

# Students flood

ANDREW MARTIN  
AND RAY FUNK

The second weekend in May brings hundreds of pan students to the Virginia coast for beaches, fun, sun, and great pan. The 11th annual PANorama Caribbean Music Festival will be held on Friday and Saturday at the 24th Street Oceanfront Park and Virginia Beach Convention Centre, Virginia Beach, Virginia.

The event is co-sponsored by the Virginia Arts Festival and Beach events, and is one of a series of summer weekend events held in the area.

The festival is hosted by the Virginia Rhythm Project and over 25 high school, college, and community steelbands participate in the competition. Founded in 2002, the festival is a must-attend event for many steelbands and continues to be a major draw for primary and secondary school pan sides in the eastern half of the United States.

Besides the annual steelband competition, the festival features a performance by the host steelband, the Virginia Rhythm Project. The band is the primary force in pan music in Virginia and is directed by Sophia Subero.

The project is an after-school world percussion and dance programme based in the Greater Norfolk/Virginia Beach area of Virginia.

Founded in 1996, the project's mission is to bring multicultural artistic excellence and education to the youth and educators of northeastern Virginia but the influence of the organisation has far exceeded these geographic boundaries, now effectively encompassing the Atlantic Coast and beyond.

The Virginia Rhythm Project is a multi-ethnic world music programme comprised of steel band, African drum and dance, and other Caribbean musical genres. However, the steelpan element of the programme, which is comprised of five ensembles, dominates the curriculum.

The project began as an outgrowth of the Virginia Arts Festival and was the brainchild of the Portsmouth General Hospital Foundation. The not-for-profit organisation sponsors arts programmes in Northeast Virginia, an area which encompasses the cities of Norfolk, Hampton, Portsmouth, and Virginia Beach.

The project is structured as five individual steelbands with a sixth group—the All-Stars—which is an audition-only ensemble comprised of the top players from each of the five feeder steelbands. These bands have regular rehearsals and perform all year round.

The All-Stars are the main touring band and have performed extensively throughout the US and Canada with internationally-known recording artists such as Gladys Knight and at high-profile academic events such as the 2005 Percussive Arts Society International Convention. The ensembles have also been featured on several regional radio broadcasts.

The pan ensembles were initially added to the project as an afterschool activity designed to keep at-risk youths and juveniles occupied and out of trouble.

According to former director Dr Anthony Hailey: "We start with the school year and get the kids going after school.

"Each one of them is an after-school rehearsal and we felt that was very crucial for the middle school groups. And because they're reaching puberty, a lot of them go home and their parents don't get home until five or six o'clock, so we wanted to make sure to occupy that time in-between school and parental supervision at home."

The Virginia Rhythm Project steelbands, including the elite All-Stars steelband, are open to all socio-economic levels and require only a brief audition process with a primary focus on rhythmic capabilities.

The project is a community-building organisation that is interested in positively shaping the lives of its ensemble members in the long term. This is nowhere more apparent than on the band's Web site

# Students flock to Virginia for steelpan festival

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One of the ensembles of the Virginia Rhythm Project during a performance.  
PHOTO: KATHRYN RINKER

<http://www.virginiaartsfest.com/2013/rhythm-project-main>—which lists the names and institutions of college-bound band members alongside the regular ensemble roster.

The steelband programme has been run for the last few years by Subero, a native Trinidadian, who is a leading pan educator that earned a graduate degree in steelpan at Northern Illinois University and a bachelor's degree in music from University of the West Indies, St Augustine.

She is a longtime member of Exodus and was the winner in the soloist category at the World Steelband Music Festival in 2000.

This year's festival will be Subero's swan song as she will be moving on to the Baltimore/Washington, DC, area later this summer to pursue other opportunities.

Subero will be replaced as artistic director of the Virginia Rhythm Project by current assistant director Dave Longfellow.

Longfellow had the fortune of growing up in Morgantown, West Virginia, and from an early age became mesmerised by the pan-making skills of Ellie Mannette.

Longfellow has since devoted his life to pan and has made the sojourn down to Trinidad several times to play with Renegades as recently as Carnival 2013.

In addition to his work with the Virginia Rhythm Project, Longfellow leads his own small steelband and has recorded two albums.

The festival will feature a series of nationally and internationally known adjudicators who will offer workshops and judge the steelband competition. These include Liam Teague, Gary Gibson, Jonathan Scales, Yuko Asada, and Leonard Moses. The test piece for the mass band performance held on the festival's opening night was written by Moses.

The renowned ADLIB Steel Orchestra from Long Island, New York, will headline the festival on both Friday and Saturday night.

They have repeatedly won Brooklyn carnival throughout the past decade and are the current champions. This will be the band's first trip to Virginia Beach and will be a great opportunity for pan fans to hear the work of the group's brilliant young arranger and leader Andre White.

Also appearing on the Saturday night concert of the festival is the Jonathan Scales Fouestra. Scales and his band are the barnstorming group who are constantly on the road, tirelessly bringing a unique pan-combo style to all corners of the world. The band is about to release their fourth album in June.

All concerts of the PANorama Caribbean Music Festival are free and open to the public. The atmosphere is relaxed and the event is truly enjoyable, giving the public a chance to see and hear the growing excellence of pan programmes in the region.