

—An 'Import' From Trinidad—

'Pans' Pounded For St. Stephen

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Because an admiral, a retired Navy chief petty officer and a native of Trinidad share a mutual interest, St. Stephen High School soon may have the first steel band in the United States.

In case you didn't know, a steel band is a group of musicians making music on the tops of old 55-gallon oil drums. And what they make really is music, not just a cacophony of sounds.

Rear Adm. Dan V. Gallery, commandant of the 10th Naval District with headquarters in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and also commander of the Caribbean Sea Command, is a rabid steel band fan.

Former Navy Chief Musician C. A. Roeper, who retired last year and is now band director at St. Stephen High School, directed a steel band for three years.

Ellie Menett of Port au Spain, Trinidad, is a steel band expert.

In March, 1957 Adm. Gallery

heard a native steel band in Trinidad. He liked it and assigned his chief musician, Mr. Roeper, to organize one.

Chief Roeper, who has been a musician practically all his life, now admits he was skeptical. Whoever heard of making music with oil drums? In fact, he wasn't even interested—he was due to retire shortly.

But the admiral sent him to Trinidad to hear a native band. "Once heard it," Chief Roeper said, "I knew that steel bands were for me."

Chief Roeper decided not to retire. Instead he found Mannette, a machinist by trade but who is considered one of the foremost steel bandmen in Trinidad. In 1950 he was the leader of the Invaders Steel Band which presented concerts in England and France.

Mannette was hired to make the instruments for the Navy band and in May, 1957, it gave its first concert at the Navy Relief Carnival in San Juan. For the next three years the Navy steel band, directed by Chief

Roeper, performed for President Eisenhower, at the Navy Relief Ball in Washington, at the Mardi Gras in New Orleans and in other leading U.S. cities.

In 1958 it was the only group invited for a return engagement at the Worlds Fair in Brussels.

Last October Chief Roeper, who once headed the Sixth District band, retired from the Navy and settled in North Charleston.

The chief's heart was still with steel bands and so he talked or organizing a steel band at the Berkeley County school. He won the support of Dr. Legrand Yarborough, superintendent of schools in that area, and was given the go-ahead.

The chief had brought with him from the islands six instruments, all made by Mannette. And for two months he has been teaching six students to play the "pans", as they are called.

However, it was decided more pans are needed, so Mannette arrived in Charleston from Trini-

dad last Thursday and he and Chief Roeper are at work.

A pan is made by depressing the top of an oil drum by beating it with a hammer until it resembles a bird bath. Mannette explained that a deep groove—which acts as a fence—will confine any given pitch to a small portion of the surface.

So, notes are marked on the surface by scoring grooves with a hammer and punch. The drum is then heated over a fire and allowed to cool.

By turning the drum upside down and tapping the underside of the lid—lightly with a hammer, the pitch can be altered until the right one is achieved.

The drum is then cut off about six or eight inches from the top, or in the case of those to be used as bass drums, the entire oil drum is used.

The fewer areas notched on the drum top, the deeper the tone. Thus, bass drums may have only two or three areas grooved, while those with higher tones may have as many as 30 smaller areas notched.

The drum tops which produce Soprano tones are known as "ping pongs," whose producing alto are known as "seconds" and are usually played in pairs. There also are cello pans and bass pans.

When he was asked to come here, Mannette refused and told Mr. Roeper that because of the stories he had heard of racial trouble he was somewhat afraid to come to the South.

However, Mr. Roeper prevailed upon him and after being in Charleston only three days he said, "It isn't at all like I was told or the stories I've heard."

Chief Roeper said he hopes to have about 14 pans in the St. Stephen steel band but admits "... you've got to go slow. When you mention steel bands using the tops of old oil drums people think you're crazy."

Well, the 10th Naval District steel band will be in the Charleston area during the week of April 20th so maybe folks around here can hear what a first class steel band sounds like.

