

Catonsville High School Steel Band

The Catonsville High School Steel Band, directed by Jim Wharton, was founded in 1991 and for seven years was the only school steel drum program in the state of Maryland. From a band with one lead pan, a set of double second pans, a set of guitar pans, and a set of tenor-bass pans, the band grew to its present instrumentation of five leads, three double tenors, four double seconds, three sets of guitar pans, a set of cello pans, a set of tenor-basses, and two sets of six-basses.

Formed as a means for students to study and perform music from a culture other than their own, the band shares the music of Trinidad and Tobago with audiences throughout the Maryland region. Over 30 performances are presented annually in settings as diverse as school assemblies, the Inner Harbor Amphitheatre, university conferences, state and national conventions of music educators, community festivals, church and synagogue social events and services, and the back of a flat-bed truck in the Catonsville Fourth of July Parade. The band has appeared on the Baltimore County Education Channel, WJZ-TV, WMAR-TV, and WBAL-Radio. During the past five years, the band was featured in articles in the *Baltimore Sun*, *Baltimore Magazine*, and *Newsday* from Port of Spain, Trinidad. Additionally, the band performed with internationally known steel drum artist, Andy Narell, at the Berks County Jazz Festival in Reading, Pennsylvania, in 2001. In the past few years, the band has performed with the Trinidadian steel pan recording artist and arranger, Ken "Professor" Philmore, the Trinidadian steel pan composer and arranger, Ray Holman, and the Dixieland/zydeco sensation, Dixie Power Trio. On April 17, 2008, the composer and jazz pan master, Andy Narell, performed with the band in a gala concert in the Catonsville High School auditorium.

The band has produced several compact disk recordings. The first CD, *Catonsville High School Steel Band*, was released in 2000 and includes calypsos, socas, jazz, two classical selections, and classic popular tunes. The second CD, *When Spirit Meets Steel*, was released in 2003 and includes more jazz oriented pieces along with calypsos, socas, reggaes, and the Panorama version of "Pan Woman." The most recent CDs, *CHS Steel Live with Ray Holman*, *CHS Steel Live with Dixie Power Trio*, *Ray Jam 2007*, and *Andy Narell and CHS Steel Live* are compact disk recordings of spectacular concerts at CHS with famed artist/composers of the pan world.

Most students in the band are also members of the school chorus, orchestra, or band program and represent all grade levels in the school. Two-hour rehearsals are held after school three days every week. Each year, auditions are held for the few open positions in the band. None of the students in the band have had prior experience playing steel drums.

The repertoire of the band covers many different styles, from classical to jazz and rock. Emphasis is placed on learning to play calypso and soca, the most popular styles of music heard in the island nation of Trinidad and Tobago.