

The East of the River Police Boys and Girls Steelband

Since 1993, hundreds of young people from the District of Columbia have participated in the East of the River Police Boys and Girls Steelband, a program that seeks to enhance the lives of those most at risk of not becoming healthy, productive adults.

One measure of the band's success is that some former members have maintained their appreciation and love for the steelpan. The steelpan originated in the Caribbean island of Trinidad and is the only acoustic musical instrument invented in the twentieth century. Two of the program's earliest participants, Bianca James, 12-years-old when she entered the program, and Gary Fisher, who was eight, are now Hampton University alumni who continue to play the steelpan. Gary recently completed a masters degree in performing music from the University of Mississippi. He has recently returned to "Ole Miss" to pursue a Ph.D. in music theory.



Another shining example of the Steelband's long-term impact on its students can be found in the musical pursuits of Albert Strong, IV, who entered the program at 14. Albert received his undergraduate degree in performing music from North Carolina Central University and his master's

degree in performing music from Northern Illinois University. He is currently on tour with Carnival Cruise Line.

The East of the River Police Boys and Girls Steelband works with young people —11 to 18 years old – who have unique creative abilities and who live east of the Anacostia River. In addition to training most of the students in steelpan, the Steelband program offers tutoring, mentoring, Life Skills training and exposes students to educational and cultural activities.

Founded 23 years ago by executive director Dr. Gladys Whitworth Bray as a substance abuse prevention program for at-risk youth, the Steelband has grown to be much more than just another program to keep young people off the streets of Washington's inner-city neighborhoods. Artists, administrators and audiences – both at home and far from home – consider the East of the River Police Boys and Girls Steelband a minor miracle of a musical institution that continues its mission of enhancing young lives.

The Steelband, a nonprofit program with free enrollment, operates from the Metropolitan Police Boys and Girls Club, at 4103 Benning Road, N.E. The staff includes an executive director, a program manager, a band manager and four teacher-artists. The program serves about 95 students through its after-school, summer and Saturday programs.



Performances

Distinguished Trinidadian composer and arranger Roger Greenidge trains the students during after-school, Saturday and summer classes held throughout the year. Once proficient, the students are allowed to display their skills during performances.

Since 1993, the Steelband has entertained nearly a million people in more than a half dozen states, the District of Columbia, and in the Caribbean. Among the Steelband's

notable performances are: opening ceremonies for the Washington-venue soccer games for the 1996 Olympics; the National Safe Schools Conference in Harrisburg, Pa. (1997); the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife (2000); and, Savannah's Black Heritage Festival (2002). The Steelband has attended the Harambee Festival in Hendersonville, N.C. twice, has been to the original Gullah Festival in Beaufort, S.C. nine times and has performed three times at City Hall in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. The Steelband has also performed in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, North Carolina, Georgia and Florida.

In the Greater Washington area, the Steelband has performed for patients, staff and families at the Washington Home for Senior Citizens, the Hospital for Sick Children and the Children's National Medical Center, and for constituents and staff of the District of Columbia Public Schools, the D.C. Public Libraries and the D. C. Department of Recreation and Parks. Other area performances include the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, Wolf Trap's Theater in the Woods, and in December 2005, receptions for the National League of Cities and the Black Caucus of State Legislators. The Steelband has also entertained at events for such programs as Habitat for Humanity, the Black Family Reunion and Drug-Free Schools and Safe Communities.

More than music



While musical education is the soul of the Steelband program, the students are also exposed to other initiatives that enhance their maturation.

- Life Skills training involves exploring

such topics as substance abuse prevention, anger and anxiety management, self-esteem and self-improvement. Jawanza Kunjufu's Self-Esteem Through Culture Leads to Academic Excellence (SETCLAE) Student Profile and the D.C. State Incentive Student Survey are administered on a pre- and post-test basis to assess the effectiveness of the program on self-esteem, drug knowledge and attitudes.

Positive role models can have positive effects on attitudes and behavior. Steelband students participate in the Kijiji Wazee (Village Elders) program, an intergenerational mentoring effort that facilitates interaction between young people and adults.

The Steelband's travels have exposed students to different cultures and given them unique educational experiences. During a trip to the Toronto area in 2005, for example, the students toured the British Methodist Episcopal Church, Salem Chapel, that was the last stop on the Underground Railroad, and visited other sites along the Niagara Freedom Trail. Through the U.S.-Trinidad and Tobago International Youth and Cultural Exchange program, the Steelband has performed three times in Trinidad. Every year, the Steelband performs at the Gullah Festival in Beaufort, South Carolina, where students are once again exposed to their rich cultural heritage.

As a nonprofit, the Steelband depends upon contributions and grants to fund programs. The Steelband offers dance and craft classes contingent upon the availability of those resources.

Accomplishments

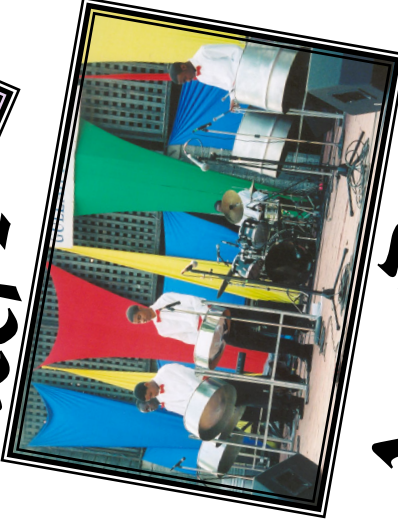


That the Steelband has accomplished its mission is evident in the recognition it has received: the U.S. Department of Education's Drug-Free Schools and Safe Communities "Shining Star" award (1994); the District of Columbia's Mayor's Arts award for "Outstanding Emerging Artist" (1997); and the President's Commission on the Arts and Humanities "Certificate of Excellence" (2000). In 2002, the Steelband took second place at the legendary "Amateur Night" at the Apollo Theater. Also to the band's credit are an audiocassette tape, "Take One" and a CD, "Rising".

**THE EAST OF THE RIVER
POLICE
BOYS AND GIRLS**



Steel-



band



CONTACT INFORMATION

The Metropolitan Police Boys and Girls Club #14
(Richard England Clubhouse and Community Center)
4103 Benning Road N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20019

Http://WWW.EORSteelBand.org

Mr. Clarence James: 202-584-6023
Dr. Gladys W. Bray: 202-584-6035
Mrs. Rita Dozier: 202-575-2347
202-397-CLUB Ext. 8220

EMAIL:
eorstlbnd@aol.com
cejameseor@aol.com

Funding for the East of the River Police Boys and Girls Steelband is made possible through the D.C. Department of Health's Addiction Prevention and Recovery Administration's Office of Prevention and Youth Services, D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities, The United Planning Organization, The Hitachi Foundation and the generous support of corporate and individual donors. The East of the River Police Boys and Girls Steelband is a non-profit 501c(3) program.

THE EAST OF THE RIVER BOYS AND GIRLS

STEELBAND

METROPOLITAN POLICE BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB
(6D - #14)
4103 BENNING ROAD, N.E.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20019-3423

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