Dear Beloved Oberlin Steelpan Friends,

PAN CONTINUES TO THRIVE at Oberlin, thanks to the spirit and energy of the young members of Oberlin Steel. They continue to be awesome.

In this issue of the Oberlin Steel Alumni Newsletter you will once again meet the most newly minted members of OSteel, as well as hear from our most decrepit alumnus (me). So we’ve got a nice spectrum. And somewhere between those extremes you’ll get an appreciation of something that few other college pan players have ever experienced: the excitement of playing in, and winning with (again!), a real live champion Panorama band. You’ll also gain insight into the bigger picture of the evolution of pan and Panorama, and the politics therein.

Enjoy the second annual Oberlin Steel Alumni Newsletter!

Peter Mayer ’82
Oberlin Steel Alumni Association

NEWS FROM THE CARIBBEAN AND NYC

By Noah Smit ’05

I WAS OBERLIN STEEL’S DRUMMER from 2001 to 2005. While I rarely touched a pan during my time there, I really got into the rhythm section side of it. I was drawn to the way that each rhythm instrument fit into the polyrhythmic matrix of calypso and soca. A few months after joining OSteel, I heard panorama music for the first time—a recording of Renegades performing “Pan In A Minor” as arranged by Jit Samaroo. We had been playing a simple verse-chorus version of the tune, so this complicated arrangement was identifiable and accessible. Still, I was blown away by the power and sophistication of it; to me it seemed like a secret and much more exciting branch of classical music, with groove. It hooked me in, and thus began a pursuit that had me seeking out as much of this music as I could.

By my junior year I decided that I wanted to take part in Panorama, following in the footsteps of several Can Consortium alumni who had participated in it years before. So, in August 2004 I performed in the Brooklyn Panorama; in February 2005 I traveled to Trinidad & Tobago, playing with that same Renegades for Panorama. In these initial forays, I played a scratcher, as the rhythm section hierarchy was one I was too green to ascend. I just wanted to be part of the experience and to learn how these rhythm sections worked, up close.

In the years after, I kept traveling to Trinidad and Brooklyn to play in Panorama. In 2006 I got a major break in Brooklyn with Pan Sonatas, whose arranger, Yohan Popwell, asked me to play percussion (another name for the timbales/bongos/cymbal setup). Then a few years later, in 2009, I was given the opportunity to play drum set for a steel orchestra in Panorama in Trinidad. The band was Sforzata, whose arranger was also Yohan Popwell. We won the Medium Category of that year’s competition.

Since then I have primarily played drum set or percussion in Panorama. There is a good deal of responsibility involved because not only do the drummer and percussionist determine the drive and mood of the rhythm section and therefore the entire orchestra, but they have a part to play in reinforcing and adding flavor to the arrangement. This is expressed in hits, accents, rhythm changes, and so forth. Sometimes arrangers will direct me with specific ideas, while other times I am able to be creative and make my own contributions to the arrangement. Because of this, I must work closely with arrangers, who rely on me not only to drive the rhythm of the band but also to understand and complement what they are trying to express musically.

One arranger I work with often is Amrit Samaroo, whose now-retired father, Jit Samaroo, created that piece of music that originally opened my ears and mind years ago. The apple does not fall far from the tree, and I had always enjoyed Amrit’s work. I first worked with him in 2007 but

continued on page 7
MEIGHAN MATTHEWS ’89
Meighan writes: “Happily continuing to drum, I have joined an Afro-Brazilian drum group called Bloco AfroBrazil, led by Marcus Santos of Grooversity out of Berklee College of Music (wearing green and yellow hair in the above photo—I’m peeking out from the lower right corner). He has taught and launched similar performance groups all over the country and internationally. Needless to say, I am in over my head, and brain circuits are firing on all cylinders to try to keep up. I am also continuing to study djembe with Berklee’s Mohamed Kalifa Kamara from Guinea, and my kids and I sing in a 60-member group called the Family Folk Chorale. Looking forward to my 25th Oberlin Reunion this spring!”

AMY BATTISTI-ASHÉ ’90
Amy writes: “I have been planning to send this for months and months—ever since that first edition of the most excellent OSteel alumni newsletter showed up in my mailbox and I saw all sorts of references to people I knew. Most entertainingly, there was a photo of myself and my fellow frontliners [below left]. My fellow frontliners, Alison (“Ali-Cat”) Hinderliter (left) and Meighan Matthews (right), are both class of 1989. John Campbell ’90 is on cellos, and the inimitable Ben Saferstein Cohen ’86—also mentioned in the 2013 issue—is on bass. Me? I am that band member whom the camera caught in mid-air. I had such a blast at that gig! And, well, pretty much every gig we ever played, as I remember. Does anyone else remember playing a Fireman’s Ball in Elyria? Now that was a show. At our first OSteel reunion, I had the pleasure of hanging out with some OSteel alumni a few decades younger than me, and I have to say, it was a delight to see that the band still rocks and that the enthusiasm for pan has only grown over the years. While my life has veered away from instrumental performance, I have been able to keep my hand in college radio, playing Salsa Dura and Timba for the masses on WMBR-FM, MIT’s station (88.1), so I still have a little Caribbean connection. I am very thankful for that. Much love to all.”

STEPHEN LIND ’06
Stephen writes: “It just wouldn’t do to have ‘Pan in A Minor’ as part of my wedding (pic below); I planned for them to steel the show from the beginning. It was like a ‘Musical Volcano,’ remnants all around us. And when it was all done, ‘Ding! Go lay’ down. And I thought, ‘Dis feeling nice.’”

LILY ROSENMAN ’03
Lily Rosenman ’03 lives in Austin, Texas, and gave birth to baby girl Rosie Johnson (below) in September 2013. With the new arrival, she’s deciding to leave the corporate world behind (it was never a good fit anyway!) and figure out what’s next (aside from the daunting task of motherhood). In her free time, she is achieving her New Year’s resolution of playing a little pan on her favorite tunes Caravan and Quasi! www.lilyrosenman.com

DEVON STROLOVITCH ’97
Devon Strolovitch (double seconds 1995-97) continued to play pan in graduate school at Cornell and in the Bay Area with the CSM Pandhandlers. He now works as a radio producer in San Francisco, hosting a weekly blues show, *Fog City Blues*, and producing the public radio series *Philosophy Talk* (hosted by two Stanford philosophy professors), both of which air locally on KALW 91.7 FM. In 2013, Devon and his co-producers won a Peabody Award for their series spotlighting selections from the National Recording Registry at the Library of Congress: http://www.studio360.org/series/inside-national-recording-registry/
THREE FORMER MEMBERS OF CALLIOPE’S CHILDREN from Horace Greeley High School ended up at Oberlin together: Mike Geller ’83, Toby Gordon ’82, and me. I matriculated in 1978, and Mike and Toby in 1979. One fateful fall day in 1980, walking across Wilder Bowl, Mike came up to me and said, “We have to start a steelband.”

“That would be great, Mike,” I replied. “But it’s impossible.”

“I’ve already talked to Toby about it and he agrees. We have to start a steelband,” Mike repeated with a smile and walked on. Some say it was the greatest moment in the history of Oberlin College.

Mike owned a pair of double tenors, Toby had a pair of seconds, and I had a lead pan. Mike somehow found Zoe Sherinian ’84, who owned a set of double tenors, and convinced a former Calliope’s Children player back in New York to send us her cellos. He also persuaded our parents to give the school $1,500. The money was used to buy new pans from Ellie Mannette, including a 6-bass, two more leads, a set of cellos, and another set of seconds. Mike also came up with the idea of calling the band the “Can Consortium” so we wouldn’t have to change the “CC” logos on all the Calliope’s Children pans and cases that we had.

Mike next asked his roommate, John Michener ’83, to play bass; he played string bass at first while waiting for the new pans to arrive. Shannon Dudley ’82 was a friend of mine from biology class. I asked him if he was interested in music, which he was, and in playing in a steelband, which he found intriguing. After hearing more about it, he wanted to try his hand at cellos. David Dunn ’83 was a friend from my dorm, Barrows Hall, and he wanted to give it a try on lead pan. Finally, Mike found Jim Chlebak ’84 and two conservatory percussion majors, John Jutsum ’83 and Peter Pollack ’84, plus several others to round out the band on drum set and percussion.

The Oberlin Can Consortium germinated during winter term 1981. We practiced day and night, learning a large repertoire of Jimmy Leyden’s arrangements from Calliope’s Children. The first concert of the Can Consortium was February 12, 1981, in Warner Main. The original band had 13 members. They were: Lead Pan: David Dunn ’83, John Jutsum ’83, Peter Mayer ’82, Peter Pollack ’84; Double Tenors / Seconds: Mike Geller ’83, Toby Gordon ’82, Zoe Sherinian ’84; Cellos: Jim Chlebak ’84, Shannon Dudley ’82; Bass: John Michener ’83; and Percussion: Carl Radens ’83, Jim Rich ’83, Doug Schulkind ’83.

The audience went crazy! People clapped, cheered, hollered, whistled, stomped and danced in the aisles. It was the magic again.

That year we played numerous gigs, including the Cat in the Cream, the Lions Club, a big party at Keep Coop, and several others. Then Mike had another brilliant idea: make steelpan an ExCo course, thereby providing a way to funnel new talent into the band year after year.

Later that same year, 1981, Shannon Dudley found his life’s calling in steelpan and ethnomusicology. Shannon connected with several giants of pan and arranged for a concert in Finney Chapel featuring guest visits from Andy Narell and Ellie Mannette. Andy sent several tunes ahead of his arrival, which we diligently practiced and played with him in concert. Also that year, at the request of the conservatory, a professional studio recording of the band was made in Warner Concert Hall. CDs of the original concert, the Finney Chapel concert and the Warner Concert Hall recording are available in the conservatory library.

continued on page 4
A BRIEF HISTORY, continued

David Dunn, Alan Herrmann ’84 and John Wertheimer ’85 were important early contributors to the Can Consortium. David wrote “Sarah’s Samba,” perhaps the most played tune in Oberlin pan history and still played to this day. Alan Herrmann wrote and arranged several tunes for the band, including Aaron Copeland’s “Hoedown” featuring Brian Dean ’83 on fiddle, and he negotiated the basement of Hales Gym for the panyard, the band’s permanent home ever since. John Wertheimer also wrote several original tunes which the band played for many years.

As the band members graduated, others took over. Over time the name changed to Oberlin Steel (aka OSteel), and the band became progressively more professional and proficient. Linda Papademas ’82 was the first Obie to play in a major Panorama band, Pan Sonatas, in New York City in 1989. Toby and Mike were the first to visit Trinidad during Carnival, in 1983. Many others followed in their footsteps and played with champion Panorama bands in New York City or Trinidad, including Anna van der Horst ’08, Anne Thompson ’12, Chris Canning ’12, Jody Ann Allen ’08, Katherine Erickson ’06, Michael Geraci ’07, Mona Barber ’09, Noah Smit ’05, Patia Maule ’03, Rosa Tu ’11, Stephen Lind ’05, Ze’ev Saffir ’08, and Zeke Runyon ’10.

Many additional Can Consortium/OSteel alumni have gone on to play with smaller bands in their home environs after graduating, or have continued to make pan an ongoing part of their lives in other ways. Most notably, Shannon Dudley PhD, associate professor of ethnomusicology at the University of Washington, has become an internationally renowned pan historian. Shannon has written a seminal history of pan in Trinidad, Music from Behind the Bridge, (Oxford University Press, 2004) and many other publications.

Countless other Oberlin Can Consortium moments, memories, and personalities have combined to make Oberlin Steel what it is today: an outstanding steelband, in the finest pan tradition.

BECOME AN OSTEEL ANGEL

When giving to the Oberlin Annual Fund, consider directing your gift to Oberlin Steel! Visit the online giving form at oberlin.edu/donate. You can specify “Donation to Oberlin Steel” in the instructions box. Thank you for your support.
MEET THE BAND

EMMA BERG is from East Lansing, Mich., and is a sophomore at Oberlin. She has been in the band for almost two semesters now and is undecided on her major but is pondering what the life of an anthropologist would be like. She loves playing the steel drums, and she loves her fellow band mates.

ELIOT HART-NELSON is a third-year comparative American studies major who plays 6 bass in the band. He spent fall semester in Berlin and jumped for joy whenever he heard steel drum featured in a club techno track. In his free time, Eliot enjoys practicing mindfulness, drinking too much coffee, and trying to stay sane against all odds.

JOSEPH FARAGO is a freshman and a new member of OSteel. He got into playing the steel drums because he saw his friend filling out an application for the ExCo and wanted to be cool and fit in. Besides this severe insecurity, Joseph finds comfort in writing poetry and listening to music. He also has an extreme appreciation for tupperware but doesn’t want to mention that in his bio.

JESS HUBERT is a sophomore who joined OSteel this past fall. She is a neuroscience major, and there might be a minor in her future. Other than OSteel, she plays the cello and loves ultimate Frisbee and longboarding!

ISABEL HULKOWER is a tenor-playing sophomore from Virginia. She is still undecided in terms of a major so if you have any ideas, seriously, HMU. She enjoys striped shirts, sweet potatoes, and writing letters to celebrities in prison.

MONICA HUNTER-HART (band co-director) is a junior English major with an international studies concentration. She joined Oberlin Steel in the second semester of her freshman year, and has been groovin’ on the tenor ever since! She has two small goals for her post-Oberlin life: reforming the American education system, and learning how to tell when a peach is absolutely perfectly ripe.

BECKY JONES is a fourth-year history and politics double major. This is her third semester in the band, where she plays double seconds. Outside of the OSteel, she teaches Spanish at Prospect Elementary school and works for an immigrant rights advocacy, outreach, and legal aide organization based out of Canton, Ohio. She looks forward to graduating in the spring and moving somewhere warm.

NOAH JONES is a senior in the college, majoring in physics and English, and has been in OSteel since the fall of his freshman year. He spent a couple years on percussion before switching to double tenor. He loves to move his limbs about. When he grows up he wants to be a break drum.

AUDREY KNOX (band co-director) is a third-year psychology major who had a ton of fun learning the 6 bass this semester (while the band’s regular 6 bass rock star, Eliot, was studying abroad in Germany) and is excited to head back home to the tenor section next semester. She is also a member of OC Taiko, plays violin, and appreciates occasional free time when she can swing it!

JAMES LUTTRELL is a senior majoring in environmental studies with minors in mathematics and politics. He began playing in OSteel in the spring of 2011 and recently switched from auxiliary percussion to drum kit. He enjoys playing and writing music, listening to and learning from others, and striving to live compassionately.

MICHAEL MAZZULLO is a third-year double degree student studying percussion performance in the conservatory and art history in the college. As a native of Ellicott City, Md., Michael is skeptical about the quality of Ohio’s seafood, but approaches the matter with an “ignorance is bliss” attitude. In his free time, Michael enjoys sleeping and complaining about what little free time he has.

TOBY RAE IRVING is a comparative American studies major, with dance and history minors, set to graduate this spring. This year she switched from double tenors to tenor bass, which has been a fun highlight of a busy semester. She is looking forward to next semester, when she will be part time and can focus on dance and steel drums and having a good ol’ time.

TOM RATHE is a fourth-year environmental studies major from Charlottesville, Va. This year he's moved from the double seconds to auxiliary percussion. Tom likes to ride his bicycle long distances, chat about the weather, sing songs, and write things down. He loves OSteel dearly and looks forward to tour in the spring!

KATIE ROTMAN is a fourth-year studio art major from Montreal. She’s been playing tenor in the band since her sophomore year. This year she’s been enjoying spending all her time either in the studio or in the panyard and was lucky enough to teach the ExCo this fall with Becky Jones. Katie is just as in love with the steel drums as she was when she took the ExCo herself and can’t wait to play at her own Illumination this spring!

OLIVIA SALAS plays cellos in OSteel. She’s from southern California and is doing a double-degree in classical bass performance and neuroscience. She’s currently a junior and is pretty psyched to be playing some awesome steel drum music with some awesome people.

NOAH SANDERSON is a second year jazz major and plays double seconds in OSteel. His schedule includes music, then music, and then music again, and then stealing things from the dumpster. He also enjoys cereal at 2 a.m. while looking at the stars.
MEET THE BAND, continued

PETER SAUDEK is a third-year environmental studies and politics major from Massachusetts. He plays auxiliary percussion in OSteel, with a side of guitar and piano to accompany every sunrise before class. Most days he can be spotted wandering about campus following his macrosmatic (acute olfactory) senses to inform him of the next best step in life, and usually ends up at Lupita’s Mexican Restaurant downtown. He’s thrilled to be a new member of the band, and he begins to hyperventilate when thinking about his first Steel tour this spring.

JEREMY SIMON, a first-year student from Ann Arbor, Mich., has been a dog walker since day one, but now mostly just goes to school. He’s allergic to cats and has always connected with pooches. He is undecided in his major but enjoys psychology and environmental studies. In addition to playing in OSteel, he is an independent hip hop singer trying to make it big.

SAM WHITE joined OSteel in fall 2013. He is a second-year student in the college and plans to declare a double major in politics and law and society. Outside the band, Sam is a member of the Oberlin Obertones, an avid guitarist and photographer, and a news and opinions contributor for various student periodicals.

ERIC XUE is a third-year student studying biology and environmental studies. He was born in San Francisco, but lived in Shanghai his entire life. Sometimes he feels that neither is home, and most of the time he appreciates that he has family and friends on opposite sides of the world. He loves the fresh air and humble vibe of Oberlin, but misses traversing the grimy, crowded, loud streets of Shanghai. In his free time, Eric enjoys skateboarding and talking to dogs.

MAYA ZEEMONT is a second-year neuroscience major from Berkeley, Calif. As a new member, she spends a little time learning to play the double seconds and a lot of time excitedly freaking out over the fact that she is even in the band. Seriously, she still can’t believe this dream has come true. When she is not all-consumed with such excitement, she spends time singing, bowling, snacking, and skyping with her dog.

OSTEEL ALUMNI IN NEW YORK PANORAMA

ZEEV SAFFIR ’08
For the 10th consecutive year, OSteel alumni joined the ranks of Brooklyn’s Steel Orchestras for the annual Panorama competition. The winning band, CASYM Steel Orchestra, included Stephen Lind and Michael Geraci on tenor, Zeve Saffir on double tenor, Zeke Runyon on double seconds, and Noah Smit on drums. Playing with Crossfire Steel Orchestra was alumna Linda Papademas.

The results of this year’s Panorama were fraught with tension regarding the use of the E-Pan, an electronic steelpan instrument, by the winning band. CASYM’s performance included conch and tubular bell sounds incorporated from the original Fantastic Friday soca tune by Superblue. Saffir, who holds a degree in French horn performance, played an authentic conch shell, while arranger Duwayne Stewart generated the tubular bell sounds on the E-Pan. While the arrangement went over well with the judges, some in the crowd believed that the E-Pan gave CASYM an advantage over the competition. “Should a cyclist in the Tour De France be allowed to attach a motor to his bike so he can move faster?” asked one commenter on steelpan forum whensteeltalks.com. Stewart himself sees this as “trying change in the game of Panorama…I never thought it [would’ve] been such a problem.”

Despite this controversy, the OSteel alumni enjoy the opportunity to play in Panorama year after year. At this point, Panorama is more than just a competition—it’s an opportunity to reunite with friends, play pan, and build lasting memories for years to come.

ZEKE RUNYON ’10
On the morning of Panorama in Brooklyn, we were chatting with a longtime member of CASYM Steel Orchestra at the panyard, where the band was decorating the racks, doing last-minute repairs, hanging signs, and packing up pans for the big night. He mentioned that when he was a teenager they used to play at colleges, and he recalled traveling to Oberlin in 1989 or 1990 to play a concert.

Months later, I was going through some Oberlin recordings and found a concert from April 1990 sent to me by Joshua Salesin ’90, a conservatory alum who made a few recordings of the band at the time. Before the Can Consortium’s final song, a band member announced “we have the rare opportunity to bring the Children’s Steel Drum Band of Brooklyn” to play, but unfortunately the tape ended right after.

When I first heard that announcement a few years ago, we had no idea which Brooklyn band it was, but now I thought it might be CASYM. I got back in touch with Josh, who remembered recording the visiting band and said he’d get back to me. Lo and behold, he found the recording and sent it my way. I checked with some friends in Brooklyn, and the voice of the band’s arranger, Arddin Herbert, on the recording confirmed it was indeed CASYM.

Their set list features such standards of the steelband repertoire such as “Eine Kleine Nacht musik” and “Brazil” alongside popular Trinidadian calypsos of the day like Ray Holman’s “Pan in Mih System” (sung by Merchant), Tambu’s “No No We Eh Going Home,” and Ken “Professor”
not as a drummer until 2011, when he called me one night with an emergency. He was arranging for a struggling medium band—Melodians—and they were suddenly in need of a drummer. Would I be able to come in and learn the tune last-minute? It was Saturday night, and the band was scheduled to be judged at preliminaries on Monday night. I had one day to learn the music and, perhaps more importantly, integrate myself into the band. All day Sunday we practiced as a band, and we performed well enough Monday night to pass through to semifinals! Melodians had not been to semifinals in years, and while we ultimately did not make it to finals that year, the band was encouraged and gained some momentum. I enjoyed working with the band and saw a good deal of potential there, and I returned the following year. Not only did we then make it all the way to finals but we came fifth overall, an admirable placing for a band that had not been at Panorama finals since 1995.

After that first season with Melodians, I began drumming in the Saint Lucia Panorama for a band called Pantime. Again the arranger was Amrit, who had been their arranger since 2005. While the band had done very well over the years, and while we ultimately did not make it to finals that year, the band was encouraged and gained some momentum. I enjoyed working with the band and saw a good deal of potential there, and I returned the following year.

New York Panorama, continued

Philmore’s classic “Pan by Storm” (sung by Designer), which is particularly special to me being the first Panorama arrangement I ever played during my first year in Oberlin Steel. CASYM would go to compete that fall in the 1990 New York Panorama competition with that tune.

The Can Consortium’s set includes several John Wertheimer ’85 compositions such as “Fish” and “Rachi,” Eddie Palmieri’s “Oyelo Que Te Conviene” (an arrangement Andy Narell brought to the band for their 1982 Winter Term concert), and Len “Boogsie” Sharpe’s hit and the title of the band’s 1987 cassette release, “This Feeling Nice.”
WANT OSTEEL MERCH?

The classic black and red Oberlin Steel stickers are available for purchase from the band. Contact OSteel directly (OSteel@oberlin.edu) for details. The latest CD is in the process of being finished and will be available for purchase in the near future.

WORD SEARCH!

OEUSCEKNOLLACEPHDGMBCEJFVSTREISQBFYTWI

OSTEEL
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TENOR
CELLOS
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