services. There is a common belief among some Christians that the drumbeat can lead a person’s thoughts away from God and turn inward to one’s feelings and emotions (Manzano 2023). To go even further, according to Austin-Boos, drumming, which is associated with West African tradition, was considered evil, barbaric, and unethical by European Christian missionaries. “The religions of West Africa brought a cosmology in which a multiplicity of spiritual forces, including ancestral living-dead and drumming found in Carnival, represent the notions of evil” (Austin-Boos 1997, 7). Seventh-day Adventists are known to practice careful consideration regarding the subconscious effects of music, as it can result in improper forms of worship (Arjoon 2023). Adventists believe that focusing inward may lead to self-reliance and the exclusion of Christ, who, in certain Protestant Christianity, should be the central focus of worship services. Hence, churchgoers are particular about music, instruments, and performances used in church services. The Bible refers to the story of Lucifer (Satan), who, despite being exalted over the stars and angels in Heaven, succumbed to pride and desired to be like the Most High (Jesus Christ),

leading to his downfall (Isaiah 14). These biblical examples encourage Christians to be discerning about the styles of music used for worship. Although biblically, the emphasis is on self-pride, there is no mention of cultural preferences or practices that are superior or favored during biblical times. Nevertheless, Christianity rejects non-European music and traditions in Trinidad and Tobago.

Manzano explains that the stigma of ethnic cultures, especially Afrocentric traditions, is the result of a lack of education. He admitted that during the time he became an SDA Christian, he had a misconception between culture and religion, although religion is expressed in culture.

“Religion and culture cannot be separated. The Eastern religions and the African religion, the Chinese, and the Jews. Our religion is expressed in culture but there are cultural practices that are not religious. Take for instance, if I wear a traditional African outfit, that is a wear. That has nothing to do with religion. And I think that sometimes we tend to associate culture and religion in one basket. So, there are African songs and African music that have nothing to do with religion. They are just songs! Orisha, Voodoo or Shango is a religion that has cultural overtones in it. But it doesn't mean that everything African is Voodoo. Everything African is not Orisha! Moreover, the African experience in the Caribbean and also in North America via slavery and all of that, whatever was African both religion and culture was tabooed. And we grew up with that. Education is critical in understanding the difference between cultural expressions of the tribe versus the religious expression” (Manzano 2023).

During the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation in Europe, a debate arose regarding the most appropriate styles of worship for churches. As Christianity expanded to various parts of the world, it assimilated European traditions and customs, subsequently imposed on other regions through colonization. Upon arriving in Trinidad, Christianity took the form of Western culture that the North American missionaries brought while defaming and demonizing ethnic cultures. Unfortunately, the stigma associated with Obeah, Voodoo, and other African practices still persists due to a lack of understanding and misinformed history through colonialism.

In their respective works, Beckford, Vallier, and Taylor explore how European Christians sought to undermine the traditions of Indigenous populations. They argue that much of human history and Christian theological literature has been chronicled from a Western standpoint, contributing to the marginalization of continents such as Africa and India. Beckford proposes that the initial step toward Christian reconciliation is to recount local church history from the perspective of Black/African historians (Beckford 2006, 60). In contrast, Jack and Jo Popjes, Wycliffe missionaries working among the Canela people of Brazil during the mid-twentieth century, chose to create a new Christian hymn for the community. They recognized that translating Western hymns into the Canela language could perpetuate the misconception that Christianity is a foreign religion. Instead, they considered adapting Canela melodies to incorporate Christian texts (Bishop 1998; Vallier 2003, 88). After all, “an ethnomusical missionary could Christianize an indigenous song” (Vallier 2003, 89). It seems that missionaries from the West have the authority to decide which music is appropriate and acceptable to God regardless of its origins, overriding local or non-Western Christian logic. The analysis of Western philosophy holds great importance concerning Christian attributes. At present, depictions of Jesus in Christianity often portray him with the physical features of a European man with blue eyes, a fair-skin figure with light-brown long wavy hair, and a beard (Taylor 2018, 15) in various forms, such as paintings, statues, sculptures, devotional objects, and images in children's storybooks. According to Taylor, centuries ago, European art was commonly used to depict Jesus “in line with the models available in the artist’s communities: a Dutch artist therefore portrayed a Dutch Jesus” (2018, 15). The Italians and French also portrayed Jesus in what they considered their ethnic features. Given European imperialism and colonization through most of the Western world, the European representation of Jesus and cultural hegemony became “the normative type worldwide. European missionaries

carried with them the picture of Jesus they knew and loved” (Taylor 2018, 15). Regrettably, Western Christianity significantly influenced Trinidad and other Caribbean nations, which were also colonized by European countries and where North American missionaries introduced Christianity. Manzano stated that he observed SDA churches across the Caribbean similarly adhere to North American worship traditions.

Manzano explained that the church adopts Eurocentric worship styles due to the historical influence of North American Christian missionaries in the Caribbean. Interestingly, the influx of Protestant missionaries during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was not limited to England alone; missionaries from neighboring Caribbean islands, Canada, and the United States introduced diverse denominations. Given that Trinidad and Tobago was under British authority then, the local population understandably embraced European practices to foster positive relations with the ruling authorities and avoid punishment. Manzano said that “people tend to walk in line with what is acceptable” (2023). He further explained that there is a general tradition or style of church and Christian practices throughout the Caribbean. He refers to this as “sameness” of style. But a few churches in the Caribbean are strongly connected to their own culture. In other words, some Christian churches practice a more local style of worship in their services.

“In some countries, you go to, when you hear the singing, it’s more connected to their culture. Grenada, Guyana, and Saint Vincent, if you go there, they don’t sing the same songs as Trinidad, but they sing with a different tempo, slightly different mood. To me, some of the other islands, and also from what I’ve heard, their music lines seems to sound more along the line of a slight calypso, Caribbean rhythm. And this is on the other islands but not in Trinidad. And that is because of the way

Trinidad views Carnival. The calypso style is rejected in Christianity because of the stigma and association to Carnival” (Manzano 2023).

As previously mentioned, the tradition of Carnival and its celebrated festivals, including Jouvèrt, panorama, and masquerading, has been controversial in certain Protestant churches for many years. According to Christian ideologies, these events are considered secular and worldly. Due to Calypso’s association with Carnival and its local origins, Trinbagonian Christians are closely familiar with the genre’s secular and Afrocentric nature. This points to Rommen’s concept of “too close to home” (negotiation of proximity). This is perhaps what Manzano was alluding to when he stated that calypso, Caribbean rhythms are more embraced in other islands than in Trinidad. As a Trinbagonian who has been actively involved with local music from a young age, Manzano has seen firsthand the discrimination against local (African) culture and tradition in Trinidad and Tobago. Genres that have originated beyond Trinidad and share less familiarity have made their way into the church. North American genres are used in Christian churches throughout Trinidad, while Calypso styles are perceived as demonic due to their African connections. Even reggae beats are far more likely to be used in worship services in some Protestant churches than calypso.

Manzano stated that the church views Carnival as a display of "worldliness" Because of the festival's revelry, lewdness, and drunkenness (Manzano 2023). The book of John explains that when Jesus was praying to His Father in heaven for the twelve disciples, He prayed “not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17: 15-16). This scripture speaks of the separation between worldly and heavenly things. In this text, Christ explains that His followers live in the world, but they are not a part of it—just as He who came from Heaven and lives on earth. Therefore, He condemns the evil that exists in the world because of sin. SDA church leaders and

members not only advise but also encourage people to keep away from the Carnival celebrations because of their erotic and carnal nature. The steelpan, by association with Carnival (festival of the flesh), has been viewed as worldly by local churches. In light of this, the steelpan has also been rejected due to its connection to Carnival. Manzano admitted that although his experiences with steelpan in the church were not negative, “steelband on the whole, has been viewed negatively and treated as such because of its association with Carnival” (2023). More importantly, the stigma of steelpan began during the early twentieth century because of its association with low-economic communities. According to Manzano, the acceptance of steelpan was a cultural issue before its involvement with Christianity and the church (2023). Before the steelpan was culturally accepted, which was led by high school middle and upper-class “college-boy bands,” the instrument was considered noisy, disruptive, and unethical because it emerged from the grassroots community and was associated with Bajohns. In the 1950s, college boys from some of the most prestigious institutions in Port of Spain formed their own steelband. For example, Dixieland, which started as Melody Makers in the 1950s, was one of the first college boy bands<sup>16</sup> (Dudley 2007, 100). Due to college-boy bands involvement, steelpan became broadly accepted by the general public. “The new middle-class bands were sometimes referred to also as “white-boy bands” because some (though by no means all) members were light-skinned” (Dudley 2007, 99). In part, the steelpan gained popularity in the local community after college bands started using it, signifying the acceptance of the instrument by upperclassmen. Classism played a significant role in shaping the steelpan's position in society. Then, in 1980, a similar scenario unfolded after Maranatha made its debut at the SDA GC session in New Orleans, Louisiana.

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<sup>16</sup> College boy steelbands were often comprised of middle-class, better-educated white and light-skinned individuals.

In the 1980s, as steelpan music began to be integrated into Adventist church services through the premiering of the Maranatha Steelband performance at the one hundred and seventh General Conference Session in New Orleans, Louisiana, there were specific guidelines and expectations governing its use. It was emphasized that the music should not mirror the lively and energetic style typically heard in steelpan competitions (panorama arrangements), as it was often deemed too boisterous for worship. According to Manzano, panmen are known for showcasing their talent and skill on the steelpan. The musicians' role is to enhance worship services and keep the focus on the Godhead rather than themselves. Panmen strive to deliver outstanding performances and compete with each other to earn recognition. Moreover, concerns were raised about certain instruments, such as the drum set and their associated rhythmic styles, as they evoked certain memories and portrayed similar practices of secular music played during Carnival festivities.

Given that some church members had prior experiences with secular life and Carnival celebrations before embracing Christianity, there was a heightened sensitivity, caution, and discomfort when introducing steelpan and the drum set into the church setting. “These instruments reminded them of the secular world” (Manzano 2023). The connection to secularism mentioned here also relates to Glasgow’s paradigm of the separation between cultural forms and Christian values by selectively choosing and deciding which aspects of identity are “good” and which are misleading. Manzano’s theory is connected to Dottin’s argument, which asserts that the secular world should not influence the church. Herein lies the conflict between steelpan and the church, debating on the issue of secularism associated with the instrument. Contrary to popular belief, instruments, including piano and organ, that are preferred in worship circles emerged from secular origins. They emerged from the harpsichord, an instrument made by Benoist Stehlin of Paris in the

mid-1700s and were used to perform Renaissance and Baroque classical music (Smithsonian 2017). The mentioned instruments were used to perform secular genres before being adopted for sacred music. Nevertheless, these instruments were welcomed because of their prestigious history in secular music. In contrast, the steelpan originated from under and working-class communities and was forged through violence and resistance. With the steelpan's initial symbolized freedom juxtaposed with the European instruments, it was looked down upon and considered "noisy."

Since the early twentieth century, the modern Carnival in Trinidad has embraced steelband music as a central part of its festivities, effectively dispelling the negative connotations associated with the steelpan instrument. Despite the abolition of slavery in Trinidad in 1834, disdain for African drumming persisted among the majority of upper and middle-class individuals, including colonial landowners. Their lack of comprehension and respect for the sounds, rhythms, and timbre of African drumming resulted in stigmatizing the instrument as "noise". Subsequently, the Peace Preservation Ordinance bill granted the British authorities and the Governor of Trinidad the authority to forbid African traditions, such as drumming, dances, singing, and Yoruba religious rituals (Batson 2004; Blake, 2005; Burton 1997; Dudley 2007; Stuempfle 2005). Similarly, Cooper argues that "the politics of noise" (1995, 5) was also a significant concern in Jamaica, particularly concerning reggae and dancehall. For Uptown Jamaicans, "noise" was recognized as either vulgarity in rural and urban communities or a "profoundly malicious cry to upset the existing social order" (Cooper 1995, 5). These genres, and more importantly, people, were condemned for their courage to resist unfair societal norms through music that emerged from their experiences. Upper- and middle-class Trinbagonians also condemned steelband music and its purpose in colonial resistance. Today, some may describe the main characteristics of the steelpan as metallic,

harmonious, and piercing resonance through the skillful tenacity of the musician. Nonetheless, it was resorted to as “noise” by society’s elites and in the church.

According to churchgoers, the purpose of the instrumentalist is to complement and enhance the music being performed. Manzano clarified that if the instrument's sound becomes distracting or overwhelms the music by being excessively loud or "noisy," it is unsuitable for worship. His musical compositions incorporate the main melody and sometimes include additional choruses. There is limited space for individual instrumental arrangements as the emphasis is on honoring God and conveying the song's message rather than spotlighting the instrumentalist. Although some Protestant Christians consider Carnival "worldly," they, in turn, embraced the North American gospel music, which has elements of soul, country, and R&B. I struggled with this realization, especially after I came across Bible text that reads, “Make a joyful noise unto to the Lord, all ye lands” (Psalms 100). In this text, King David declares that all should worship God exuberantly, which is interpreted as noise. Despite this, North American style of music dominated local churches through the influence of European missionaries.

Some Protestant church members in Trinidad developed a strong affinity for a particular style of European music after years of striving to accommodate British influence. Their familiarity later caused unease when contemplating changes to worship customs. Elderly Christians (The Silent and Baby Boomers Generations) in Trinidad have been exposed to country gospel music through radio broadcasting and music recordings. Manzano asserts that country gospel music was widely embraced in Christianity during the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century, serving as the preferred genre for church and worship services. “When you hear it long enough, you learn to like some of the things you hear in it” (Manzano 2023). Manzano stated that country music is widely embraced in Jamaican and Saint Lucian Christian communities. Similarly, worship services

in many Caribbean islands incorporate the calypso rhythm. In Trinidad and Tobago, worship music tends to favor North American or reggae styles, with local genres like *gospelypso* or *jamoo* not receiving as much acceptance. There is a preference for international gospel music over local production in Trinidad and Tobago, partly due to concerns about the origins of local music and its association with Carnival. Again, Rommen's theory on the 'negotiation of proximity' is emphasized.

The issue is that churchgoers are all too familiar with the origins of Calypso and the stigma attached to it, making it undesirable and unethical for worship services. According to this theory, Manzano added,

“We know that calypso is associated with Carnival, so we wouldn't want to play that. Somebody outside hearing calypso may not associate with it. They may just see it as the national music of Trinidad and Tobago. The same people who push back against calypso might accommodate reggae. Because reggae doesn't have a stigma to them. All they see in reggae is Jamaican music. They don't know the story behind it. Some Americans might say that country music has a negative history or rock 'n' roll or blues. But for somebody who don't know, for them, it's just music. Music becomes acceptable as long as you don't know the story behind it” (2023).

Since its official establishment in 1863, the Seventh-day Adventist church had limited knowledge of the history of hymns and Christian music. Hymns were often borrowed and reprinted from other Protestant denominations, and their origins remained largely unknown to the general congregation (Murray 1998, 206). Until the release of the first companion to the SDA hymnal in 1988, more information about the hymns' histories became available within the SDA church. While European hymns, Christian Country, and Western music were the predominant genres favored in churches,

Trinidadian local musical genres were often criticized and neglected. Theologian Manzano noted that, in his interpretation, the musical styles used in the Bible differed significantly from contemporary music (2023).

According to Manzano, the music described in the Bible was culturally accepted in those times. For example, in the book of Psalms, King David mentioned a type of worship that included solely instruments.

“Praise Him with trumpet sound; Praise Him with harp and lyre; Praise Him with timbrel and dancing; Praise Him with stringed instruments and pipe. Praise Him with loud cymbals. Praise Him on the high-sounding cymbals.”(150:3-5).

In addition, Manzano emphasized that the Jews and the Israelites in biblical times used music and instruments consistent with their experience. “You cannot play what you don’t have. All musical expressions were cultural. In every given culture, there is the sacred and the profane. All music has human construct, and God leaves it up to our wisdom and reasoning to understand and accept” (Manzano 2023). In other words, music and instruments are all connected to a culture. Culture does not exist without music, and vice versa. That being said, I thought about the culture that represents Protestant Christianity and Adventism. Protestantism in Trinidad was geared toward North American culture, from worship styles to genres, clothing, and visual depictions of Jesus Christ.

Manzano's early exposure to his diverse heritage and deep understanding of biblical scripture as a qualified pastor and theologian has equipped him to articulate the challenges faced by SDA in their churches with clarity and rationale. Trinidadian churches embrace Gospel music that originates from outside of Trinidad because it is less familiar, making the associated issues

less concerning. In Adventism and other Christian denominations, the intertwining of culture and religion in Trinidad and Tobago presents complex challenges due to Christian beliefs. Church leaders and members believe it is important to maintain the distinction between culture and religion to prevent association with "worldliness." Strangely enough, among other denominations, Adventism embraces North American Christian traditions more than local styles. As shown in the introductions and chapter one, Adventism is deeply rooted in European North American culture based on the use of Western European hymns, Country music, type of clothing, and musical instruments. It appears that the discourse surrounding the dissociation of culture and religions applies to most global denominations, except for North American tradition. Manzano, Dr. Thomas Isaac, and other theologians have seized opportunities to impart knowledge and shed light on the existing system and its potential deceptions to members within their classrooms and congregations.

### **Dr. Thomas Isaac — Professor of Religious Studies**

Isaac is an Emeritus Professor in Religious Studies at the University of the Southern Caribbean (USC) in Saint Joseph. USC is the only SDA university in Trinidad and Tobago. Unlike Dottin and Manzano, Isaac descended from a Seventh-day Adventist family heritage and has spent most of his life attending the Arima SDA church. After high school, he became a literature teacher before accepting principal duties at the Toco Composite, Five Rivers, and Saint Augustine high schools from 1961-1999. He was also a part-time lecturer at the University of Southern Caribbean, serving in the education and theology departments. I first learned of Isaac when he lectured on "Carnival Culture & Christianity." After arriving in Trinidad for fieldwork, I contacted Isaac via WhatsApp and shared my research interests. We arranged to meet at his place in D'abadie and decided to have the interview on his front porch. Shortly after we sat down to chat, a rainstorm

ascended upon the community. So, we moved the interview to his home. He was kind enough to share with me some of his artwork and portraits of family paintings that covered his living walls. He shared that he enjoys painting during his free time. I continued observing his home surroundings and noticed a piano and a few other percussion instruments. While chatting about his passion for music, we stumbled upon the Maranatha Steel Orchestra, and at this point, we decided to sit and talk about it. I took out my Zoom audio portal recording and cell phone and began the interview with my first question about his background. Eventually, the issue of steelbands in SDA and other Protestant churches in Trinidad and Tobago came into the discussion.

Thomas reiterated that the steelband was rejected in churches due to its connection to Carnival and African drums. He further explained that the stigma surrounding African tradition was reinforced by North American missionaries who brought a European style of Christianity. Christianity in the Caribbean began reforming and including local leadership through evangelization during the nineteenth century. For example, Pentecostalism had marked tensions between moral discipline and ritual eudemonic among non-European people. Author John Catron examined Henry Beverhout's global perspective, which was to recognize the

“evangelical Protestant practice of giving people of African descent positions of authority within the hierarchies of local churches. Black church members became deacons, elders, and even preachers if they did not always receive official sanction from church authorities. Evangelical missionary organizations encouraged international consciousness among their black members by sponsoring the travel of select people of color from around the Atlantic basin to receive religious instruction in North America and Europe. By moving in multiple directions from and to the Caribbean, North America, Africa, and Europe, they became agents of cultural

exchange and in the process created a new circum-Atlantic Afro-Christian culture”  
(Catron 2016, 2-5).

Despite this expeditious shift in Caribbean Christian leadership and organization of structure, the European style continues to dominate worship traditions in local churches.

Music suitable for worship and church services is one of the main factors in European Christianity, causing controversial debate in Caribbean Christian denominations. Dottin, Moses, and Samuel have all agreed that church music should reflect reverence and soothing emotions, and they have also expressed a fundamental concern about the rhythmic structure of church music. When I asked Isaac if he agreed with the other leaders regarding reverence and soothing music as the staple of church music, he replied “yes”; however, he also believes that there are multiple ways of praising God as shown in the Bible (Isaac 2023). Although the SDA GC published music guidelines for the global church that acknowledge the inclusion of various genres and musical styles in churches, there is a subtle understanding that during any function or church event, hymns and Country and Western styles of music are preferred and expected to be performed. The same can be said for SDA congregations in Trinidad and Tobago.

According to SDA church leaders in Trinidad, the rhythms utilized in calypso and soca music do not align with European standards. In Eurocentric Christian music, rhythm often takes a back seat, with melody and harmony assuming primary importance. *Gospelypso*, a blend of gospel and calypso, has encountered opposition from certain Protestant Christians due to its connection with Carnival rhythms. Nevertheless, some wholeheartedly embrace it, recognizing the potential of rhythm to facilitate physical expression and worship. Some believe that music, particularly when accompanied by compelling rhythms such as steelpan, may give rise to movements and

gestures deemed secular and unsuitable in religious settings, thereby posing a challenge to Christian values and principles.

While some of these cultural forms are accepted in FG churches, rhythmic movement, including dancing, is still prohibited in the SDA denomination. Gospel music is increasingly choreographed and displayed in FG churches. Unfortunately, SDA churches have continued to keep away from dancing. Isaac stated that dance has always been a part of religious worship. “In ancient Israel, dancing was a form of ceremonial expression and worship” (Isaac 2023). In Jeremiah 31:4, God was speaking to the children of Israel when he said, “Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall adorn yourself with tambourines and shall go forth in the dance of the merrymakers”. 1 Samuel 18:6 reads- “as they were coming home when David returned from striking down the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments”. Exodus 15:20-21 says,

“then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing. And Miriam sang to them: ‘Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.’”

The three Bible passages cited above serve as just a few illustrations of how dance and percussive music were utilized as a means of expressing praise, gratitude, and thanksgiving to God. It is a celebration of God through percussion instruments. These are the forms of worship that were accepted in bible times. It is worth mentioning that while dancing continues to be discouraged in the SDA church, the steelpan has been gradually embraced. The striking observation remains an unresolved situation in some Protestant Christian communities.

Isaac, a former member of the South Caribbean Conference (SCC) of the SDA committee for over a decade, observed that the perspectives and inclinations of the church leaders and clergy may not always align with those of the laity. Their primary responsibility is to uphold the church's doctrines and organizational functions. As a result, the SCC did not partake in the church's decisions concerning steelpan music. Additionally, the SCC abstained from making public statements about the steelpan to avoid offending, handling these matters separately to prevent potential offense from public statements. During an SCC committee meeting, Isaac stressed that churches should not dictate the SCC's decisions on steelpan and other significant matters, such as appointing women pastors.

“I said to them ‘you are letting the tail wag the dog. Your responsibility in the leadership is to go and reinstruct those elders and point out how un-Christian their behavior is. But they’re not doing that. They just accept it. The church is still adopting an attitude of suppressing’” (Isaac 2023).

He clarified that the church should cease using ancient precedents to justify contemporary government, cultural, or social policies and portray a public front of a European concept of celestiality. Hence, Christianity is practiced from a Eurocentric perspective and justified by a global concept, where northern and high-income societies, including Western Europe and North America, are seen as the epitome of Godliness. As a result, the Protestant church is committed to the Sola Scriptura<sup>17</sup> religion, according to Isaac.

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<sup>17</sup> Sola Scriptura (“scripture alone”) “*principium fidei*, axiom of faith denotes the conviction that scripture is the one and only criterion for Christian faith and living, and beliefs and practices are true and truthfully Christian if and only if they correspond to the witness of the whole of scripture” (Wisse 2017).

Sola Scriptura means the writings of the Bible are absolute, and the doctrines of Protestant churches are evident that the theological interpretation from their leaders has not considered the historical context of the Old and New Testaments. Societies have and continue to advance while reshaping their values for prosperity and equality. According to Isaac, the laity has an overt tendency to hold on rigidly to scriptural justification for their attitudes, policies, and dispositions.

“An excellent legalist sophistication of the pastorate or clergy agrees with an educated understanding of determining scripture while comparing it to historical context. For many years, there have been controversial discussions between the clergy and the policies of the laity on this subject” (Isaac 2023).

His interpretation of scripture and culture has shaped his understanding of doctrinal tradition in Christianity. These are just a few of the Protestant church's main foundational and doctrinal beliefs that are still in practice.

Isaac has devoted his career to educating religious institutions about equality, reasoning, and culture. His influence extends from his role as a Professor of Theology at USC to his position as a committee member at SCC in Trinidad and Tobago. From a theological perspective, Isaac understands the decisions made by the leaders of the SDA church and its conference. And so, he has actively promoted culture, particularly the steelpan, within the SDA community and his position as a theology educator at USC. Although he discovered Adventism during his adult years, Isaac has always maintained an open mind towards morality and culture. His teachings on religion and culture have significantly impacted the Trinidad SDA community, particularly through his work in educating university students. Despite the organization's reticence, he has not hesitated to express his opinions on certain decisions made during SCC meetings. While Isaac shared the SCC position on the steelpan during his time serving as a committee delegate, President Moses has

provided a broader explanation of the SCC's decisions on pan in the SDA church in the following paragraphs.

### **President Leslie Moses, President of the South Caribbean Conference**

Pastor Moses is the president of the South Caribbean Conference of Trinidad and Tobago. Like Dottin, Manzano, and Isaac, Moses was raised in a non-SDA household before becoming an Adventist in his late teens. He served as a pastor for twenty-two years before being promoted to an administrator of the SCC, where he spent thirty years in various positions. In the 2011 Quadrennium elections, Moses was elected President of the SCC. Then, in 2015, he was re-elected as president, and again in 2019. There are one hundred sixty-five SDA churches in Trinidad, not including Tobago. Tobago has formed its own conference called the Tobago Mission. The conference has over four hundred staff members, twenty schools from kindergarten to secondary education (high school), and one university. As the president, his duties include the supervision of these entities except for USC. USC has its own governing board. During the first month of my arrival in Trinidad, I got Moses's contact information from Arjoon. I reached out to Moses, shared my research interests, and asked if he would like to discuss and share his thoughts on the topic. After several attempts to schedule a day and time, we finally met on November 16, 2023, at his office at the SCC headquarters in Saint Augustine, Trinidad.

Just a few minutes into the interview, Moses confirmed that the steelpan was not initially welcomed in the SDA church because of its secular origins. "Its ungodly start because of its musical accompaniment for revelry and for party" (2023). He then told the story of the Sangre Grande SDA church and the steelpan incident, where the instruments of the Maranatha Steel

Orchestra were removed from a church event and thrown onto the sidewalk by a church leader. “Since then, the steelpan has evolved into part of the genre of music in the SDA church. So that many churches have their own steel orchestras” (2023). He continued mentioning the GC Sessions, where the Maranatha Steel Orchestra has been involved and represented the people of Trinidad and Tobago since 1980. The GC session, where an average of seventy thousand people would gather in a convention setting to examine the progress of the denomination and make decisions for a more straightforward path. As a form of worship, music would be organized for these meetings.

“For the last three decades or so, steelpan has been on the menu for music on the world stage in a church and religious setting. This is the highest level of meetings in the SDA church, and the steelpan has been embraced into that setting. So, the steelpan has gotten not just local recognition in the place of its birth but also international recognition as an instrument that can play holy music. That, I would say is a revolution and I am very proud go one of these major cities in the world and hear steelpan playing religious music. It is a great contribution from us (Trinidad) to the world” (Moses 2023).

Moses's affirmation regarding the acceptance of steelpan at an international diplomatic gathering validates the argument that steelpan found favor in Trinidad after gaining prominence within the US SDA council. Delegates from the US and GC not only supported and appreciated the music produced by the steelpan but also actively encouraged and requested additional performances from the Maranatha Steel Orchestra during the sessions. During the 1980s, as US steelbands began emerging, the Maranatha group teamed up with other US domestic bands to provide gospel music for GC meetings. In light of this, Trinidadian SDA churches extended invitations to the Maranatha group to perform during their worship services. Nevertheless, this led

me to ponder whether the SCC had any role in the church's initial rejection and subsequent embrace of the steelpan based on the Sangre Grande and 1980 GC events.

I asked Moses if the SCC has always supported and welcomed the steelpan despite the churches' opinions. His response was,

“No, because it was secular. The evolution of the steelpan was for party, bacchanal, calypso, and the accompaniment of revelry and lewd dancing. All of these are qualities that are not embraced by the church. But then I would say the steelpan was baptized” (Moses 2023).

Adventist youth became more involved in and joined Christian steelbands. The church music ministry began to grow as pan solos, and steelbands would perform at large and important events, especially for international visitors. This led to the steelpan's baptism and its transformation into an instrument sanctified and approved for church worship. Moses affirmed that the Maranatha Steel Orchestra played a pivotal role in the integration of the steelpan into the SDA church during the 1980 GC performance.

“So they (Maranatha) did a whole lot to wipe out some of the misnomers about steelpan being in church. Eventually, the pan became very entrenched in the worship experiences of the church, and they certainly helped to bridge that gap” (Moses 2023).

As per Rommen, Butler, Dottin, Isaac, Manzano, and Moses, there is a preference for the influence of North American religious traditions and practices in Trinidad and Tobago. Notably, the acceptance of the steelpan by GC delegates and attendees, along with the development of US and

European steel bands, enabled Christian Trinidadian steel bands to emerge and be utilized in church services.

Following the appreciation for the instrument by North Americans, Maranatha, Pangelics, Mount D’or Gospel, Petit Valley, Asdaso Arima, La Brea, and Mary’s Hill (Tobago) Steel Orchestras have been embraced within Trinidadian SDA churches. Despite the acceptance of the steelpan by the SDA church, the SCC did not issue an official statement regarding the sanctioning of the instrument. Moses stated he “cannot recall any official statement being sent out giving acceptance to the steelpan. But that doesn’t mean to say it didn’t happen” (Moses 2023). I wondered about this statement and began to compare Isaac’s claim regarding the SCC’s committee members allowing the church to make certain decisions without any input from the conference. According to Moses, the acceptance of the steelpan is quite evident (2023). Perhaps the underlying silence of the conference regarding the previous tensions surrounding the steelpan may have contributed to the acceptance of the instrument in the SDA denomination. Following the Sangre Grande situation, the conference stood back and allowed SDA churches and their leaders to resolve the issues regarding the steelpan without their involvement. It is possible that the SCC’s input could have avoided the Sangre Grande and the Mount D’or incidents since Maranatha’s first appearance at the 1980 GC meeting. Instead, SCC delegates have chosen to champion the steelpan when recognized and appreciated on the global stage while ignoring their responsibility in addressing the stigma and controversial discourse in Trinidadian SDA churches. In any case, as Moses stated, the steelpan is actively involved in the SDA church's music ministry and gospel mission for Christ. It is noteworthy that the steelpan is still under scrutiny for the style of music played in the church because of its connection to Carnival culture, as Manzano stated.

I recently came across the "Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Music" guidelines published by the General Conference (GC), and I found the section on "Principles to Guide the Christian" particularly interesting. Principle Nine states,

"we should recognize and acknowledge the contribution of different cultures in worshiping God. Musical forms and instruments vary greatly in the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist family, and music drawn from one culture may sound strange to someone from a different culture" (General Conference 2023, 4).

Although this is an acknowledgment from GC, SDA churches in Trinidad and parts of the Caribbean are hesitant to incorporate other genres (rather than North American gospel) into their worship services, even from their own culture. This guideline led me to explore the ways in which Trinidadian SDA members explain how they separate culture from religion while simultaneously acknowledging various local traditions as a form of worship. After all, as Austin-Boos stated, Christian cosmology believes that its moral ontology is extraterrestrial, whereas culture is carnal and, therefore, immoral. As I examined the experiences of certain SDA leaders regarding the discussion of SDA Christianity and culture, I realized that although there is a fundamental belief in keeping them separate, SDA Christianity has embraced a style that is specific to its origins.

The selection of music genres and performance styles holds significant importance in steelpan performances during church services, particularly as they tend to steer clear of local cultural influences. Within the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) denomination, a distinct tradition of Christianity is observed, one that is not tied to any particular culture. Moses asserts that Trinbagonian SDAs uphold a modest expression of Christianity that remains separate from the cultural influences of Trinidad and Tobago.

“We are still part of the culture. The food we eat, the language we speak, the way we do what we do, and the way we sing are all part of our cultural heritage. But as Christians, we know what to accept and what to reject from the culture. So, as SDAs, we don’t believe in the Carnival culture and bacchanal activities as part of our church culture. So we reject that” (Moses 2023).

Now that the steelpan is “baptized,” it is appropriate for church and worship events. The fact remains that the steelpan was “sanctified” and made holy for the church after Maranatha’s Steel Orchestra debut at the GC meeting in 1980 when it was embraced by the US SDA officials attending. Although the Sangre Grande and Mount D’or incidents were evidence that tensions between steelpan and church members still existed, the SDA community gradually welcomed and ordained the instrument, making it appropriate for worship after Maranatha’s accepted performances at the GC in the US. Despite Seventh-day Adventists' belief regarding the separation between religion and culture, according to Moses, Adventism in Trinidad continues to uphold North American worship traditions.

The SDA denomination has strong ties to the US, as it originated there and has deep historical roots in the country. The tradition of Sabbath-keeping in the SDA church can be traced back to North American missionaries who first observed the Sabbath during the Second Great Awakening<sup>18</sup>, which took place between the 1790s and the 1830s in the US. It is also recognized that North American standards have influenced the SDA tradition, as Moses noted.

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<sup>18</sup> The Second Great Awakening is a series of religious revivals that swept the United States from the 1790s and into the 1830s and transformed the country's religious landscape (“Religious Transformation and the Second Great Awakening [Ushistory.Org],” n.d.).

“The standard music in the SDA church is American/European style. Keep in mind that the church started in the United States. Our headquarters is still in the United States. And so there is a heavy European influence on our music, music form, music genre” (Moses 2023).

He elaborated that local genres such as gospel reggae and gospels are especially popular among young people, but these styles are not typically used for worship due to their association with secular music genres. He also believed that Adventism is evolving and that these local genres will eventually be embraced for worship (Moses, 2023). Additionally, he brought up the preference for European-style hymns as the primary choice for worship, followed by US contemporary gospel music. European hymns are characterized by their soft and melancholic tone, prioritizing the text over rhythm, while gospel music typically features rhythmic and stylistic elements akin to R&B, soul, and blues genres. While both musical styles foster racial tensions in the US, meaning “southern gospel music (read white) while the other is a gospel-blues song (read black)”, both genres are preferred more than local music in Trinidad (Rommen 2007, 74). SDA churches in Trinidad and the Caribbean have not addressed the concerns associated with these musical groups due to the geographical distance of their origins. Conversely, local styles like *gospelypso* and gospel reggae are more culturally proximate, leading to a "negotiation of proximity." However, Dottin and Moses are hopeful that the Adventist denomination is progressing in becoming more inclusive of ethnic traditions.

Despite the SCC's previous decisions, historic challenges, and leadership, Moses is optimistic about Adventism's future in Trinidad and Tobago. His continued support in Adventist youth and music ministries has allowed more opportunities for SDA steelbands and concert performances in the community. Moreover, Moses and Dottin ensured that Pangelic Steel

Ensemble would attend and represent the Trinidad and Tobago SCC at the 2015 GC session. During his fourth term in office, Moses supported the ongoing music mission of the SDA church, including gradual changes in instrumentation, singing style, praise, and worship.

Dottin, Manzano, Isaac, and Moses have demonstrated courage and advocacy for inclusivity, justice, and receptivity to the use of steelpan in SDA worship. Although the steelpan was cautiously incorporated in SDA churches after Maranatha's performance at the hundred-and-seventh general conference in New Orleans, these four leaders continued to support and challenge the stigma of steelpan that exists in the church. While there is still a heavy debate regarding how the instrument must be used for worship purposes, they have embraced these discussions, acknowledging that it should be used to honor and glorify God. To them and many other Adventists, steelpan should not sound like local music, including calypso, soca, and panorama. In any case, steelpan has taken a bold step into the church with the help of the Maranatha Steel Orchestra and the encouragement of four leaders who have individually contributed to welcoming steelpan into SDA churches. The FG church, however, has experienced a slight contrast to the SDA denomination regarding the steelpan and the acceptance of local music, which will be discussed in Chapter Three.

In this chapter, I analyzed four SDA leaders' perspectives on the inclusion of local culture, specifically the steelpan, in church and worship music services. I also examined the historical integration of the steelpan in the SDA community in Trinidad and Tobago through the experiences of certain leaders to better understand why the steelpan and local culture were rejected in churches. Pastor Clive Dottin, Pastor (President) Leslie Moses, Professor Andy Manzano, and Dr. Thomas Isaac are prominent leaders in the SDA denomination in Trinidad and Tobago and have claimed that the instrument is beneficial for the development of the church through music ministry. Its

connection to culture and identity is critical for new converts and influencing the broader society to accept Christ. Culture allows the opportunity for secular and worldly practices in the church. Culture emphasizes its association with Carnival, Afrocentric traditions, and Afro-spiritualism, which are all anticolonial but are perceived as anti-Christianity and secularism. These four leaders have claimed to enjoy and embrace the North American style of Christianity and its prosperity in the development of the SDA church worldwide. However, they realize the impact that steelpan is contributing through music ministry and connecting others in society to the church, redefining steelpan's perception of the Christian world.

The issue of music within the church is intertwined with the complex relationship between culture and Christianity. The conflicting beliefs and teachings surrounding whether Christianity should adopt cultural practices and, if so, whose culture should take precedence present a significant challenge. As Moses highlighted, the SDA denomination originated in the United States and initially adhered to worship traditions that were authentic to American culture. Despite efforts to distance SDA from American Christian practices in other nations, the influence of these traditions on local culture has been considerable as modernity continues to shape Christianity. Put simply, when Christians distance themselves from local culture, they tend to become more entrenched in American traditions. As previously mentioned in the GC "Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Music" guidelines, which promote the inclusion of cultural music, there is a growing expectation among churchgoers for North American musical styles influenced by nostalgia.

However, these leaders were hesitant to persuade churchgoers to embrace the instrument, leaving the discussion of acceptance solely to the individual churches and their congregations, resulting in the disconnection between SDA leaders' and congregants' attitudes. SCC leaders have

kept silent on steelpan's contribution to the music ministry in churches for fear of retaliation. The portrayal of European Christianity was steep in local SDA churches, and the idea of officially embracing steelpan was an outright contradiction to the denomination's fundamental beliefs and values that reject secularism and Carnival. SCC leaders championed the steelpan abroad while distancing themselves from the topic of steelpan locally. That is until the steelpan was deemed "baptized" by the church.

Remarkably, the steelpan that was once condemned in Christianity was favored and appreciated by US SDA officials during the 1980 GC session and is now accepted through baptism. As Dottin claimed, the rise of the steelpan in US SDA churches that began in the 1980s was convincing enough for local churches to follow along which allowed for the instrument to be baptized. The baptism of the steelpan allowed for the continued increasing inclusion of the instrument in SDA churches.

However, Adventists felt that there should be a certain model and style of how the instrument should be used in churches. Unanimously, the leaders have all agreed that steelpans should be performed, controlled, and modified in a non-traditional way so that they contribute to soothing and reverent musical elements and suit a particular worship style of modesty. It is critical that the music and style of performance do not bring attention to the talent of the performer but rather the message of the music. This is an example of holding true to the denomination's values and finding ways around secular tradition which I will also explore in the FG churches in chapter three.

In chapter three, I examine how four leaders and musicians from the FGA navigate the tensions between their congregations and the surrounding local culture, drawing comparisons to the SDA denomination. My focus is on analyzing the approaches and perspectives of these leaders

and musicians, particularly in how they effectively integrate steelpan music and local cultural elements—primarily Afrocentric—into their congregations. This chapter illustrates how the FGA is more progressive in embracing local culture than the SDA, while still exercising caution towards certain traditional practices.

## The Celestial Sounds of Steel – Chapter Three

### Full Gospel Leaders Embracing Culture

*“They brought pan into the church but didn’t consider its value for what it is”*

*Theodore Hicks 2023*

1 Kings 1:40, Isaiah 5:12; 30:29, (and 1 Samuel 10:5) are Bible texts that explain the use of instruments like pipe organs, flutes, and tambourines to glorify God. Judges 3:27, 6:34, 1 Chronicles 15:28, and Psalm 150:1-5—quoted in the introduction—mention horns and trumpets in honor of celebration unto God. These scriptures corroborate the style of worship practiced during biblical times. 2 Samuel 6:5; Psalm 149:3-4; 150:4, and Jeremiah 31:4 discuss honoring God through celebrations, music, and dancing. The entire book of Psalms validates that there was a cultural tradition of worshipping God through music and dance. Therefore, the ideologies surrounding instruments like the steelpan and dancing are historically constructed in colonial Trinidad—not dictated by the Bible.

In this chapter, I analyze the changing attitudes and perspectives within the FGA organization and the acceptance of local expressive culture, local music, and the steelpan in their communities by church leaders and members, and compare them to the SDA church. I argue that although FG churches have embraced gospel calypso and local culture, including the steelpan, some leaders have actively implemented measures to discourage and exclude certain cultural practices from church services. Despite the FGA's North American musical preferences of hymns, Country and Western gospel, and contemporary gospel music, the inclusion of steelpan in their worship spaces has sparked important discussions about clothing, language, other types of music, and instruments within these communities. While Eurocentric worship style is preferred in the

FGA, some churchgoers enjoy local styles and Afrocentric beats during their worship services. However, in the SDA church, these styles are not typically allowed.

The Full Gospel Assembly is an assemblage of various Protestant denominations in Trinidad and Tobago. The FGA, overseen by The [Full Gospel] Association, is a local collective consisting of churches that adhere to the teachings of the 'full gospel. During my stay in Trinidad, I attended and participated in the worship services and interviewed leaders and musicians of the Woodbrook Pentecostal, Laventille Open Bible Standard, and the Saint James African Methodist Episcopal, which is affiliated with the Full Gospel Association of Trinidad and Tobago. I observed that the three churches mentioned above had different worship routines. However, there are significant similarities in their uses of music. During my visits and comparing their worship traditions, I realized that all three churches used local forms and types of music during their services. FG churches were more welcoming to local styles of music, including the steelpan. In contrast, this was not the case in the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church.

After attending the worship services, I introduced myself to each of the organization's leaders previously mentioned, explaining the purpose for my visit and my current research involving music in contemporary Protestant Churches, focusing on the FGA. I interviewed Osbourne Williams, pastor and apostle of Woodbrook Pentecostal Church; Godfrey Emmanuel Mitchell, pastor of Saint James African Methodist Episcopal; Theodore Hicks, lead pianist at Laventille Open Bible Standard. Unfortunately, during my time on the island, I could not meet in person with Richard I.K. Williams, pastor of the Cathedral of Christian Excellence in Curepe, Trinidad. Given the circumstances surrounding my departure from Trinidad, pastor R. Williams was willing to participate in an online interview after I returned to Seattle. These four leaders were enthusiastic about sharing their perspectives regarding music and their church practices.

In the Full Gospel Assembly (FGA), influential leaders like Pastor Osbourne Williams, Pastor Godfrey Emmanuel Mitchell, Pastor Richard I.K. Williams, and Theodore Hicks have utilized their positions to advocate for the steelpan and highlight its social, musical, and spiritual contributions due to its inclusive nature. Initially, I will elaborate on the roles of O. Williams, Mitchell, Hicks, and R. Williams in the music ministry and their support for the steelpan within their respective organizations. I will then examine O. Williams's and Mitchell's perspectives on incorporating certain musical styles or rhythms (such as calypso and soca), as distinct from the steel pan as a musical instrument, during worship services. Their beliefs align with the viewpoints of SDA leaders Pastor Clive Dottin, Dr. Andy Manzano, Dr. Thomas Isaac, Joseph Lett, and Pastor Leslie Moses regarding the type of music deemed suitable for the church. Conversely, Hicks and R. Williams have contended that local gospel music is a form of worship and should be embraced. Although calypso and soca-type songs are discouraged in the SDA church, they are permitted in the FG church with certain restrictions, especially concerning dance and movement. In other words, there are still concerns about certain musical practices being inappropriate for church services, which I will explain in more detail by presenting the perspectives of the FG leaders and musicians mentioned above. Overall, these four FG leaders have championed and included the steelpan in their worship spaces.

### **Dr. Osbourne Williams, Ps.**

Williams is the esteemed pastor of the Woodbrook Pentecostal Church (WPC), a venerable institution with a rich history spanning over a century. WPC is the inaugural Pentecostal church established in Trinidad by the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC) in 1920. Williams and the WPC are among the most popular FG churches in the Woodbrook community.

After learning about WPC from Eshean Arjoon, director and founder of Pangelics Steel Ensemble, I attended the church service the following Sunday. On September 3, 2023, I arrived at Woodbrook church at 9:30 am only to realize that the service was about to conclude; however, I was able to experience the end of Williams's sermon, including singing and a performance from Woodbrook Pentecostal Steel Orchestra. The church hall was large enough for a capacity of one hundred people, and the instruments occupied that staging area. The instruments included a drum set, keyboard, trumpet, and steel orchestra. By the time I was seated by an usher and had taken out my notepad to document, I had already observed that the service differed from what I was used to seeing in the church. In the SDA church services, I tend to be on the calm side of things. The music, the preaching, and the entire service would be subtle and poised. Church members in WPC responded to the preaching with clapping and sporadic outbursts of "Amen" and "Hallelujahs." Like the Adventist congregation, people wore formal (European) clothing, including fancy fascinator hats and high heels for women. The music near the end was vibrant, with loud singing, clapping, raising hands to the sky, and some even standing. It was an experience I had only read and heard about from friends and other members of the FGA. At the end of the service, I approached pastor Williams and introduced myself, complimenting his preaching. After some dialogue, I told him about my fieldwork and interests in steelpan in the FGA community. He was very interested, and we exchanged contact information. Three days later, I contacted his office and arranged an interview with him. Visiting WPC was somewhat of an experience. Their style of worship was foreign to what I had been exposed to, and it is a practice that I only saw on television gospel programs. After my experience at WPC, I was excited to talk with Williams about everything that happened in the service.

On September 14, 2023, I conducted an interview with Williams at WPC. He commenced by recounting his childhood experiences. Williams grew up in a devout Christian household. His parents were fervent believers. He felt a divine calling to the ministry due to his upbringing and the unwavering support of his parents. After completing his theology studies in the US during his early 20s, he returned to his hometown of Point Fortin. There, he and his wife embarked on a journey of preaching and mentoring young adults from diverse denominations, aiming to guide them toward becoming ministers. Unfortunately, they decided to depart from Point Fortin and join WPC due to conflicts and disagreements with their peers. Joshua Turner Nelson, the incumbent pastor of WPC, took Williams under his wing and provided guidance to cultivate him into a pastor. When Nelson fell ill, he entrusted Williams with the responsibility of leading WPC as pastor for a six-month period. Presently, Williams continues to serve as the pastor of the Woodbrook Pentecostal church, a role he has wholeheartedly fulfilled for the past thirty years.

Both the SDA and FG churches share the practice of North American worship traditions. There has been controversy and hesitation among the FG church leaders and members regarding the inclusion of musical instruments other than the organ and piano in their worship spaces. Williams mentioned that the church he attended in Port Fortin, Trinidad, originated from a religious group in Wales (UK) called the Christian Brethren Movement (CBM), which preferred only organ music for their worship services. Initially, the CBM believed that musical instruments were not allowed in the church based on their interpretation of biblical scripture. However, even after its inclusion, the use of the organ caused tension among the attendees. Williams explained that Adah is a descendant of Cain in the Bible and gave birth to Jabal, who was known as the father of all and played instruments and is credited with inventing the harp and flute.

“So, it is felt that something being associated with Cain. And of course, Cain and his rebellion and all of that therefore, it something that is not acceptable as a part of worship because of its origin. Even back then, as a teenager, when I heard that expression, I kind of wondered why do we live in houses? Because it was the same guy who is the inventor of shelter. So, how we can accept shelter but then, we don’t want to accept musical instruments” (Interview 2023).

Interestingly, the harp and the flute are accepted in churches today despite this analogy. Nevertheless, Williams followed their belief until he left the group and joined the Pentecostal church in the 1990s, which also practiced North American worship traditions.

The CBM interpretation regarding the rejection of all instruments was a result of Cain’s rebellious acts against God, which also lends to the controversial discourse of the steelpan in churches. As Williams stated, it is the misinterpretation of the Bible where certain practices are accepted while others are not (Interview 2023). Interestingly, while the Pentecostal church and the CBM are categorized as Protestant, they share similar and contrasting views. For example, they both practice North American worship traditions but disagree on using instruments for church services. While other denominations, including CBM, have claimed that instruments are inappropriate for worshipping God, there are many biblical examples where instruments were used as a form of worship. In fact, percussive instruments were mentioned in biblical scriptures (Interview with Williams, 2023). The analytical theories of their ideology regarding instruments have claimed to be biblically supported. But in this case, there is a biblical contradiction to the CBM beliefs because there are many instruments that are used to worship God listed in the bible. For example, 1 Kings 1:40, Isaiah 5:12; 30:29; (and 1 Samuel 10:5) acknowledge pipe organs, flutes, and tambourines to glorify God. Judges 3:27, 6:34, and 1 Chronicles 15:28 mention horns

and trumpets in honor of celebration unto God. Finally, as mentioned earlier, Psalms 150:3-5. These references prove that instruments were used in worship during biblical times. Furthermore, scriptures have also given examples of the style of worship. Since there has been critical debate regarding how instruments should be used, certain gestures and movements, including dancing, are discouraged in SDA, FG, and many other Christian denominations. 2 Samuel 6:5; Psalm 149:3-4; 150:4; and Jeremiah 31:4 all discuss honoring God through celebrations, music, and dancing. In Bible times, it was a cultural tradition of worshipping God through music and dance. Even the former pastor, Nelson, during his tenure at WPC, realized the significance of instrumental music and the steelpan in Christian worship.

Pastor Nelson initially adhered to traditional worship styles due to his Moravian background while leading the Woodbrook Pentecostal Church. However, following several visits to North America and Europe for pastoral conferences and seminars, he gradually became open to incorporating instruments into the church's worship. Over time, he developed a strong passion for music, including wind and percussion instruments. By the time Williams and his wife were officially ordained as pastors of Woodbrook, the church had integrated instrumentalists such as a flutist, trumpeter, saxophonist, keyboardist, and drummer. Members from other churches and denominations also joined the music group at Woodbrook, committing to rehearsals and Sunday services. Notably, the Woodbrook Steel Orchestra was established during Nelson's leadership, comprising elderly and youth ages five to sixty, dedicated to serving the music ministry. They have performed at church services and local events nationwide. Additionally, some members participated in the annual Panorama festivities in 2023. According to Williams, the church fully supports using their talents for ministry both within and outside the church assembly, as the

steelband has performed at various sacred and secular events, showcasing a wide range of musical genres.

The Woodbrook Steel Orchestra performs a diverse range of genres, with a repertoire primarily focused on gospel songs infused with secular influences such as reggae and calypso styles and rhythms. Their music includes *gospelypso*, traditional hymns, and various tempos. During his leadership at WPC, Williams mentioned that neither he nor his wife encountered conflicts or controversial discussions from church members regarding musical style or instrumentation. The band's music is arranged by a member who receives financial compensation for the work and is responsible for rehearsal sectionals and steelpan tutoring. Despite the church's stance on Carnival celebrations, they incorporate calypso and soca rhythms into their worship services without criticism from the congregation. Williams and his wife advocated for musical styles like calypso and reggae styles, particularly the steelpan, irrespective of the church's council committee, which was against the idea.

During the interview, Williams explained that the Pentecostal church appreciates Carnival's history and cultural significance. However, after consulting with the other leaders of the WPC, they agreed that certain aspects of Carnival should not be permitted in the church. For instance, songs with sexually suggestive lyrics, substances that impair judgment, and pelvic dancing (referred to locally as "whining") are not in line with the church's principles and morals and should not be incorporated into church services.

“For example, if the lyrics is promoting adultery or things like that. Drugs or whatever, we would advise don't play that song. Because even though you're not hearing the words, the music is basically amoral. It has no morality in itself. Nonetheless, the listeners, knowing the lyrics, will be appalled to know that the

church, by playing the tune is apparently giving some sort of support to what it is saying. The song doesn't necessarily have to be Christian song but as long as it doesn't demote what we stand for" (Interview with O. William 2023).

He also emphasized that although WPC supports Carnival and culture, there should be certain limits, such as young adults taking part in the panorama should refrain from drinking alcohol and engaging in lewd dancing to avoid being swayed by the negative aspects of the festivities.

Similar to William's statements regarding excessive alcohol consumption and specific dances during Carnival, Thomas also supported his claim and stated that drunkenness and lewd dancing were added components after the development of the Jamette Carnival. As a result, they are less significant than other traditions, including stickfighting, Calypso Monarch<sup>19</sup>, and panorama. The era of the Jamette Carnival is uncertain when lewd dancing (whining) was developed, but it remains a form of expression that contributed to the resistance and uprising of enslaved African people. Oppressed Africans used these forms, among others, to escape oppression and enslavement. Their expressive behavior, viewed as revelry, lewd, and inappropriate, was to push back against suppression, empowerment, and control from British rule. The "lewd" expression of dance that Williams and Isaac referred to represents culture, heritage, identity, and liberty. It does, however, point to Glasgow's critique of Isaac's lecture on Carnival, Culture, and Christianity.

As Moses mentioned in the previous chapter, Christians are also part of the culture through food, dress, and dialect. However, North American Christian practices and values aim to remove certain cultural attitudes that do not align with traditions outside the American culture. According

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<sup>19</sup> Calypso Monarch is a competition where calypsonians compete for the Monarch title (grand prize) for that year.

to Glasgow, to be distinct, Christians must show that they are not of the world, expressing culture while rejecting its values, as their identity belongs to the Heavenly Kingdom of God. Nevertheless, certain Protestant denominations in Trinidad and Tobago embrace North American traditions as 'appropriate' and engage in their style. Personally, as a member of the SDA church, I felt a disconnect from my identity and the associated ethics, as I had to reject cultural values daily. This affected my social ability to connect with my peers and classmates during my academic career. I had little knowledge about my heritage because I was encouraged to stay away from local traditions like the Baptist faith, Carnival, and steelpan, which were taboo and considered unholy in Adventism. Sadly, I had more knowledge and familiarity with Country and Western music and owned more formal (European) clothing than any other attire. It is certainly not my intent to slander Christianity or Adventism itself but rather debunk how it is practiced, which shows a clear contradiction against scripture based on biblical and scholarly evidence provided in this research. With that being said, this research aims to bring awareness of local traditions that have contributed to the liberation of Trinidad and Tobago but have been criticized in Christianity due to their Afrocentric and secular origins. While these traditions seem to bear lesser value of culture, Christianity has also devalued the steelpan.

Williams envisions that the steelpan can be the light among the darkness for people who have converted to Christianity and are passionate about the instrument. He believes that it has the potential to influence others and develop musical skills, talent, and inspiration for ministry. Williams used an example of Jesus' life on earth, whom the Jews and people in the synagogue accused.

“If you read the gospels, Jesus was much more among those who were not welcomed in that environment. And He did not just also go among them and be stoic. He

did not become consumed by them, and He was criticized for it. They called him a glutton and a winebibber. Friend of publicans and sinners. But certainly, he understood that if He is supposed to influence, He can't stay away from them. And He actually became a magnet that attracted them to Him. Through His contact, some changed. And so it's the same kind of view that we would have and believe in. To be in the world and not necessarily of the world" (Interview with O. Williams 2023).

The deconstruction of Western Christianity involves retelling biblical Christian history through the lens of Black/African stories. After all, the origins of Bible history are rooted in North Africa and the Mediterranean region, as Beckford highlighted. I aspire for this research to foster a greater awareness within the Black and Afro-American Seventh-day Adventist and Full Gospel communities, especially in Trinidad and Tobago. Similar to Williams's dream for the steelpan, my goal is to encourage constructive discourse between leaders and members through this dissertation, which will, in turn, create opportunities for meaningful modifications and promote cultural balance.

Williams has been a passionate advocate for the inclusion of steelpan in the church, lending his support to steelpan and gospel music ministry. Under his leadership, the Woodbrook Steel Orchestra has been actively involved in church events and Sunday services while also participating in secular events, all while staying true to their gospel beliefs. The orchestra members have embraced their culture and identity through steelpan music, proudly upholding their Christian beliefs while expressing their cultural values. During my meeting with Williams, I learned a great deal about his work and support for local music in his church. I realized that he is also dedicated to reaching other non-Christians through local tradition, especially during worship services. During my visit to WPC, I observed how the congregation was fully engaged in singing, preaching,

and expressing joys of praise throughout the worship session. It renewed a sense of hope and pride in my identity as an Afro-Trinbagonian and inspired me to connect with fellow Christians from various denominations through music and the steelpan. I truly believe that this is what being a Christian is all about. Through Williams's vision, the steelpan and gospel music ministry have inspired and motivated many non-Christians to attend their church services.

### **Ps. Godfrey Emmanuel Mitchell**

Mitchell serves as the pastor of the Woodbrook African Methodist Episcopalian (AME) church. His early childhood was spent as an Orisha devotee before his family transitioned into the AME church. In my search for FG churches, I discovered\* the Woodbrook AME church and decided to attend a Sunday service. On September 10, 2023, I visited the Woodbrook AME church on Woodford Street, Port of Spain. I arrived just as the service was about to begin, marked by the singing of hymns. The congregation sang popular hymns from their songbook or hymnal, including “Standing on the Promises” and “My Jesus, I Love Thee”, — (which are also popular songs in the Adventist church),-accompanied by instruments such as a keyboard, tambourines, a drumset, bass guitar, and a djembe African drum. The most memorable part of the service was witnessing the lively participation of the congregation as they clapped, sang, and danced during the song services. The drummer would initiate the rhythm, typically a calypso beat, and the other instruments would follow suit. In addition to the hymns and choruses, they also sang North American worship songs before the preaching commenced. I also noted the diverse attire of the congregation, with some members wearing European clothing and others donning traditional African attire. After the

service, I had the opportunity to speak with Pastor Mitchell and share my story. He expressed his willingness to assist in any way he could, and we exchanged contact information, arranging to meet at Woodbrook AME church a few days later.

On the afternoon of September 16, 2023, I met with Mitchell at the church to discuss my research. Eager to begin, I asked for his permission to record our conversation and take notes. During our interview, Mitchell provided insights into establishing the AME denomination. He explained that the AME church was founded in 1798 in Philadelphia, where its headquarters are also located. Mitchell highlighted the church's global recognition, particularly following the U.S. government's declaration in 1816. Additionally, he shared that the first AME church in Trinidad was established in 1912 on Woodford Street, Port of Spain. With over forty years of experience, Mitchell oversees the AME primary school in the district and serves as a minister and evangelist. He emphasized that Richard Allen an enslaved African American, founded the AME organization. Alleyne's significant role in protecting the religious freedom of his fellow African Americans was also discussed. The emblem of the AME church, representing the Anvil and Cross, holds great importance. The Anvil symbolizes the church's development, while the cross signifies Jesus's crucifixion.

“The intertwining of the Cross and an anvil: two symbols representing the crucifixion of racism and separatism; two symbols with parallel significance to the foundation of our faith. The bedlam at the crucifixion, and the defiance of the founding fathers of African Methodism when they faced virulent injustice and rejection, are testimonies of the power of the Cross” (Douglas, n.d.).

British missionary John Wesley introduced the Methodist religion to enslaved African Americans, who later transformed the denomination into the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). The

term "Episcopal" denotes that the church is overseen by an episcopacy, with each district being governed by a bishop who manages the church's affairs. During our discussion, Mitchell informed me that AME incorporates characteristics of the Full Gospel community.

According to Mitchell, the AME is affiliated with the Full Gospel Association of Trinidad and Tobago. He further explains that the AME church emphasizes biblical truth; however, they do not typically engage in certain practices common in other Full Gospel churches. For instance, speaking in tongues and spirit possession are the main characteristics of the Full Gospel Pentecostal church. While some AME members practice these, they do not define the entire belief system of the AME church. Mitchell noted that although the AME church is associated with the FGA, they have always embraced cultural diversity in their worship services.

Mitchell asserted that the AME church takes pride in embracing Afrocentric culture within its community. The Djembe drum is a central instrument in their worship services, adding rhythmic texture to the songs. Despite being viewed as malevolent by European missionaries, African drums were welcomed by the first AME church in the U.S. When the AME church arrived in Trinidad in 1912 (still under British authority), the Djembe drum became a part of their worship services. This was a significant development due to the 1884 Peace Preservation Ordinance, which granted the Governor of Trinidad the power to regulate drumming, dances, and assemblies. In the 1970s, the Afro-Trinidadian community was impacted by the civil unrest that occurred in the US.

The steelpan was among the many Afrocentric creations of the Afro-Trinidadian community that contributed to the social and political uprising of the 1970 Black Power Movement in Trinidad. The mid-1960s Civil Rights Movement in the United States led to the Black Power Movement, fostering a strong sense of Afro-consciousness and Africanness in Trinidad and

Tobago. As tensions surrounding the Black Power Movement escalated, *gospelypso* and reggae gospel developed among Trinbagonian Christian youth inspired by the Black Power revolution.

According to Mitchell, reggae gospel music became more popular in certain Protestant churches than *gospelypso* because it was perceived to have a more controlled rhythm. Calypso music was seen as a threat to the sanctity of Christian belief, as its rhythm, if not regulated, could potentially lead to inappropriate behaviors through movement, such as dancing. Therefore, in the AME community, the calypso beat must be controlled if it is allowed in the church (Interview with Mitchell, 2023). However, with reggae music, there is less concern for its ability to cause disorderly conduct. “The reggae gospel, vibes, or music, was more tempered. The calypso approach to music was more rigid, I would say, and create a more level of gyration. So we have to approach it in a mild way” (Interview with Mitchel). *Gospelypso* contributed to a more modest appreciation for AME Christians. For the AME Church, the ethics of style required that the music be performed in a controlled manner. This aligns with Manzano’s views on how the steelpan should be played. Both Mitchell and Manzano agree that the way music is performed or utilized is more significant than its origins. This issue is less pronounced in reggae, as its origins are less familiar; therefore, the secular associations of gospel reggae are not as concerning as those linked to *gospelypso*.

Before the 1970s, calypso, reggae, Djembe, the steelpan, and the drum set were not allowed in AME churches in Trinidad. According to Mitchell, this was mainly because of the strong influence of Catholicism. The drums were used in AME churches in the southern region of the U.S. But they were not welcomed in Trinidad. The dominating presence of Roman Catholics in Trinidad and Tobago greatly impacted other Christian denominations and their customs. Roman Catholicism was known for its pagan practices and welcoming ethnic religions like Yoruba, which

developed into many Afro-Christian denominations in the Americas. The Protestant Reformation was an act against Catholicism. However, some Protestants have maintained Roman Catholic traditions and ideologies. More interestingly, African culture was not welcomed in the Catholic church, only with the syncretized denominations such as Orisha, Santeria, Voodoo, and Candomblé. The AME that came to Trinidad honored Roman Catholic tradition and rejected local styles, including calypso, reggae, Djembe, drum set, and steelpan until the 1970s.

Mitchell noted that Woodbrook AME was fortunate to have a gifted pan soloist in Music Director William Carol, from Guyana. In the early 1990s, the church established the Woodbrook AME Steel Orchestra, which was supported by enthusiastic young members of both the church and the community. The band thrived for five to six years, performing at church services and community outreach events, featuring musicians aged seven to fifteen. Tragically, Carol passed away. The band struggled to find a suitable replacement, and as members began to migrate to other countries, it ultimately disbanded. The uplifting sounds of Carol's music during worship services held great significance for the congregation. His contributions to the church through steelpan music were deeply cherished by the Woodbrook AME community (Interview with Mitchell, 2023).

In the AME church, culture is recognized and welcomed. There are some SDAs who have similar opinions regarding other denominations that embrace culture in their worship customs. In an interview, Mount D'or's Wendy McIntyre claimed that Christians must acknowledge who they are.

“He (Jesus) said, all kindred, tongues, and peoples. If we were all alike, do you know how boring this world would be? And then He (Jesus) said, Go and baptize all nations. As long as you dress modestly and not too extravagantly” (2023; Revelation 14:6; Matthew 28:19-20).

McIntyre references the biblical text in Revelation, where the prophet John describes his vision of Jesus preaching to people from diverse cultures and groups. She also cites the Gospel of Matthew, in which Jesus, following his resurrection, instructs his followers to preach, teach, and baptize all nations. While some leaders argue that individuals must abandon their previous lifestyles, including culture, before becoming Christians, the Bible indicates that conversion is only accomplished through the Holy Spirit, which in the SDA is often referred to as the Helper.

“But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:7-8).

Christ teaches that only the Helper can determine sin, righteousness, and judgment. The laws, traditions, and ideologies of contemporary Christianity are human constructs, primarily originating from European interpretations. Religious leaders have often demanded that people conform to Christian practices before and after baptism, which are influenced by European lifestyles and religious practices. This includes musical style, church attire, and sometimes the order of worship services. Despite these societal norms, the AME church has recognized its Afro-cultural heritage in Christian and church practices. However, the music style of the AME church is predominantly Americentric due to its North American origins, which devalued the use of local styles.

The AME Church is renowned for its traditional and inspirational hymns composed by North American writers. According to Mitchell, these hymns reflect the time of day or current events. They include hymns of adoration, morning and evening hymns, advent hymns, opening and hymns of praise, hymns of ascription, affection, assurance, atonement, baptism, Christmas, discipleship, faith, forgiveness, and confession, all of which are incorporated into their worship

services. In addition, they also include contemporary gospel music from artists such as CeCe Winans, Hillsong, and others. Mitchell emphasized that there is a mix of musical styles in the church because “we are in the Caribbean, and our religion came from North America” (Interview with Mitchell 2023). The US AME church leaders have encouraged their members to worship God in their own likeness and culture aside from hymns and North American gospel music.

Mitchell has consistently upheld Afro-Trinidadian traditions, such as the Woodbrook AME Steel Orchestra, within the Woodbrook community and the AME church through his pastoral ministry and theological expertise. Having formerly been an Orisha devotee, Mitchell recognizes the historical significance of African heritage within the AME denomination. Despite the controversies surrounding drums and African heritage in Protestantism, he has actively promoted the steelpan and its impact on the culture and youth of Trinidad and Tobago.

### **Theodore Hicks**

Hicks is a member and official steelpan player at the Laventille Open Bible Standard Church. He has been playing and performing steelpan for over twenty-five years. On October 8, 2023, I arrived at the Laventille Open Bible Standard Church near Parshley Street, Port of Spain, at 9:30 am. The worship service had already begun, and the congregation was standing during the singing. As I was ushered in, I heard the sounds of the steelpan. I was eager and excited to witness the rest of the service from that moment. On stage was the worship team, which included six women, a drum set, a keyboard, a bass guitar, tambourines, and a steelpan. I noticed the steelpan player would lead out as a new song began. The lead singer is usually responsible for changing the songs. I also realized that the drummer accompanied the choruses with a calypso rhythm. A few

congregation members stood up and danced while clapping to the music. There were shouts of “hallelujahs” and singing from the audience. Similarly, North American worship songs like Hillsongs were performed just before the homily. At the end of the service, I approached Hicks and introduced myself. We began comparing information regarding the steelpan, building what I call a pan-connection. I then explained to him my research and asked if he would be willing to participate in an interview. He agreed, and we exchanged contact information. We arranged to meet at the church in Laventille on October 13, 2023, for an evening discussion. At first, he was hesitant about the recorded interview and signing the consent form because of the sensitive information involved. I assured him that he could decline any questions or stop the interview at any given time. Also, I read some of the questions so that he would know exactly what we were about to discuss. He seemed more comfortable with my suggestions and agreed to start the interview.

In the mid-1990s, Hicks became a Christian and departed from the Solo Harmonites Steelband in which he was a member. He confessed that it was a struggle as he had a deep affection for the steelpan and could not envision life without it. Even though he had not fully embraced Christianity then, he was aware of the religion's disapproval of the steelpan. In the early stages of his Christian journey, he longed to return to playing pan in panorama due to his love for the instrument, but it was not widely accepted within the church then.

“The plan wasn’t accepted in church, and I couldn’t agree with Christianity. I asked God, How come You saved me? You saved me from this thing (steelpan). You know I love this thing, and the hard part of that is that I couldn’t play any calypso after that. I tried. Don’t feel like I didn’t try. All I could do was play hymns and worship songs and that kind of stuff. I said to myself, this is a big mistake I made because I’m not feeling the love for Christianity. I know I am saved. I had an experience

with God. But I fell out of love with the church. Because if I love it and you don't, then something is wrong. Every Sunday, love is being preached, but I'm not seeing it" (Interview with Hicks 2023).

After enduring months of frustration, Hicks began playing gospel music on his steelpan at home. He expressed a deep love for the instrument and felt a profound connection to it, believing that his musical talents were a gift from God. Hick is confident that Christian steelpan players share a unique relationship with God through their performances. "When you hear them say 'you make that pan talk', it is not skill, it is the Spirit of the Lord" (Interview with Hicks 2023). However, Joseph, Samuel, and Manzano disagree with Hicks regarding the belief that the performance displays are gifts from the Holy Spirit. They believe that steelpan performers should play in a modest and reverent way, which they believe is the 'only' acceptable musical offering to God. By doing so, the pannist is removes the spotlight from the player so that the audience can meditate on God alone. In the panorama of steelpan music, expressing the music through performance and skilled soloing is one of the highlights of steelpan music performances. In response, Hicks emphasized that the way and style steelpan should be played for the glory of God is not a Christian's decision. He emphasized that the issues with steelpan in the church are not about how people feel or think the steelpan should be played. "This is not about us, this is about God. It have nothing to do with us" (Interview with Hick 2023). The steelpan has its origins deeply rooted in the African revolt against slavery in Trinidad. Enslaved Africans, who were integral community members, were believed to have connections to the Yoruba religion (Henry 2003; Herskovits 1947; Murray 1998, 165; Stuempfle 2005). The spiritual connection between Hicks and his steelpan led to a resolution at the Laventille Open Bible Standard Church after he became a Christian.

Hicks claimed that he strongly suggested that steelpan be included in Laventille Open Bible Standard Church. “The pan was forced, especially by me; it was forced upon the church” (Interview with Hicks 2023). Before joining the Laventille Open Bible Standard Church, Hicks used to attend another church (which he chose not to disclose) where the steelpan was not allowed. He even approached the pastor about the instrument, and they responded that the steelpan was unwelcome in the church. “The pastor told me the steelpan wasn’t accepted” (Interview with Hicks 2023). He expressed some disappointment but felt a divine calling through the steelpan. In the mid-2000s, Hicks became a member of the Laventille Open Bible Standard Church, where Mrs. Whitshire, encouraged him to play the steelpan for church services. Initially, Pastor Whitshire provided the congregation with a brief steelpan history.

Following this, Mrs. Whitshire and Hicks devised a plan in which she would introduce the steelpan to the congregation by singing a hymn, with Hicks accompanying the music. Over the following weeks, he continued to play gospel songs and accompany the music. Despite the inclusion of the steelpan in the church, Hicks noted that it is still not fully embraced.

“Pan in the church is not no great thing right now. It ain’t reach where it supposed to reach. Because it still carry a certain stigma. There were times the pan would play in church, and they wouldn’t give it a mic. I personally used to go and beg for a mic. I told them I’m not playing this pan until I get a mic! Because everybody else on mics. They brought pan into the church but didn’t consider its value for what it is” (Interview with Hicks 2023).

Hicks suggests that local styles of music and rhythms are only utilized and valued when U.S. or European delegates are present in the church, as we have seen with Maranatha’s acceptance at the GC in 1980. Members show appreciation when local music styles are performed for foreign

visitors. Additionally, he believes that Christians are apprehensive about change, finding it challenging, uncomfortable, and uncertain. He referred to the bible text: “No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better” (Luke 5:39). According to Hicks, churchgoers may not feel the need for change in some areas. In verse 38, it is stated, "But new wine must be put into new bottles, and both are preserved" (Interview with Hicks 2023). This suggests that new blessings will come with new experiences. His strong suggestions on including steelpan music at Laventille Open Bible forged an environment of lustral worship.

Following his baptism, Hicks remained unwavering in his passion for the steelpan. He saw an opportunity to use the steelpan to honor and glorify God while staying true to his love for the instrument. Despite encountering resistance early in his Christian journey, Hicks was resolute in his belief and purpose. He viewed the steelpan as a divine gift and was determined to integrate it into worship. Through his perseverance, skill, and cultural pride, Hicks successfully facilitated the acceptance and use of the steelpan in worship services at the Laventille Open Bible Standard Church. His views on accepting steelpan music regardless of how people think the performance should be support biblical reference in Psalms. Worshipping God in the Bible is illustrated and explained as an expression of dancing, singing loudly, and playing percussive instruments. It is another form of celebration. Therefore, Hick's perspective is that people should not dictate what is appropriate what is appropriate music but what the Spirit is allowing in that very moment. This was all inspired by his unwavering passion for steelpan music.

### **Apostle Richard I.K. Williams**

Richard Williams has been the pastor under the PAWI administration for over fifteen years. He founded and led the CCE church in 2006 for thirty-one years. In a conversation I had with Marcus Ash, the education officer on the executive board of Pan Trinbago, Ash mentioned Williams and CCE's public support for Steelpan and Panorama. After obtaining Williams' contact information, I contacted him via WhatsApp to discuss my work. Unfortunately, we couldn't arrange an in-person meeting before my departure to Seattle. However, we scheduled a Zoom meeting to discuss music and the church. On January 26th, 2024, at 4 pm Pacific Standard Time, we met via Zoom and began discussing the tensions in certain Protestant churches and the steelpan.

During the interview, Williams expressed his full support for local music and culture in his church. He believes that Christians should worship God in their native language.

“My philosophy is that music in church must be culturally relevant. I can’t be living in the land of soca, and I don’t use it in my worship, or reggae, or black-oriented type of music. Chatting, rapping, and all of those elements should be part of worship. One of my biggest issues is that we have been so culturally diffused that we don’t appreciate our own culture” (Interview with R. Williams 2023).

Ethnomusicologist Ingrid Monson theorizes on the concept of language and communication in African Diasporas. Language

“is a pervasive mode of communication under which are subsumed several other rhetorical tropes, including metaphor, metonymy, metalepsis, hyperbole, and also irony and parody. Although transcending the realm of politics, signifyin(g) is a

language of blackness that enables the black person to communicate behind masks, in a linguistic universe shielded from white control” (Monson 2000, 84).

According to R. Williams, the concern regarding rejecting local music extends beyond the church to encompass modern society. In today’s celebrations, such as birthday parties and wedding ceremonies, Christians often favor genres like R&B, jazz, soul, and reggae over local genres such as soca, calypso, and steelpan. Williams stated that Christian “would go to a wedding and dance to the electric slide, or a Brian McKnight, those nice songs. But if you put on soca, they won’t dance to it. While there is progress that they are dancing to those music which is predominantly black, their own indigenously local music, they still don’t want to dance to it because they have been brainwashed, in my view, to think that it is sinful because of the whole wining<sup>20</sup> thing” (Interview with R. Williams 2023). He explained that his philosophical and theoretical understanding of Bible scripture is that culture is central to worship, which is why he fully supports it.

Williams's perspective on Carnival’s relation to Christianity differs from that of other church leaders. He believes that Carnival's primary function is to celebrate tradition. According to Williams, he has often found himself in positions where he had to defend Carnival's historical purpose. He noted that church members often lack a basic historical understanding of Trinbagonian culture.

“Quite frankly, I am tired of the ignorance in the church. One of the qualities in the bible is spirit of Wisdom and Wisdom is the ability to inquire about something and understand from all its possibilities and dimensions. When

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<sup>20</sup> Wining/Whining is a popular dance in Africa and the Caribbean that involves a circular pelvic motion of the waist while trying to keep the rest of the body from moving.

Christians say negative things about Carnival, such as the revelry is because they don't know the history of Carnival. I once heard a pastor say that Carnival was dedicated to the god of Bacchus. I was shocked of his ignorance because he's a very well known pastor. Because Carnival is Carne-Vale, meaning goodbye to the flesh. Because it's the celebration before Lent. It is also an attack against black people because mas and pan was created by black people. There are some European elements but black people got involved with mas to mock their oppressors. The exaggerated wining was a way of mocking the slave masters. It didn't start off as something vulgar and leud. Because African people anywhere in the world love to dance and love to move their waists. And they never interpret it as anything vulgar. Calypso came out of the gayelle<sup>21</sup>, where the slaves were storytellers and bearers of the culture which developed in Trinidad as they made fun of other masters, mocking them with *double entendres* and saying in it ways not to be accused. All these are born out of oppression. What about the mind-bugging creativity of the panorama? You take a steel drum and create an orchestra from a steel drum; wow! We should be celebrating that the creativity of the mas, stable, wittiness by Calypsonians. My argument is that Christians should be involve in those things. Culture is a tool" (R. Williams 2023).

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<sup>21</sup> The gayelle is the place or space where stickfighting battles occur.

The challenge with “wining” lies in its perception as a sexually suggestive pelvic movement, particularly among women, often involving male dance partners, which can contribute to notions of sexual permissiveness. Rohlehr notes that wining faced substantial criticism from the Church during the British and French colonial eras due to “the sexually suggestive pelvic movements of Black women in particular, reinforced stereotypes of the ‘lascivious’ nature of Africans” (1990, 4). These critiques were rooted in racist ideologies propagated by European Christians who opposed African traditions. Concerns about the inappropriate image of wining and its potential to influence emotions and promote promiscuous behavior persist. Understanding wining as a form of artistic expression, alongside the stigma it faces due to racism, suggests that there is a need for more extensive discussions about this significant aspect of African ancestral practice.

The notion that Carnival and the concept of celebration emerged from Christianity, particularly within the Roman Catholic tradition, is thought-provoking. Originally, Carnival was a festival for European elites. However, when enslaved Africans in Trinidad and Tobago sought to join in by incorporating their distinctive traditions and customs, these additions were labeled as evil. A similar dynamic can be observed with other Christian celebrations, such as Christmas and Easter. Both Christmas and Easter have origins linked to 'pagan' traditions, with Christmas commemorating the birth of Christ and Easter focusing on His crucifixion. The inclusion of folklore figures like Old Saint Nicholas—an early Christian bishop of Greek descent known for secretly giving toys as gifts—eventually evolved into the contemporary image of Santa Claus. Likewise, the Easter Bunny is tied to secular customs. Despite these diverse roots, many Protestant denominations, including the Seventh-day Adventist and Fundamentalist churches, view these traditions as representations of Christ's life on earth. This prompts the question of whether these

traditions endured in Christianity because they were not influenced by African or other ethnic customs. This realization underscores how the demonization of African culture has been deeply intertwined with racism and colonial suppression, often rationalized through the framework of Roman Catholic Christianization and the notion of civilizing through Christianity.

Williams is resolute in his commitment to incorporating the steelpan into his church. As a supporter, musician, and custodian of culture, he has steadfastly defended and encouraged his followers to embrace their cultural heritage as part of their spiritual journey. Silver Stars Steel Orchestra director Marcus Ash told me .... In the 2000s, Marcu Ash attended one of Williams's services after he was invited. After recognizing Ash's contributions and participation in Steelband and the arts, Williams encouraged the congregation to attend the upcoming panorama festival and support young leaders like Ash in his role as Director of the Silver Stars Steel Orchestra (Interview with Ash 2023). Such encouragement coming from the pulpit of a church is uncommon. Williams continues to welcome steelpan musicians into his community and supports the younger generation in panorama competitions during the Carnival season. Despite facing criticism for his decisions and views on supporting the steelpan, he has expressed confidence in the instrument's potential to his followers during his sermons to pave the way for justice and progress in Trinidad and Tobago.

In this chapter, I explored the changing attitudes and perspectives of FG leaders and members about the inclusion of local music and worship practices and compared them to the SDA denomination. I also examined agreements made by FG leaders regarding integrating steelpan and local music, including *gospels*, in their communities. Although the FGA appears to be more progressive than the SDA about including cultural traditions in their communities, there are specific local practices that FG leaders have not wholly embraced. In particular, according to O. Williams and Mitchell, there is a concern about controlling the soca beat used in worship songs so

that people would not be tempted to dance and celebrate just like during Carnival time. Therefore, these leaders practice caution concerning certain soca beats and steelpan performances during their worship services. In other words, they control the parameters around the music beat for worship services to prevent certain dances like wining. While FG churches tend to embrace steelpan and *gospelypso*, some FGA leaders, like their SDA counterparts, have a strong aversion to the soca style.

Glasgow's insights into the necessity of separating cultural forms from values highlight a central tension within the SDA and FG denominations regarding culture. While culture undeniably influences individual decisions and behavior, it is crucial to understand that the historical values embedded in that culture foster human practice. In Trinidad and Tobago, Carnival culture represents a symbol of freedom and resistance against oppression and colonization, illustrated through the rhythms of steelpan, the *Canboulay* riots, and the participation of the Jamette Carnival. During the eighteenth century, colonial authorities likely saw Carnival as "bad behavior" because of African involvement (Dudley 2007, 104).

Afro-Trinidadians have derived significance, purpose, and principles from these traditions, resulting in their "code of conduct," ultimately contributing to their liberation. But Adventism did not welcome social discourse. According to Calvin Rock

"Adventism also became highly conservative. At its worse, the church consciously endorsed the popular theological views of racial inferiority and, at best, truly believed that fixing injustices was not the work of the church and that social evils could wait for the resolution at the Second Coming" (2018, 4).

Therefore, Christians should embody the characteristics of Christianity as outlined in church doctrines, fundamental beliefs, and values that are established by North American (white) church leaders and their cultural origins while minimizing and excluding other cultural influences. This is an ongoing debate about whether cultural expression should be disassociated from values; however, the question remains: whose cultural values have been prioritized by the SDA and FG denominations, and why? It is apparent that North American values, particularly in music, are predominantly emphasized in Trinidad and Tobago, largely due to the historical context of colonialism.

The SDA denomination differs from the FGA in its acceptance of specific music genres. For example, while *gospelypso* is embraced in FGA churches, it is frowned upon in the SDA community. However, both denominations concur on the appropriateness of European church attire for worship and the use of North American contemporary gospel music, as well as the piano and organ as the primary instruments in church services. Although both the SDA and FGA denominations originated from Protestantism, the FGA is noted for its more expressive worship style and the earlier and more rapid incorporation of instruments such as the steelpan into their community compared to the SDA. Chapter four will elaborate on some of the cultural work that has been done to gain acceptance for the steelpan in SDA and FGA churches in Trinidad and Tobago.

## The Celestial Sounds of Steel — Chapter Four

### Christian Steelbands on the Rise

As a long-standing member of the SDA church, I have witnessed and experienced the institutional reluctance to address the rejection of local gospel music and, more importantly, include the steelpan as an instrument of sacred worship. Now, the steelpan is welcomed in the SDA and FG institutions, there are certain parameters surrounding how the instrument is used and performed during worship services.

This chapter explores the development and function of five steelbands affiliated with the Full Gospel (FG) and Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) communities in Trinidad and Tobago: The Maranatha Steel Orchestra, the Mount D’or Gospel Steel Orchestra (which I was a member), the Pangelics Steel Ensemble, the Nazarene Worship Center Steel Orchestra, and the Pans of Praise Steel Orchestra. I observed these bands and interviewed the leaders and selected members during my fieldwork research in Trinidad from June to December 2023. I aim to understand how these steelbands navigated the tensions between the steel pan’s Carnival origins and Christian concerns about godliness. Also, I will discuss why the aforementioned steelbands currently thrive in religious communities where they were not initially accepted. I focus on the mission and vision of each group while highlighting their challenges, accomplishments, and the styles of music they have performed for their audiences from the mid-1970s to the present. My selection for these five steelbands was because of their distinguished reputation since 1975.

Marantha Steel Orchestra is not officially affiliated with any specific church; however, its members are all part of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) denomination. Similarly, Pangelics

Ensemble is not directly linked to an SDA church, but its members are SDA Christians, and their leader, Eshean Arjoon, serves as an associate pastor within the SDA church. In contrast, the Mount D'or Gospel Steel Orchestra is affiliated with the Mount D'or SDA Church, while the Nazarene Worship Center Steel Orchestra is associated with the Nazarene Worship Center, and Pan of Praise is connected to the Saint Helena New Testament Church of God.

These five steelbands have altered the public's perception of the relationship between pan and the church through community functions and performances in local malls, parks, and various outdoor events. Their purpose is (and in Maranatha's case, was) to support and provide a haven for youth in their community and minister the gospel message through music. Furthermore, these bands have managed to sustain their musical contributions through the efforts and participation of the younger generation within their Christian organizations. Young Christians and youth from various communities have joined and performed in these steel orchestras, and as a result, the bands continued to function in their respective churches.

I argue that the pan in school/pan in the classroom government program further propelled the rise of steelpan in SDA and FG churches. Pannists of the younger generation who played pan in schools have more "wholesome" associations with the instrument. They have not experienced it as a practice of transgression. In some cases, as shown in Chapter Two, the steelpan's international exposure and approval, including involvement in diplomatic conferences and music concerts in European and North American countries, contributed to its acceptance in Trinidad and Tobago.

In 2002, the Trinidad and Tobago government, with the support of the 'pan in school coordinator council' (NGO), started the steelpan public-school program. This initiative, developed by the Ministry of Education and the Trinidad and Tobago government, aimed to promote youth

development through pan and culture. Earlier, in 1992, Dr. Anne Osbourne introduced pan into Higher Education by establishing the Certificate in Pan and bachelor's in music (Pan) at the University of the West Indies. The initiative had a positive impact on churches, as Christian students were academically exposed to the musical capabilities of the instrument. Through these music programs, steelpan education was taught in public schools, and it became a mandatory instrument, replacing the standard recorder. The replacement was a bold initiative by the government in an effort to boost cultural awareness and identity through the steelpan.

With the exception of the Mount D'or Gospel Steel Orchestra, all the steelbands I focused on incorporated various musical styles into their repertoire, including *gospelypsos*, gospel reggae<sup>22</sup>, gospel soca<sup>23</sup>, jazz, rock n roll, R&B, classical, and hymns. Mount D'or continues to perform traditional hymns. The diversity of repertoire has resulted in some tension regarding the full acceptance of steelpan music in church settings.

### **Maranatha Steel Orchestra**

The Maranatha Steel Orchestra was an SDA steel band organized by a group of young men aged eighteen to twenty-five who performed gospel music for worldwide audiences. It all started with Maranatha. In the mid-1970s, the Steelband was established shortly after the 1962 Independence of Trinidad and Tobago. Dennis Kadan, along with other members of the Laventille SDA church, formed the Maranatha Steel Orchestra, with Kadan later becoming its manager. Kadan arrived in Trinidad from Guyana as a pastoral intern to serve the Laventille SDA church

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<sup>22</sup> Gospel Reggae is the fusion of reggae rhythms and inspirational/scriptural text.

<sup>23</sup> Gospel Soca is the syncretization of gospel and soca beat.

community. Initially, fourteen members formed the Steelband, and rehearsals took place at Bartley Cato's home, as steelpan was not allowed in the church building. In an interview, Dr. Vernon Andrews told me that “steelpan was not initially accepted in churches” (2023). As the Maranatha Steel Orchestra developed, therefore, it faced prejudice from the SDA community. The first Elder of Laventille SDA Church at the time, Cato, supported the band and invited its members to rehearse at his home. Because the band was prohibited from performing at local churches, they decided to share their music at various events like birthday celebrations and prepared for a tour of the Caribbean and other international countries.

Fortunately, between 1975 and 1979, the Maranatha Steel Orchestra performed at Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) churches in Martinique and Barbados (Wade 2023). Subsequent to their appearance at the Caribbean Union Conference (CUC), also referred to as the University of the Southern Caribbean (USC), the band was invited to perform at their first gospel concert in Martinique. The invitation from CUC made it the only SDA establishment at the time to extend such an invitation to the Maranatha Steel Orchestra. During an interview with Wade and Elder, they noted that CUC was distinguished for its generic approach to events. “They were independent more or less because they were a college. It was the churches that carried the stigma” (Elder 2023). It appeared that college students favored the musical style of the Maranatha Steel Orchestra and the variety of songs they offered.

Following their participation in the one hundred and seventh General Conference Session in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1980, Maranatha was invited to perform at an SDA church in Trinidad. The Seventh-day Adventist General Conference organizes the quinquennial General Conference Sessions in the United States. The General Conference of the SDA church is the

“forum for electing world church officers and voting changes to the church’s Constitution. Delegates also hear reports from each of the 13 administrative regions of the church. Voting delegates for Session represent world regions both by church population and the self-sustainability of administrative regions. The Constitution states that at least 50 percent of delegates shall be laypersons, pastors, teachers, and non-administrative employees, of both genders and representing a range of age groups and nationalities. Church members also have the opportunity to reconnect with friends from around the world” (General Conference 2024).

In 1977, the Maranatha Steel Orchestra received a special invitation from the Inter-American Division and President Israel Leito of the SDA Union to perform at the General Conference session in New Orleans, USA, in June 1980 (Dottin 2023). Upon their arrival in New Orleans, Maranatha performed the SDA theme song "Far Beyond the Sun," accompanied by a marimba group from Mexico. Following their performance, Maranatha was invited to play at other events in cities like New Orleans, New York City, and at the University College of California chapel in California during their visit to the US (Blake 1995, 96-97; Murrell 2023). According to Wade, their requests to perform were both paid and voluntary. To simplify, their main performance was financially supported by the South Caribbean Conference of Trinidad and Tobago. However, other requests during the conference were not in the contract, but they were expected to perform. Thanks to their successful performances in New Orleans, Maranatha was invited back to the General Conference in 1985, 1990, and 1995. In an interview with Mickey Murrell and Evangelist Pastor Clive Dottin of the SDA Union Conference, they both stated that the Maranatha Steel Orchestra's international exposure and acceptance at the General Conferences between 1980-1990

generated an appreciation for the instrument in SDA churches in Trinidad and Tobago during that time (2023). Since then, the Maranatha Steel Orchestra and other SDA steelbands have been invited to visit and perform gospel music in many SDA churches nationwide. Pastor Dottin claimed that the steelpan “became an international attraction,” and because of this, the instrument was accepted in the church (2023). Murrell proudly shared that the band would perform at various churches in Trinidad every weekend or would go on international tours to the United States.

In the 1980s, the steelpan became increasingly popular in SDA churches because of Maranatha’s international performances and acceptance from General Conference delegates. However, some SDA members still believed the instrument was inappropriate for use in church. In December 1980, just six months after their return from the General Conference in New Orleans, Maranatha was invited to perform at the Sangre Grande SDA church. However, a Sangre Grande member expressed his disapproval of the steelpan by throwing the instruments outside the church. This occurred when the church pastor invited the Maranatha Steel Orchestra to play gospel songs for his daughter's wedding. The steelband set up the pans and rehearsed for the performance the night before the wedding. They found the steelpans outside the building when they returned to the church on the wedding day. The head deacon of the church had several duties, including ensuring that the church doors were opened and locked when necessary. After realizing the pans in church, the deacon removed the instruments and threw them on the sidewalk. He believed that the steelband had no place in the church hall and referred to the instruments as "devil's playthings" (Wade 2023). His attitude towards the steelpans seemed to have been fueled by the instrument’s association with Carnival based on his response for justifying his actions which he claimed that the “instrument didn’t belong in the church because that (steelpan) is for Carnival and bacchanal”

(Wade 2023). Luckily, the instruments were not harmed, and the officiator of the wedding apologized to the band members and allowed them to perform.

The band played gospel music during the church ceremony, and a mix of secular songs was played at the reception, which was held at a different venue. Wade, Murrell, and Elder claimed that the Sangre Grande members who supported the band performing at the wedding were outraged by what had happened. So, the Sangre Grande church officials agreed to strip the deacon of all his duties and responsibilities regarding the function of the church.

This incident highlighted the realization that Adventists in Trinidad began to appreciate the steelpan, especially in the church. Sangre Grande church members supported reprimanding the head deacon for his actions. The support from Sangre Grande members and other churches around the island aided in accepting the steelpan in the SDA. Nevertheless, some members still believed the steelpan should not be in the church. Therein lies the problem of steelpan's full acceptance in SDA churches. Some members are still skeptical of the instrument based on its association with Carnival and also, how it is performed.

Over the years, pan experts and SDA pan enthusiasts from all over the country joined the Maranatha Steel Orchestra. Their contributions helped establish the band as an internationally recognized and distinguished steelband in the SDA community. The band welcomed people of all ages into their pan family, with a special focus on the youth in their community. Due to Maranatha's courage and determination, other SDA steelbands including Pangelics, Mount D'or Gospel, Petit Valley, Asdaso Arima, La Brea, and Mary's Hill (Tobago) would probably not have existed. Maranatha became a hallmark steelband in the Trinbagonian SDA community.

Because of international exposure, Maranatha Steel Orchestra was eventually accepted in SDA churches in Trinidad and Tobago. With the support of the SDA quinquennial General Conference, steelpan gained international recognition and became widely embraced throughout many SDA churches in Trinidad and Tobago. This is an interesting paradigm where a certain (Afro) cultural tradition, once condemned by North American missionaries, was celebrated at the executive level of the SDA denomination in a North American location. Prior to the GC event, the steelpan was hated, criticized, and outlawed. Now, that the GC embraced it, Trinbagonian churches began to welcome the instrument.

The CUC student body, however, encouraged and supported Maranatha, fostering an enduring resilience in the band members before their international acceptance. Their musical contributions and gospel ministry were always welcomed at the college, and as a result, they frequently provided gospel music for CUC's church services. The support from CUC allowed the band to pursue their goal and gave them hope that one day, they would be accepted into the SDA church. Though it may seem the instrument is accepted in churches, there are still tensions among certain members. The colonial legacy in Trinidad and Tobago continues to taint and fuel the stigma of the steelpan.

### **Mt D'or Gospel Steel Orchestra (My Home Church)**

The Mount D'or Gospel Steel Orchestra is a Christian youth group that has been performing traditional gospel music for over two decades. The steelband owns two sets of six basses, one tenor bass, double guitars, a set of triple cellos, two pairs of double seconds, four pairs

of double tenors, and one tenor. Two more tenors and a double second are owned personally by individuals who play in the band.

Allan Samuel, the leader and founder of Mount D'or steelband, started playing the steelpan in the mid-1970s as an extracurricular activity at Diego Martin Secondary School. After completing high school, he joined the Exodus Steel Orchestra in the early 1980s. In 1988, he and his common-law partner at the time, now his wife Evelyn, joined the SDA church after a few months of Bible study with local missionaries from the Diego Martin SDA church.

During his first few months as a Seventh-day Adventist, Samuel joined the Mount D'or SDA church because of his existing relationship with some members due to bible study and the crusade<sup>24</sup>, where he accepted Christ and got baptized. Samuel noticed that the music at the Mount D'or SDA church was mainly Eurocentric/North American, with instruments such as piano, flute, acoustic guitars, and electric organs. Samuel's passion for the steelpan moved him to introduce it to the church. He purchased a double tenor steelpan from the Hummingbird Pan Groove steelband and worked diligently to arrange gospel choruses, hymns, and contemporary gospel music. As an aurally trained musician, Samuel would select traditional hymns from the SDA standard hymnal to arrange and perform for church gatherings, including popular gospel tunes like "Jesus is a Winner Man," "Jesus Loves the Little Children," and "Jerusalem". Samuel would audibly sound out the rhythms and pitches of his arrangement while simultaneously sharing the music's letter notes so that the players could learn the music. The band members preferred not to learn through sheet music and Western notation.

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<sup>24</sup> Crusades are evangelistic meetings in certain communities that can last for months.

In the earlier performances of the band, the Mount D'or congregation received and appreciated Samuel's music and generously donated funds to the ministry. With added financial support from the church's savings, Samuel obtained other steelpanns to join in the worship segment. Thus, in 1989, the Mount D'or Steelband was established, consisting of four members. By the 1990s, the steelband gradually expanded into the current eighteen-member orchestra as they added more instruments to the band. Samuel's hope for the band was that it would provide spiritual and emotional support for the congregation's younger members and the larger community. He viewed the instrument as a means to convert young people to Christ, in contrast to the stigma that so many struggled to overcome.

Thanks to the continued financial support from the Mount D'or church, Samuel established a young adult steelband. He strongly believed that his steelband ministry was a powerful tool for engaging younger church members, diverting their attention from secular and negative circumstances. Samuel also aimed to enhance the church's worship service by incorporating the steelband. He proudly claimed that the church's membership was consistently increasing due to the steelband, with many individuals joining the church after becoming members of the steelband. Samuel told me that the steel orchestra was divided into two sections, the children's band—of which I was a member—and the adult group, according to age categories. The children's steelband comprised members aged five to sixteen, while the adult steelband are sixteen to fifty-seven.

In 1996, the Mount D'or Children's steelband was established, and after four months of rehearsals, they performed during the Sabbath morning worship service for the first time. Samuel mentioned in his interview that both steel orchestras faced rejection from some church members regarding their performances during worship services due to negative stigmas associated with the steelpan, "The pan is used in J'ouvert (Jouvay), panorama, and those events are considered evil.

So, when pan entered the church, people saw it as part of the Carnival celebration, worldly, immoral, and it should not be in the church” (Samuel 2023). This also supports the motive behind the Sangre Grande incident and the deacon’s actions by throwing the instruments onto the sidewalk of the church property. After the first few performances from the steelband during the Saturday morning services at Mount D’or, certain church members and leaders voiced their disapproval of the steelband’s performance to Samuel, while others enjoyed it and cheered him on.

As mentioned before, although there were churchgoers who enjoyed and supported the ensemble, some found the music inappropriate and irreverent in the sanctuary due to the history of the steelpan. Then, in 2005, the leaders voted to have the pans removed from the worship space (sanctuary) and relocated to the basement of the church building because some people were uncomfortable with the instrument in the sanctuary. According to Samuel, the pans were removed because some members and leaders did not favor the instrument used for worship services, and the church choir wanted the space for their group rehearsals. Although Samuel was allowed to provide solo performances for worship services, the instruments remained underground for three years. Some leaders even posited the notion that the playing of pans could be extended from the basement and still be heard, but Samuel expressed dissent regarding their suggestion. Samuel was determined to return the pans and admitted to frequently contemplating how he could bring the steelband back into the sanctuary.

Following the relocation of the pans to the church basement, the congregation elected new board members to lead the church. Among them was Samuel, who saw an opportunity to challenge the former leadership's decision and advocate for the instruments to be returned to the main worship hall. The newly appointed leaders were receptive to his proposal, recognizing the value of including the pans in worship services. Samuel noted that senior church members had initially

expressed concerns about the morality of using steel pans, but over time, attitudes had shifted, and the instruments were now widely appreciated. Their attitude shifted primarily because young congregation members were actively involved in the band, learning music and working together to share the gospel message through music, which excited them about attending church. According to Samuel, there were specific individuals at Mount D'or SDA Church who initially disregarded the steelband, but over time, they came to understand its benefits in fostering constructive engagement for younger generations. In an interview, one of the longstanding leaders at Mount D'or admitted to his dislike of the steelpan in church, viewing it as a worldly instrument tied to Carnival. However, when the pans reappeared in the worship hall and his grandsons joined the children's band, he experienced a change of heart regarding the instrument. "I didn't like the pan in church at first. I didn't like it at all. But then I see my grandson's playing in the band and the discipline they had, I was humbled" (Anonymous 2023). Numerous members express gratitude for the steelband's contribution to the worship services through their music. "Unfortunately, there are churches in the SDA community that continue to reject the steelpan" (Samuel 2023).

Objections to playing the steelpans in church were made on several different grounds. Concerns were raised about the instrument's shiny, metallic (silver) appearance, which some interpreted as wealth and vanity. More importantly, churchgoers were conflicted on whether the instrument aligned with the twenty-eight fundamental beliefs of the SDA church. The twenty-eight fundamental doctrines of the SDA church are a guide for church members and how they interpret the scripture for daily purposes. These laws also provide an overall view of the SDA denomination's beliefs and practices.

Samuel agreed with Sister White's statement on music discussion in the introduction and told me that her writings are a guide to better understanding the Bible and making daily life

choices, and they should be viewed as the lesser light to the greater light of the Holy Bible's laws and testimonies. He supports White's argument that churchgoers should "be in an atmosphere of worship. Nice reverence and nice soothing music. All the instruments can be used for that, but people abuse it" (Samuel 2023). He concluded his statement by reciting a passage from the book of Psalms in the Holy Bible, which reads "make a joyful noise unto the Lord" (100:1). Initially, I was perplexed as his statements appeared to conflict with one another. However, Samuel clarified that during White's tenure as an SDA member, there was no allowance for boisterous music. Samuel claims that "it's a balance. You have to have a balance when it comes to music" (2023). Timothy Rommen encountered a similar discourse in the Full Gospel church, in Jerma A. Jackson's meditation on the strands of "exuberance" and "restraint" within African American churches (2007, 25). Jackson focused on the contrast between those styles of services rather than a balance. Certain churches prefer a restrained tradition, while others are a bit exuberant. In his attempt to find the balance between the two, Samuel believes the steelpan can achieve it. Hence, Samuel's preferred musical style for the Mount D'or Gospel Steel Orchestra is a collection of classical, traditional hymns and North American contemporary gospel music. This repertoire has been well-received in many locations and regional events.

In 2016, the Mount D'or Gospel Steel Orchestra had the honor of traveling to Californie Sam SDA church in Martinique. They were invited to participate in the 'Meeting Pan Lamentin' program hosted by an SDA church, where they spent a full week performing at various venues on the island. Then, in 2022, they were invited to perform at the Roxborough SDA church located in Tobago. Currently, the band is organizing fundraising events in the hopes of touring other Caribbean islands in 2024. Samuel told me that his latest mission is to "establish a network of

young steelpan virtuosos who can provide steelpan training and help establish potential steelbands in SDA churches nationwide” (2023).

Samuel was able to restore the steelband to the worship hall with the help of other leaders, and support and participation from the younger members. Although there were members who were not comfortable with the instrument in church, their attitudes changed as more youth began joining the band and as a result became active in the church. Through positive leadership, members began to view the steelpan as a constructive musical attribute detached from revelry, Badjohns, and bacchanal as long as it is used in a particular way.

While Samuel passionately advocates for steelpan and its musical potential in gospel ministries, he also recognizes the need to respect stylistic differences between church performances and secular performances. Like Manzano and Moses, Samuel believes in presenting gospel music in a moderate and modest manner, avoiding styles typically found in panorama competitions. Hence, his arrangement style and musical preference are considered classical, traditional, and similar to Euro-North American music. Manzano, Moses, and Samuel’s beliefs align with Ellen G. White's guidance on church music, emphasizing the importance of presenting instruments in a particular (European) style and dissociating the instruments from the secular style in which they were originally played. White advised the SDA church in her writings to be wary of loud, raucous, and boisterous music that may detract from sincere and personal worship. Although, this ideology of praise and worship is contrary to the biblical evidence mentioned in the book of Psalms regarding loud-sounding instruments as a form of praise and worship, Samuel and the band members believe that they can still achieve the Highest praise and worship through tempered and classical styles of music.

In the following section, I explore Eshean Arjoon and the Pangelics Steel Ensemble. This orchestra also originates from the traditions of the SDA denomination and shares similar views regarding the steelpan and its role in the SDA church.

### **Pangelics Steel Ensemble**

On April 15, 2011, Eshean Arjoon formed the Pangelics Steel Ensemble. It is a steel band that was birthed in Saint James, west of Port of Spain, and its purpose is to provide inspirational music for Christians and non-Christians. Arjoon is the founder, arranger, and band leader of the ensemble. Pangelics is a registered member of the north region at Pan Trinbago<sup>25</sup>, and the Trinidad and Tobago artistry registration. As a Christian steelband, associating with secular organizations can seem controversial. However, Arjoon decided to work with these organizations and use every opportunity to provide inspirational music within these communities and events. These organizations are affiliated with Trinidad and Tobago's Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and the Arts (MTCA). Pan Trinbago is known for hosting and sponsoring competitions among national steelbands, with two categories: competing and non-competing steelbands. Pangelics is listed as a non-competitive and religious steelband in the Pan Trinbago organization. Typically, Christian steelbands prefer 'non-competitive' because their mission and values are to inspire non-Christians instead of becoming musical rivals or competitors.

In panorama competitions, steelbands compete by performing a song specifically arranged for the instruments involved. They are evaluated based on various criteria, including style of

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<sup>25</sup> Pan Trinbago is a cultural organization representing the interest of steelbands in Trinidad and Tobago.

arrangement, texture, performance, color, interpretation, tone, rhythm, phrasing, balance, and execution. Dudley reports that

“compositional complexity also provides a vehicle for individual players to "gallery"<sup>26</sup>, making histrionic gestures and expressions as they flawlessly execute complex and exciting parts- a sort of individual display and boastfulness that has much more in common with Carnival festivity than with European concert performances” (2003, 19).

Conversely, the church tends to distance itself from these cultural expressions of boasting and ‘gallery’ in pan playing. “A competition's power to legitimize cultural values depends on its ability to draw a crowd” (Dudley 2003, 21). Hence, Glasgow and other leaders caution against the very cultural values that can be problematic. The aim is to uplift and glorify God, shifting one's attention to the Most High in music. The cultural values of steelpan hone attention to one’s talent. As a result, Christian steelbands tend to choose non-competitive.

Prior to the development of Pangelics, Arjoon served as the director of the Petit Valley Steel Orchestra (PVSO) in the early 2000s for three years and continues to do so. In the 1990s, PVSO emerged from the Petit Valley SDA church. During his time with the PVSO, Arjoon recognized the need for more gospel steel bands in Trinidad and Tobago. He realized an increase in requests from young people in the community to join the band after each performance. While working with PVSO, Arjoon explained that the young members became increasingly enthusiastic about performing in the community. He noticed that the youth at Petit Valley SDA were captivated by the steelpan music ministry.

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<sup>26</sup> Show off one’s skill.

This realization—along with continued conflicts with the leadership at Petit Valley SDA—led him to create Pangelics, with a mission to minister to those who may not identify as Christians and to provide a music ensemble not bound to a specific church organization. His mission is to arrange gospel songs and hymns with genres like soca, calypso, reggae, and other Caribbean music styles for the steelpan that align with the church's liturgy. His ultimate goal is to find a balance between meeting the church's standards and catering to secular functions. He further explained that

“for the church we maintained the values of the church, the meaning of the musical expression, however, incorporating the local identity into it. So, not necessarily separating who we are from what we hold dear in terms of our religious values but finding a pathway in bringing those two together. And the benefit of doing that was that it had an effect where we can now become a band, not just in the church or Christianity but in a secular sense and playing the same music to rhythms that are familiar and playing the religious tunes that are of West Indian heritage” (Arjoon 2023).

While Pat Glasgow believes in the separation of Christianity and culture [cultural forms (expression) versus cultural values], Arjoon illustrates that the two can work together through his music ministry. His zeal for local styles blossomed while directing the PVSO and when he first began playing the steelpan. Arjoon suggests that maintaining a balance between Christian and cultural values is essential, rather than a complete separation. In order to achieve this goal “there needs to be Spiritual maturity” (Arjoon 2023). Arjoon and Samuel both aim for this balance with their band, as previously stated.

After joining the Woodbrook SDA Church in 1998, Arjoon, a former member of the Startlift Steel Orchestra, a large community steelband in Port of Spain, decided to incorporate the steelpan

into the worship service. Excited to use his talents to perform gospel music for weekly church services, Arjoon discovered that some congregation members hesitated to include the steelpan. “It (steelpan) was kind of tabooed. It was so tabooed that people were afraid to it” (Arjoon 2023). Despite this, Arjoon remained committed to showcasing the celestial ability and versatility of the steelpan as a medium for worship. During the interview, Arjoon claimed that “the steelpan were underutilized” by the leaders of the church in the early 1990s, “and they spoke outrightly against it” (2023). Arjoon realized that he had the challenging task of convincing his home church about the musical and spiritual gifts that the steelpan could render. His motives for religious and cultural expressions were based on elevating worship in the church and promoting a sense of community and connection among believers and the rest of the world.

At the same time, this type of religious expression proved to be quite a challenge for Arjoon to integrate the steelpan into their worship services, especially with the Phase II pan yard situated just across the street from the Woodbrook SDA church. The Woodbrook SDA church's proximity to the pan yard<sup>27</sup> served as a constant reminder of the secular and immoral nature of steelpan music due to the type of events that occurred throughout the year. Being in close proximity to the pan yard, the Woodbrook SDA made every effort to refrain from using the steelpan they owned. Arjoon claimed that Woodbrook church members perceived steelpan music as secular and immoral, and they compared it to the Phase II steelband across the street. During his time at Woodbrook, members criticized Arjoon for his involvement with the steelpan.

For instance, during an interview, Arjoon shared an experience at his home church, the Woodbrook SDA.

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<sup>27</sup> A large area or parking lot where community steelbands rehearse.

“My church in Woodbrook, it caused a stir when the first pan came in the early nineties. As a matter of fact, persons who have leadership in the church spoke outrightly against steelpan. And there is an interesting encounter and testimony that resulted from that. That tension that was created there by the time I came around, I kinda started to break through that tension some more. And little by little persons started to appreciate what I’m doing. As a matter of fact, one of the elders of the church, one of the local leaders call me to play (steelpan) for the service he was conducting. And in this service, he asked me to stand up behind the instrument and said to the whole church while he was presiding over the church that day. And he basically gave his testimony of how God showed him the purpose of the steelpan in the church.

And so, his testimony resulted in other people wanting to come to the steelpan and accepted it in a greater fashion. So, what he said in church that day after he asked me to play was: ‘I purposely asked Eshean to play because I wanted to tell you that I didn’t always like steelpan.’ As a matter of fact, he said ‘I rejected it! I hated it! I didn’t think it belonged in the church because of the background of the steelpan, where it came from and the fact that it is used in the Carnival atmosphere’. And so, he was basically talking about pan and the negative stigma and ready to keep that influence away from the church because of the revelry and gang violence and fights associated with the steelpan. The church didn’t understand the history of the steelpan. The elder said one day, God showed him that he himself was like the steelpan. Starting as a discarded vessel and then being repurposed and reshaped into an instrument that can produce great glory to God’. And so, God showed him that

it was his life. And God rescued him from being discarded. And he said after God showed that to him, he can never look at the steelpan the same way. He saw it as something that would be used for the glory of God and through his testimony, we got a change in my local church about the steelpan where it was incorporated into the church and we invited other steelpan players into the church” (2023).

Furthermore, in 2010, the SDA Pathfinder Club<sup>28</sup> established an award called “steelpan honor” worldwide through the South Caribbean Conference's efforts. Arjoon claims the Pathfinder Club “teaches young adults about life and survival skills” (2023). The steelpan honor is a badge awarded to people who have completed achieved specific standards of competence and knowledge about the instrument. These events have illustrated steelpan’s advancement and contribution to the SDA community through Christian youth involvement.

Arjoon claimed that a particular incident where an SDA church in the east of Trinidad (which would remain unnamed for privacy reasons) rejected the steelpan due to the influence of certain leaders in the SDA denomination who believed it to be a demonic instrument. Arjoon, a qualified pastor with a bachelor's degree in theology from USC, has been invited to speak at various churches throughout the country. His approach to ministry involves beginning his preaching and teaching sessions with musical performances using steelpan. Despite being invited to speak at the particular church, the leaders refused to allow him to preach that day when he arrived with his steelpan due to their opinions on the instrument. Arjoon recognized the group's sincerity in their beliefs but noted that their information was flawed. He concluded that the

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<sup>28</sup> The Pathfinder Club is a youth organization similar to scouts or paramilitary groups.

propagation of misinformation about the steelpan has significantly contributed to the instrument's reputation within Christian communities. Because of this incident and the stigma that has surfaced in the church community, there is a misconception that because the steelpan is associated with African drums, it can transmit and transfer evil spirits.

In 2014, a similar situation occurred where Jeremiah Davis, an SDA African American pioneer, politician, and religious speaker, visited Trinidad and Tobago to conduct a series on music and lecture to SDA leaders and members about the steelpan in a predominantly Afrocentric context. Arjoon explained that Davis shared negative opinions and misinformation about the steelpan.

“He would say that the pan was not really an invention of Trinidad and Tobago. This is what he claimed. He also proclaimed that the steelpan was not to be used in the SDA church. And he said that it was actually invented in Africa. The end result of the conference caused a heated controversy among members of the SDA church. What he said was so passionately put across that it caused some persons to question our own history and even the use of pan in church. However, I’m happy to say through constant education and spiritual maturity amongst the members, what he said didn’t take hold to memories too long after that. There are some persons, for whatever reason, because they may have certain understanding and interpretation of scripture may believe that certain things that represents an Afro background or an Indo background, once its not European in nature, cannot be utilized for worship. And historically speaking in the SDA church here in Trinidad or any of the other traditional Christian denominations, you would find that there is a heavy colonial overtone because a lot of these came from the colonial era and what we call the neo-colonial era of America. Basically, these denominations said, once it doesn’t

fall in line with America or Europe and white America and white Europe as a matter of fact, there is no place for it.

Here in the Caribbean, our peoples of certain backgrounds couldn't wear certain hairstyles. Their musical instruments and forms of expression were demonized for the European and white American style of worship. However, these things, especially since our country came into the age of Independence in 1962 go forward had a paradigm shift in our thinking and cultural identity. And this really began a versioning of accepting our indigenous musical instruments in forms of expression into the mainstream denominations that were Eurocentric. It really shows how powerful the colonial mindset is being swayed over people as to say this is the standard and nothing else or anything else that doesn't look like it has to be demonized and rejected. But thank fully through education and a sense of spiritual maturity by going back to the Bible and seeing the context of the Bible. The Bible is of an African and Mediterranean context if you really understand the Bible. So, there's a greater sense of appreciation for the historical roots of the Bible and accepting certain types and understanding that are more ethno-oriented. So, this type of education and this type of insight and especially of younger generations questioning and challenging the historical past has improved what we have been told about the steelpan amongst other things as well" (2023).

Two key themes emerge from Arjoon's interview: leaders who advocated for the steelpan and encouraged their congregations to do the same experienced a notable shift in their members' attitudes toward the instrument. Additionally, Arjoon emphasized that a lack of education

regarding the history of the steelpan has allowed negative stereotypes to persist among churchgoers. As discussed in chapters two and three, religious leaders who courageously defended the steelpan and its role in music ministry inspired their congregations to recognize it as an instrument of praise.

Arjoon's statement suggests that the perception of the steelpan instrument in Christianity is evolving because of increased education by steelband advocates and musicians in the church, distinct from Pan in the Schools and institutional educational policy. Furthermore, he has been organizing youth sessions and music theory lessons for young members of various SDA churches in Trinidad since the beginning of Pangelics in 2011. Understanding the history of the steelpan through education is crucial for certain Christians and those who oppose the instrument to appreciate its value and purpose.

### **Pan in School / Pan in the Classroom Project**

In 2000, the Ministry of Education launched a program called "pan in the classroom" or "pan in school," which financially supported steelpan education in public schools nationwide, allowing open access to students for learning, performing, and experiencing the musical capabilities of the steelpan. The program was initiated by the administrative government of the People National Movement with the aim of making all the various types and ranges of the steelpan available to local secondary schools as part of their academic curriculum. This gave students the opportunity to learn and engage with steelpan in a formal academic setting. In addition, the social aspect of steelpan was also considered effective in alleviating gang violence, fights, and criminal activity between communities. Arjoon claims that

“The ‘pan in school’ program was initiated by the Ministry of Education in Trinidad and Tobago to develop our base or skill set so to speak by enforcing pan education. We did get an invitation by the Ministry of Education here in Trinidad and Tobago to further develop our (USC) curriculum by joining their ‘pan in the classroom’ program for primary and secondary school teachers” (2023).

The program allowed highly skilled individuals and groups of the pan fraternity including Dr. Jit Samaroo, the Codrington family, and others, to assist in facilitating instruments, tips on arranging music for steelpan, and other skills to students. The program aimed to have the best steelpan builders and arrangers teach their craftsmanship to the younger generation

The initiative of the “pan in school” emanated national acceptance within religious communities across the country. Students of various religious backgrounds were able to learn and play the steelpan. In an interview with Michael Cooper, the C.E.O and founder of Panland Trinidad and Tobago, and a major supplier to the ‘pan in school’ program stated that “the steelpan had infiltrated both the religious and education communities. Being played in churches, temples, and of course the schools” (2023). Thanks to the "pan in school" program, young Christians who received steelpan training in school now have the opportunity to incorporate this unique instrument into their church communities, creating a truly enriched atmosphere of music, praise, and fellowship. This initiative has helped the steelpan gain wider acceptance within Trinidad and Tobago's religious and educational communities, as it places a strong emphasis on developing cultural traditions among the next generation. Arjoon stated,

"it is a tremendous thing to see the instrument widely accepted. But it took years.

In fact, it took decades. But it is still going and the other side of it is that there was

‘pan in the schools’ program started here (Trinidad) in the turn of the 2000 century, the new millennium” (2023).

Renowned steelpan arranger Duvone Stewart, pan tuner Augustus Peters, and many other pan ambassadors have benefited from the music festival literacy program, which was developed as part of the Pan School Coordinated Council project. This initiative has made significant social and cultural contributions to the steelpan fraternity.

The pan in school project focused on replacing the steelpan’s long-standing stigma with a constructive perception, showcasing its versatile and world-class musical potential. Developed by the Ministry of Education, this initiative enabled pan tutors and music educators to teach steelpan in schools, shifting its function from one of transgression to one of community-building. Through this music education system, young Christians engaged with steelpan in an academic setting, allowing the instrument to be embraced and welcomed into the church by young members and musicians.

### **Nazarene Worship Center Steel Orchestra**

The Nazarene Worship Center Steel Orchestra is a gospel steelband in the Santa Cruz community, east of Laventille. Lincoln Henry holds the position of arranger and band leader. He is the son of the late Reverend Leelan Henry, who founded and led the steelband in 1992. The Nazarene Worship Center is a member of the Full Gospel Association of Trinidad and Tobago. In 1993, Lincoln, his two younger siblings, and his father commenced playing steelpan at the Nazarene church. Reverend Leelan, who originated from Bellview St. James—a community that was credited for steelpan development—was the church’s reverend when he founded the steelband.

He had been introduced to steelpan at a young age and was acknowledged as the “panman” in his community and “Reverend-panman” at the Nazarene church.

During his interview, Lincoln asserts that the Nazarene Worship Center Steel Orchestra has been a “staple in Trinidad and Tobago’s gospel pan fraternity<sup>29</sup>” and experts in *gospelypso* (2023). Reverend Leelan was a prominent figure in advancing *gospelypso* in Trinidad and Tobago because the genre was stigmatized through its association with calypso and Carnival. Therefore, calypso, soca, and local styles of music suited for the pan were off-limits to Christian steelbands. There is much to consider in the fact that the Christian organization that had criticized the steelpan for its secular association began to embrace it. At the same time, *gospelypso* and other local genres were still stigmatized for their connections to secular music styles. As Rommen stated, “Calypso’s connection with Carnival and bacchanal, however, was too strong to be overcome, and *gospelypso* continues to struggle for acceptance within Full Gospel circles” (2007, 22). Perhaps an instrument that conveys no text is easier to distance from its worldly context and, therefore, can be purified and delivered from its secular nature through baptism, as explained in chapter two. This shows that “baptism” and sanctification have not been applied to local music styles, including *gospelypso*.

Reverend Leelan advocated for *gospelypso* and steelpan music in church and worked alongside other leading individuals in developing this genre, including Sherwin Gardener and Nicole Bhalasingh. Gardener and Bhalasingh were popular *gospelypso* artists and Christian leaders in their community. His vision as the Reverend of the Nazarene Worship Center was to engage young adults in the Santa Cruz community by using local styles of music to inspire and promote positive behavior. To this end, he believed that *gospelypso* and steelpan music were ideal

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<sup>29</sup> Steelpan organization that supports established gospel steelbands nationwide and finances gospel events.

instruments for motivating and encouraging younger generations as a means of escaping the harsh reality of domestic and legal troubles in their communities.

Garth Marshall, the band's manager, paid tribute to Reverend Henry, describing him as a great inspiration to community members. Reverend Leelan's mission to unite religious and musical practices has contributed significantly to the development of *gospelypso*, and his efforts have helped to shape the genre's identity and growth in Trinidad and Tobago. In an interview, Marshall claimed that Reverend Leelan

“used steelpan as a tool to guide young adults. They come here by the church and like to hear pan instead of going downtown to hear panorama. And it influence them. And after a while, you get familiar and you start speaking the same way. All you need is a little guidance. They would have practice and worship sessions before practice. They were encouraged to talk about their own situations and their everyday life in the community. They have an outlet. And he (Leelan) used that to the max. And that is what he was encouraging for youth steelbands in all churches. Church members only wanted so-called Christian people to play the pan and not the youth from the community because to them (churchgoers), they (young adults) had to reach to a certain standard. But that was not his (Leelan) mission” (2023).

Reverend Leelan used steelpan to guide young adults to church, and because they enjoyed playing his arrangements, they chose to attend the Nazarene's rehearsal rather than go to the panorama competitions (Marshall 2023). Although there were members in the congregation who were not in favor of the steelpan, Reverend Leelan was determined to fulfill his mission. Lincoln

shared a story about a member of the Nazarene Worship Center who accompanied the steel orchestra on one of their many tours in 2014. After their return to Trinidad, a member testified in front of the entire church about her experience with the band. She confessed to the congregation that she “could not believe that God took this evil instrument and made it so nice” (2023). In reality, the member came to understand that the stigma of steelpan had no bearing on religion and Christian salvation. Reverend Leelan believed that the steelpan would benefit his music ministry and transform the lives of individuals to serve Christ Jesus. Since Reverend Leelan’s passing, Lincoln has accepted the responsibility of leading the band and continuing his father’s legacy.

The band is dedicated to serving their church and actively participates in various community events in Santa Cruz. They organized block parties, fundraisers for church events and charities, and fun children's day parties in their neighborhood. The band has toured and held concerts in New York City, Barbados, and Toronto, Canada. They have also collaborated with well-known music bands, including Out of Eden and Jazz of Clay. Despite facing rejection and lack of support from some, the band received immense pride and joy when they gained international recognition. “Performing on international stages in foreign (economically developed) countries were the unforgettable moments when the band would experience appreciation from the church community and the nation as well” (Lincoln 2023).

Lincoln stated that his father’s philosophy of the steelpan as an instrument of worship contradicts popular belief. He believed that the aesthetics of gospel music should not be of a lesser quality than secular songs. Lincoln stated that his father often said, “you must not hear it and say...that’s gospel!” (2023). In other words, local Christian music should sound and feel familiar to local styles of music. Henry stated that Reverend Leelan believed that incorporating local rhythms and Trinbagonian musical aesthetics is imperative while performing gospel on the

steelpan. Reverend Leelan's ultimate goal is to perform at any event where people would have difficulty determining which band "sounds" like gospel and those that do not. "People must enjoy both! It must sound authentically Trinbagonian" (Lincoln 2023). Where sacred and secular music is concerned, Lincoln is convinced that gospel music in Trinidad should sound like the local style of music.

Reverend Leelan incorporated all of the traditional elements of the steelband, including African drums, bongos, congas, drums set, iron/brake drums, scratcher, and du-dup<sup>30</sup>, and used them in the church steelband. Although the instruments mentioned are typically found in any steelband, most Christian steelbands have excluded them because they carry the same secular stigma as the steelpan. The incorporation of these instruments into the steelband facilitates a panorama style of music and dance. Their use in a church setting, however, may inadvertently promote behaviors associated with competition, which are often viewed as secular and inappropriate.

This perspective further perpetuates the stigma surrounding percussion instruments. The aforementioned instruments and their ties to secular music significantly contribute to their discrimination within the church. Despite this, biblical texts advocate for the inclusion of percussive instruments, exuberant praise, and dancing in worship as demonstrated in the introduction and Chapter Three.

The Nazarene Worship Center Steel Orchestra is widely recognized for its diverse repertoire that spans various styles and genres. Its local style of music and calypso rhythm have earned it a prominent position in the local gospel industry. The Orchestra's gospel music

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<sup>30</sup> a two-note bass drum.

performances in the Panorama style have been particularly acclaimed. According to Marshall, the Orchestra has distinguished itself from other Christian steelbands by avoiding the "gospelize" or "contemporary gospel" tradition, instead remaining true to its cultural roots and musicianship.

The Nazarene church established links to the Caribbean Nazarene Theological College through the missionaries who resided in the Santa Cruz vicinity during its development. However, upon the arrival of Reverend Leelan in 1980, the church's dynamic underwent a transformation. According to Marshall, the worship ceremonies were adapted to a local style distinct from the North American sound. The church assumed the role of a haven for the community, with Reverend Leelan and some church members actively involved in the community's affairs. The steelband, which performed during the worship services, made some church members uncomfortable since it was considered secular because members of the community were involved. Lincoln and Marshall stated that some members left the church because people from grassroots, 'hotspots', or high-risk areas were invited to the services by Reverend Leelan. It appeared that some churchgoers were uncomfortable with individuals from urban communities performing and participating in the steelband. Despite the stigma regarding the steelpan and the community members, Reverend Leelan was passionate about steelband music and the local style of gospel arrangements he produced. He arranged songs to suit the steelpan instrument, which became a hub for steelpan music, with various other instruments, such as the bass guitar, drums, keyboards, and percussion instruments, being used. Marshall continued to explain that

“the steelpan came from rebels or people outside of society at first. They were not only churches, but there were people outside of society that developed this pan. So, it was frowned on in society first, then, society started to accept it. Because it became normalized and got in. But the churches wanted to be separated and apart

from society or appear to be. They kept the pan out as long as they could. Because they thought that it represented a certain type of people” (2023). “It also represented a type of season, Carnival season. It is associated with Carnival which was rejected by the church. That’s why the church kept away and went to camps and encouraged people not to get involved in arts in that way. But Reverend Leelan saw it (steelpan) in a different way. He saw it as any other instrument. He saw it as a gift from God” (Lincoln 2023).

The steelband members were considered or often referred to as ‘Bad Boys’ and ‘Badjohns’ by the Nazarene church members. Regardless of the criticism they received, band members would be present in church every Sunday morning to perform gospel music. This was part of Reverend Leelan’s dream. Marshall remembers that

“He saw pan as creative blessing to get the people from the community into the church. The terminology he would use is if God take a discarded dustbin and could turn it into a beautiful instrument, so He can turn anybody. And that was his daily sermon” (2023).

As previously noted, an elder at Woodbrook expressed a similar sentiment regarding the steelpan. This underscores the connection to the golden era of steelpan in the 1960s, during which it emerged as an emblem of representation and identity, ultimately being recognized as the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago. This recognition was solidified when the Trinidad All Stars Percussion Orchestra (TASPO) performed at the Festival of Britain as mentioned in the introduction. In the realm of Christianity, both international delegates and local leaders view the steelpan as a symbol of transformation, taking something once discarded and turning it into

something beautiful. Leelan shared this vision for the steelpan and its community members at Nazarene.

Controversies surrounding the Nazarene Worship Center Steel Orchestra exemplify the prejudice that the steelpan has faced within the church. Members often associated the instrument with Carnival and secularism, and they criticized the community that joined the band based on appearances. However, through strong leadership, the band persevered, ministering to the larger community and touring internationally with their gospel music. As highlighted by Marshall and Lincoln, the band is well-known and takes pride in performing local styles of gospel music. Their repertoire includes *gospelypso* and other local gospel styles, deliberately steering clear of contemporary North American gospel. Because of their stylistic preferences, they have become one of the most reputable gospel steelpan groups in Trinidad and Tobago, recognized for their clever arrangements and distinctive rhythmic contour that sets them apart from other bands. Leelan believed the steelpan would guide community youth towards constructive purposes and prepare them for adulthood.

### **Pans of Praise**

The Pans of Praise Steel Orchestra, established in 1998, has been a prominent contributor to the Saint Helena community by providing gospel music at local and international events. The orchestra's genesis can be traced back to Pastor Raman Ragbir, the leader of the Saint Helena New Testament Church of God in the same year. The Saint Helena New Testament Church of God is also a member of the Full Gospel Association in Trinidad and Tobago. Pastor Ragbir received a steelpan from a member of the Saint Helena Church. Recognizing its potential, Ps. Ragbir decided

to incorporate the instrument into their worship services. Additional steel pans were purchased until the Pan of Praise Steel Orchestra was established. The orchestra's first arranger was Joanna Ragbir, daughter of Pastor Lalman, who also served as a member of the Saint Helena church. The orchestra's members are devoted churchgoers of the Saint Helena New Testament Church of God. The church's founder, Pastor Lalman, was convinced that steelpan had the potential to bring honor and glory to God. The Pans of Praise Steel Orchestra, led by the music directors Joanne Ragbir and Keva-Ann Blackman, has represented Trinidad and Tobago in various countries around the world, performing for a multitude of events, including Grenada, Barbados, and San Antonio, Texas, in the United States.

During an interview, Blackman mentioned that the worship style during the 1990s differed from what is being practiced today. For instance,

“people weren't allowed to wear jewelry, too much make-up, skirts were a thing. You weren't really able to wear much pants, at least in the era I was in. They didn't really frown on it but once you were coming to a church service you couldn't wear it. So, I think those things would have assisted the close-mindedness of the genesis or introduction of the steelpan” (Blackman 2023). Although there had not been a broad acceptance of the steelband at St. Helena, members eventually accepted the contributions of the instrument to the music ministry. “They never turned it (steelpan) away because it was a phenomenon” (Blackman 2023).

To clarify, churchgoers were fascinated by the physical and musical capabilities of the steelpan. Therefore, they did not reject it but kept it at a distance because of its association with Carnival. Blackman explained that the familiarity of the music arranged for the steelpan contributed to the steelpan's acceptance from churchgoers. The repertoire consisted mainly of local

gospel style and included soca and reggae beats to the arrangements. “The use of it was most important to members” (Blackman 2023). Members favored the instrument's positive influence on youth but did not fully agree during the early stages because of its stigma. Their efforts to look past the stigma allowed churchgoers to embrace the steelpan gradually. Pastor Ragbir's vision for the steelband was to establish a youth music ministry at St. Helena church, much like Reverend Leelan's vision for the Nazarene Worship Center and the Santa Cruz community.

Pans of Praise Steel Orchestra has achieved a distinguished position within the gospel steel band community because of Blackman's solid leadership, direction, and vision. She is currently the band's music arranger, band leader, and director. Blackman's introduction to the steelpan at a young age during her primary school education laid the foundation for her impressive career. She earned a bachelor's degree in music (pan) from the University of the West Indies in 2014, where she acquired the essential skills and knowledge to lead and oversee the pan ministry at St. Helena with the help of her fellow band members. During her studies, Blackman also gained valuable experience in choral conducting and panorama arranging, which she drew upon to manage the band and guide them to success in their music ministry. Blackman's musical prowess extends beyond the gospel genre, encompassing other styles such as gospel soca, gospel rock, jazz, and R&B, which are often considered unsuitable for Christian ideologies. Nonetheless, Blackman's musical achievements remain a testament to her versatility and creativity. In her interview, she stated that she was able to develop the skills needed to effectively manage and lead the band due to the educational opportunities and diverse musical experiences. Through steelpan tertiary education at UWI and exposure to panorama arranging, Blackman led the Pan of Praise Steel Orchestra into a dynamic and reputable music ministry at St. Helena New Testament and nationwide.

Blackman has curated an amalgamation of gospel soca, jazz, gospel rock, and R&B music for the Pans of Praise Steel Orchestra, genres that were conventionally proscribed in church services. Blackman has developed an appreciation for these genres and introduced them to the worship services at Saint Helena. According to her, the congregants are content with her arrangement, and even those initially skeptical have experienced a transformation in their perspective over time. If there were tensions about Blackman's arrangement and "if anybody had disliked it, it was in the minority, and they may not have said anything. At the end of it, God still gets all the Glory" (Blackman 2023). Blackman views on the steelpan in the church are primarily about religious/spiritual/Christian conviction. She believes that Christian steelpan lovers should have an alternative to panorama. "If the opportunity arises for the children (in learning the art of pan arranging), I will approach it (panorama) from a work point of view. My first arrangement was Junior panorama, and I won first place" (Blackman 2023). Pan in the church creates an opportunity for people who prefer to engage in sacred rather than secular music. But panorama competitions are an ideal opportunity for pan ambassadors to learn and develop the art of pan arranging.

On November 18, 2023, Pans of Praise hosted a gospel Christmas extravaganza. Community members of the Saint Helena New Testament Church of God attended the event and enjoyed Trinidadian cuisine, games, and musical performances from the Pans of Praise Steel Orchestra and other invited guests. Pan of Praise performed a selection of Christmas Carols on the steelpan from their repertoire. Pans of Praise performance had the crowd dancing and singing along to songs, including "We Three Kings," "O Come All Ye Faithful," and Handel's Messiah - "Hallelujah Chorus", all arranged in a local style, soca beat. Other instruments in the orchestra were congas, brake drums, tassa, scratcher (metal guiro), and du-dup. The musical contributions from the Pans of Paise Steel Orchestra were performed by mostly young adults and some of whom

their parents also became members through their leadership. Some parents who are members of the St Helena New Testament joined the steelband and play various instruments due to their children's example and participation. The Pans of Praise Steel Orchestra featured mainly young adult musicians, some of whom were later joined by their parents.

As a member of the Full Gospel Association, the Pans of Praise Steel Orchestra of Saint Helena has been actively working to dismantle borders of segregation and disunity in their community through the support and dedication of their youth. Blackman and other supporting members of the band have been advocating for the Pan of Praise Steel Orchestra to preserve and maintain the interest of the youth in their community. Blackman claimed that their musical ministry continues to thrive because there has been ongoing involvement from each upcoming generation at the Saint Helena New Testament Church of God.

Pans of Praise received prejudice from their congregation but was able to circumvent those attitudes through Blackman's leadership and youth involvement. The stigma of the steelpan made churchgoers uncomfortable at first, but then they gradually accepted the instrument because of its contribution to the music ministry and youth engagement. Furthermore, St Helena's New Testament was open to local styles of music performed on the steelpan. They enjoyed Blackman's arrangements and the inclusivity of local styles like soca, calypso, and reggae. Similarly, their attitudes towards the steelpan changed as they saw the congregation's youth gravitate to the instrument and the music. Performing in the steelband fostered a sense of community, discipline, and belonging. However, the steelpan was associated with Badjohn's behaviors and revelry during its early stages which carried a stigma.

This chapter explores the strategies employed by five Christian steelbands, namely the Maranatha Steel Orchestra, Mount D'or Gospel Steel Orchestra, Pangelics Steel Ensemble,

Nazarene Worship Center Steel Orchestra, and Pans of Praise Steel Orchestra, to overcome the stigmas associated with the steelpan's origins. These strategies include outdoor and community music events for youth engagement, concerts, established music ministry, music tours, and international exposure/acceptance that have contributed to each band's success. Moreover, it focuses on the unwavering, dedicated spiritual interpretation, reasoning, and wisdom some certain religious leaders, including Kadan, Wade and company, Samuel, Arjoon, Leelan, and Ragbir, who have been instrumental in converting Christian perspectives through youth engagement in steelpan. Also, the international exposure of the steelpan in the SDA and Full Gospel communities has allowed a greater appreciation for the instrument by churchgoers. Lastly, the 'pan in school'/'pan in the classroom' program was an incentive to include the steelpan in Christian worship spaces by involving students who benefited from the government-initiated pan program and fostering community-building instead of transgression.

The success of these steelbands in promoting the acceptance of steelpan music in Christian worship spaces in Trinidad and Tobago can be attributed to the unwavering support, resilience, and determination of their leaders, members, and youth, specifically through education. The involvement of younger generations in the Full Gospel Association and the Seventh-day Adventist community has been instrumental in fostering the inclusivity of steelpan music in churches across the island. College-affiliated churches and youth groups have played a significant role in the evolution of gospel steelbands. In particular, the involvement of young musicians who were exposed to the steelpan through the 'pan in school/pan in the classroom' project in the 2000s and those who pursued higher education with a focus on the instrument has been crucial in making steelpan music socially acceptable in Christian worship spaces. Such educational opportunities have significantly elevated the awareness of steelpan music across various denominations.

The international exposure and steelband concerts hosted in Europe and North America during the early 1970s further contributed to the growing appreciation of steelpan music among churchgoers in Trinidad and Tobago. This shows the effects of oppression sickness that still exists in the local Trinbagonian Christianity. As an insider, oppression sick can be challenging to come to terms with, especially in a neocolonial system that has social and political hierarchical leverage. Hence, the steelpan was not initially accepted because of its grassroots connections and origins.

Kadan, Wade, and their colleagues—Samuel, Arjoon, Leelan, and Ragbir—are courageous leaders who champion the potential of the steelpan and advocate for its place in supporting the younger generation. Despite facing backlash and criticism from their own community regarding the use of the steelpan, these leaders passionately defend the instrument. They illustrate how it can foster community building, promote healthy relationships, and serve as a tool for education and discipline. They all share a commitment to overcoming prejudice and reframing the steelpan as an inspirational music ministry, instead of something transgressive. Through their determination, dedication to education, and community engagement, they have successfully worked to challenge the stigma surrounding the steelpan, presenting it as an instrument of worship and praise.

## The Celestial Sounds of Steel—Conclusion

This dissertation explores the ideological perspectives and opinions surrounding the incorporation of certain music styles, particularly the steelpan, into services of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) and Full Gospel (FG) churches in Trinidad and Tobago. Since the 1980s, there has been a notable rise in the presence of steelpan music within these denominations. However, due to its associations with Carnival, with African roots, and with badjohn behavior, steelpan music has faced rejection from certain leaders and members of the SDA and FG churches. These congregations have generally favored Eurocentric and North American forms of gospel music, such as traditional hymns, Country and Western, praise and worship, and contemporary gospel music, primarily because of their cultural distance from local styles. In simple terms, Trinbagonian Christians who are uncomfortable with local worship genres, such as *gospelypso*, are receptive to American gospel music because they are less familiar with its own connections to secular styles such as blues, soul, and hip hop.

In the SDA and FG communities, specific criteria dictate whether a particular style of music is deemed divine or suitable for worship. Music that lacks cultural ties to local styles and originates from beyond national borders is generally preferred. In other words, compositions that are culturally and geographically distant from Trinidad's local music are favored. As Rommen argues, local music is often considered overly familiar and poses a direct threat to one's salvation due to the complex interplay between secular and sacred influences (2007, 66; 2019, 40). Despite ongoing discussions surrounding the use of steelpan in local SDA and FG churches—such as avoiding Carnival dance rhythms, discouraging gallerying, selecting appropriate repertoire, and determining suitable levels of cultural influence—positive developments are advancing steelpan music within

these religious communities. The steadfast support of SDA and FG leaders, who continue to navigate the subversion of the SDA and FG denominations, along with initiatives aimed at involving more young people through the establishment of music ministries, is fostering a sense of community. These youth music ministries encourage greater engagement among community members to attend church services and events. The backing of public school and higher education programs, supported by governmental initiatives since 2000, has significantly shifted Christians' perceptions of the instrument, granting it credibility and facilitating its presence in spaces that promote social order, a secure environment, and teamwork. To put it in Rommen's terms, the immorality associated with Carnival and its music generates concerns about the "ethics of style," and requires a careful "negotiation of proximity" when choosing music for worship.

The ethics of style play a crucial role in determining what is deemed appropriate for worship. Congregants often assess the aesthetics and musical elements to identify which style is considered divinely suitable for their worship services. Generally, music with an Americentric influence—regardless of its ethnic origins or genre—is favored. This preference places Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) and Full Gospel (FG) churches in a "good standing" or enhances their perception as "good" by North American church delegates. Consequently, reggae beats, R&B, soul, and blues are more widely embraced in SDA and FG churches compared to calypso/*gospelypso*, soca, and jamoo. North American musical affinities and Americentric elements or style of music are considered divine or appropriate for worship services in the Seventh-day Adventist and Full Gospel churches. To the extent that the steel pan has been accepted in SDA and FG churches, it is because it has been metaphorically 'baptized' (in the words of Leslie Moses)

Leslie Moses employs the metaphor of the "baptism of the steelpan" to highlight the instrument's acceptance within the SDA and FG churches. According to President Moses, this term

signifies the “mental and emotional acceptance” of the steelpan, as baptism serves as a rite of passage essential for participation in church activities. For the instrument to be utilized or for an individual to fulfill a role within the church, they must undergo a process of ordination or “baptism”; however, despite Moses' assurances of the steelpan's acceptance, some churchgoers still harbor reservations. Concerns surrounding the instrument's connection to African spiritualism contribute to this unease among certain members. The steelpan's African origins and the cultural implications of its performance have left some churchgoers uneasy about its role in worship, causing concern about the use of the instrument and deciding how it should be played in church.

If the steel pan today has been “baptized”, it is thanks to the efforts of diverse musicians and activists who have worked to make it acceptable in the church. The Maranatha Steel Orchestra, Mount D'or Gospel Steel Orchestra, Pangelics Steel Ensemble, Nazarene Worship Center Steel Orchestra, and Pans of Praise Steel Orchestra have successfully navigated the prejudice surrounding the instrument, incorporating it into worship services. I selected these five steelbands specifically because I have personally experienced some of the discrimination against the steelpan during my time with the Mount D'or and Pangelics steelbands. The history of the Maranatha steelband is particularly noteworthy, as it is recognized as the first SDA steelband in Trinidad and Tobago. Both Nazarene Worship Center and Pans of Praise are well-regarded gospel steelbands in the region and have contributed meaningfully to their communities through affordable concerts and children's events, building a sense of community and connection. Consequently, I believe the success stories of these five steelbands are vital and central to this topic and the broader discussion of the steelpan in the SDA and FG churches.

The baptism of the steelpan also allowed for the support and musical contributions of young Christian leaders, who have significantly contributed to the success and sustainability of

these bands. Young Christians and musicians from the community have dedicated their time and talents to expressing their praise for God through music. As a result, these bands have fostered community building and engagement through steelpan music. With the active involvement of Christian youth, these steelbands have developed music ministries that allow them to tour and share their inspirational music globally. The integration of Americentric and local styles of gospel music has further enhanced the acceptance of steelpan music.

In some cases, the repertoire and arrangements have successfully combined both styles. For example, Arjoon also sought to evolve Petit Valley Steelband into Pangelics as a response to the contentious dynamics between him and the leaders of the Petit Valley SDA church. He established Pangelics Steel Ensemble with the goal of incorporating younger musicians without adhering to the ideological constraints and approval of any Christian institution and incorporating local styles of rhythms and beats into the repertoire. Consequently, Pangelics has emerged as one of the defining steelbands within the SDA community in Trinidad and Tobago. Similarly, Maranatha's independence from Laventille Church has opened doors for performances at universities, various sacred and secular events, extensive touring, and a diverse repertoire that incorporates a range of musical styles. Pangelics and Maranatha's efforts were successful in changing churchgoers' attitudes towards the steelpan. Others have pursued similar paths or embraced the fact that the instrument is welcomed in the church, opting instead to use it in a more non-traditional manner through the support of young Christian musicians. These are some of the ways certain steelbands have gained trust, acceptance, and sustenance in the SDA and FG churches.

The acceptance of the steelpan creates opportunities for embracing certain cultural expressions and pride. Through international acceptance—particularly from economically

developed countries in the northern hemisphere—the steelpan has gained both popularity and approval for use in Trinbagonian churches. Delegates from the SDA community in North America expressed their support for Maranatha's performance at the General Conference in 1980, which marked a turning point for the instrument, prompting emotions of appreciation and pride among Trinbagonian SDA leaders who attended the event. Following this event, local SDA churches began to welcome steelpan music into their worship services and sacred ceremonies. Ironically, an instrument once condemned by the elite class and North American Christian missionaries in Trinidad and Tobago—viewed as a symbol of disruption and violence—has now been embraced within the SDA General Conference community. The North American preference for musical choices, along with the endorsement of the steelpan in churches, has become an integral part of Trinbago's SDA and FG tradition. As local culture faces resistance from church members, some leaders have promoted the integration of local culture within churches.

The Mount D'or Gospel steelband was revitalized due to Samuel's strategic leadership efforts. His involvement in Mt D'or's leadership catalyzed the decision to reintroduce the steelband into their sanctuary. By virtue of his prominent role, he successfully persuaded fellow leaders to embrace the steelband as a means to enhance and enrich their worship services. The leader and founder, Leelan Henry, was committed to fostering a Christian atmosphere for the young members of the community through the Nazarene Steelband. He envisioned the steelpan as an instrument capable of bridging the gap between the community and the church through the power of music. More importantly, it provided an inclusive space for the youth, inviting them into a community that values, supports, and embraces their commitment while encouraging the gospel message through ministry. Additionally, Blackman's experiences in Panorama significantly contributed to the repertoire and development of the Pans of Praise gospel music. As a young musician, Blackman

had limited experience in arranging for the steelpan; however, her time spent working at Panorama Events—assessing music and mastering the styles of pan arranging—ultimately paved the way for her successful career as an educator and the continued success of the Pan of Praise Steel Orchestra. These successful stories were not limited to local attractions.

Prominent Christian leaders in Trinidad and Tobago, including Dr. David Ibeleme, Noel “the Professor” Richards, Ps. Clive Griffith, Ps. Clive Dottin, Dr. Andy Manzano, Dr. Thomas Isaac, President Leslie Moses, Ps. Osbourne Williams, Ps. Godfrey Emmanuel Mitchell, Theodore Hicks, Ps. Richard I.K. Williams, Elder Allan Samuel, Eshean Arjoon, Lincoln Henry, and Keva-Ann Blackman, have played a vital role in fostering the growth of steelpan gospel music ministry within SDA and FG communities. Their dedication, talent, steadfast leadership, rich experiences, core beliefs, and musical expertise have motivated youth and music ministries, instilling a profound sense of purpose among young Christians in their communities.

At the University of the Southern Caribbean, Manzano and Isaac have actively promoted the steelpan in their classrooms, at the University of the Southern Caribbean (USC), and within their church congregations through various steelpan performances. In 2023, during the tenth annual Harold Baptiste Lectureship series at USC, Isaac delivered a paper discussing the history of Carnival, its festivities, and its impact on the liberation of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, specifically tailored for the SDA community. Dottin and Moses, who hold executive positions within the Caribbean Union and the South Caribbean Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, have organized steelpan performances for various events and conferences. Arjoon and Samuel continue to lead the Pangelics and Mount D'or Gospel steelbands, volunteering to provide uplifting music for church events, conferences, weddings, funeral services, and community outreach initiatives.

In the FGA, O. Williams, Mitchell, and R. Williams have incorporated the steelpan into their worship services through music. O. Williams and R. Williams also actively encourage their congregation to attend and support their youth during the panorama competitions that take place during the Carnival celebrations. Hicks utilizes his talent on the steelpan at Laventille Open Bible Standard Church, leading the congregation in music and collective singing during worship. The congregations' willingness to embrace the steelpan was influenced by the launch of public school music education.

Public education and tertiary institutions were key factors in the emergence of the steelpan within churches. In 2000, the "pan in the classroom" or "pan in school" initiative, launched by the Ministry of Education under the leadership of Mrs. Hazel Manning, integrated the instrument into the school curriculum. This significant development afforded children and young people the opportunity to explore the steelpan and its musical potential. Christian youth began to learn and perform on the steelpan in academic settings. The incorporation of the steelpan into education reshaped its perception from being viewed as a transgressive element to one that promotes discipline. The steelpan became an integral part of an educational system that fostered a sense of order and security. Subsequently, other organizations like Pan Trinbago followed suit, creating inclusive spaces for young Christian steelbands. Unlike the Pan Trinbago organization, the church required certain limitations about the use of the steelpan.

Through the support and courage of some SDA and FG leaders, international acceptance and youth support through public school education, Trinbagonian Christian opinions have changed regarding the steelpan; however, certain conditions of the instrument's use are cautiously applied. In addition to this idea of baptizing or approving the instrument, the manner in which it is played may determine its acceptance in church services. The player's virtuosity creates the concern for

showing off instead of accompanying. Many believe that while performing on the steelpan, players should avoid drawing unnecessary attention to themselves through ostentation or “gallerying.” Instead, the emphasis should remain on the song's lyrics and the honor it brings to God. Ultimately, both the song and the performance on the steelpan should enhance the message of the music, fostering a deeper connection to Christ. The manner and style of steelpan performances, which have the ability to inspire rhythm and dancing, are critical for the decision to accept the instrument fully.

The management of local aesthetics, such as rhythms that are associated with sexually suggestive dance style of wining, presents significant challenges for church leaders. For some SDA's, local rhythms like calypso and soca, along with their accompanying dances, are prohibited, as they are deemed secular and immoral. Consequently, steelpan performances should portray virtuosity and local rhythms that can lead to lascivious dancing. Church leaders in the FG exercise caution regarding local rhythms and dances, imposing restrictions to prevent potential escalation. FG leaders have taken proactive measures to limit the incorporation of local rhythmic styles and dancing during worship services, ensuring that participants do not become overly spirited and that leaders maintain control over the congregation. The acceptance of the steelpan in the SDA and FG communities has thus been conditional upon the avoidance or minimization of certain rhythmic styles.

The Pan Trinbago “non-competitive” category was established specifically for Christian steelbands that prefer performance over competition to avoid the cultural tradition of virtuosity, which can lead to “gallerying” (showing off). This choice reflects the performative roots of the steelpan, where players often “gallery” or showcase their talents. Christian bands aim to share their music and inspire audiences with gospel songs played on the steelpan. For these bands, the mission

is to minister and convey uplifting messages to the public while remaining out of the competitive spotlight. However, Hicks believes that the Spirit's work should be acknowledged and allowed to flourish, as humans should not impose limits on the divine expressions that can emerge through the steelpan. After all, if the pan is “baptized,” then the Holy Spirit can be expressed through the music without the limitations of tradition and concern for African spiritualism.

Lastly, the ongoing discourse regarding cultural forms and their distinction from cultural values remains a point of concern for leaders and churchgoers in the SDA and FG communities. In Trinidad and Tobago, cultural expressions encompass Carnival traditions such as calypso and soca music, bacchanal behavior, and Afro-Trinbago folklore characters that are often viewed as witchcraft. Pat Glasgow and other SDA members believe that cultural forms can be used as long as their values—which are associated with culture, worldliness, and secularism—are not prioritized or celebrated. For SDA and FG Christians, Trinbagonian culture is seen as embodying cult-like practices and revelry associated with worldly traditions. Christians aspire to cultivate a lifestyle focused on Heavenly pursuits, distancing themselves from worldly behaviors as exemplified by Christ; however, the goal for these leaders and steelpan musicians is finding a balance, incorporating aspects of culture while adhering to and respecting SDA and FG moral and ethical beliefs. This also signifies the challenges of sourcing a common ground for expression and values.

Clive Dottin, Thomas Isaac, and Andy Manzano have worked to include steelpan as a cultural expression while establishing certain limitations. The steelpan is used as a symbol of culture and national pride, and respecting their fundamental Christian belief by omitting local rhythms, virtuosity, and other local styles and music through steelpan performances. Leslie Moses' metaphor of “baptism” as a symbol of acceptance and inclusion allows cultural contribution and transforms the stigma of transgression in the church community. Moses's beliefs align with

Glasgow's paradigm of cultural forms versus cultural values. While Trinbagonian Christians are part of the culture, they do not subscribe to the cultural values linked to Carnival, particularly regarding local genres such as *gospelypso* and gospel reggae, which are often associated with secular music. European hymns prioritize soft and melancholic tone, text, and Godly messages, while local styles commonly feature rhythm, virtuosity, and worldly elements.

Arjoon, O. Williams, Mitchell, and Blackman have—in some ways—applied Glasgow's culture versus value theory. Arjoon has managed to compile a repertoire of hymns and gospel music with elements of local rhythms and beats. His strategy not only balances their range of musical styles but also caters to the SDA, FG, and secular groups musically. Meanwhile, O. Williams and Mitchell have welcomed *gospelypso* and steelpan in their church services. They have allowed their musicians and worship services to include local rhythms and styles that identify with local culture, national recognition, and pride. Although they have gone a step further than the SDA, they have limited certain cultural practices like dancing (wining).

Revelation 14:6-7 presents a profound biblical prophecy from the apostle John, stating, “And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto those who dwell on the earth, to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment has come: and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.” This text explains the distribution of the gospel message. The gift of salvation through the acceptance of the gospel message will be given to all people of various cultures, ethnicities, and groups in order for them to worship God. As highlighted by the SDA quarterly study guide, “God is drawing together a transnational, multilingual, multiracial, cross-cultural community” (SDA Sabbath School Quarterly, p 10; June 29, 2023). While there is some uncertainty among churchgoers in the SDA

and FG communities regarding the extent to which culture should be integrated into church life, the Bible, as their primary source of guidance, embraces culture and tradition in the service of God. Therein lies the question: How much do we, as Christians, uphold biblical truth, or have we been misled by conventions and traditions shaped by colonialism and racism?

In another event I attended, SDA brass bands and Pangelics participated in a music competition known as the “Battles of the Band,” where three bands competed by performing gospel tunes. I noticed that all the bands incorporated local rhythms into their renditions of songs like “Oh Happy Day” and “Jesus Is The Rock.” The audience and supporters were actively engaged by dancing and singing along to the lyrics. However, the use of these local styles and rhythms is often limited within the church, resulting in Americentric styles taking precedence during worship services. This reflects a broader trend of North American influences that can overshadow local culture and the steelpan in Trinidad and Tobago, although these elements are still celebrated in social gatherings outside of the church.

The steelpan was born out of a need to resist and respond to the oppression faced by working-class Afro-Trinidadians in the early to mid-twentieth century. Its roots are in the Jamette Carnival that began with the participation of newly liberated Black people in the 1840s, shaping Carnival as a space to express resentment and resistance. When the steelbands emerged 100 years later they were a continuation of that resistance. More importantly, playing pan was a way for them to make music, experience joy and that in itself was an act of defiance against the colonial system. One could say that the steelpan was created to make a joyful noise, as Psalms 100 instructs us to do, and as such, it is a Celestial Sound of worship. These attitudes are rooted in ideologies of anti-blackness and anti-Africanness that are woven into the Christian church's very foundations, specifically in Trinidad and Tobago. Despite such doubts and ideologies, there has been an

increasing shift in Christian attitudes towards the steelband. Youthful participation through music ministry, international acceptance, and the government's involvement in boosting public music education all help explain the increasing welcome for the celestial sounds of steel in Trinidad and Tobago's churches.

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