It's an instrument unlike any you've ever seen or heard. Tracing its origins to early 20th century Trinidad, the steel pan is constructed by hammering notes into the sunken bottom of an oil drum and played using small, rubber-tipped mallets. But the instrument's outward simplicity belies complex origins.

“For the people of Trinidad, the steel pan represents irrepressible creativity and a determination to express themselves and assert themselves through music and performance,” says Shannon Dudley, associate professor of ethnomusicology and author of Carnival Music in Trinidad and Music From Behind the Bridge, a history of steelband music in Trinidad.