

Adventist Music in the Caribbean

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One of the most effective methods of conveying Seventh-day Adventist teachings in the early decades of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's growth in the Caribbean was the pioneering of early Adventist songs and hymns. Music has always been an effective vehicle to transmit ideas and ideologies. Early colporteurs and ministers both taught their first contacts and interested people the early Adventist music that they had learned from their mentors. The early Adventists who viewed themselves as "a singing people" had memorized numerous songs about their beliefs, which they shared with new converts.

By the time of the first Adventist missionaries' arrival, various Caribbean musical styles had already been infused into this highly multi-cultural and multi-ethnic region. Centuries of African slavery across the Caribbean led to the blending of African songs, rhythms, and chants with European and other influences. This became part of musical expressions in Caribbean society. Earlier music genres of preestablished Christian denominations closely followed traditional genres of their church leaders. Many gospel songs collected in Franklin E. Belden's *Christ in Song*, which also carried fundamental beliefs of Adventism, quickly became Seventh-day Adventist favorites in the Caribbean. Caribbean Adventist choristers encouraged musical innovations to many of these songs and choruses. Visiting Adventist missionaries often commented on the style that Caribbean audiences brought to many Adventist songs.

Music was an integral part of boarding school and college curricula in the Caribbean. Some teachers created songs that captured the spirit and experience of the schools. At Caribbean Training College (CTC) in Trinidad, the musical compositions of Mrs. Inez Hamilton and Mrs. M. E. Smith became favorites among the students. "Mrs. I. C. Hamilton was the earliest song writer on campus. She composed numerous songs still on the lips of the early students. Many of these songs were sung on campus and before appreciative audiences on visitors' and rally days."¹

Students formed musical groups and performed at assemblies, churches, and concerts. In the early 1950s, CTC's men's group, "College Heralds," captivated audiences with the rendition of various songs and tunes, including "Negro Spirituals," and held concerts in Barbados. Also, CTC's music director, Mrs. Frances Archbold, a licentiate of the Royal School in Piano Performance, and Mrs. Lucy Mae Kum, a trained musician and graduate of Pacific Union College, encouraged and promoted students in the performance of Caribbean Adventist music. Their audiences across the Caribbean grew in size and appreciation.

A more significant musical development in the area of instrumental music took place near the end of World War II, starting in Trinidad and moving to the Caribbean and, eventually, the rest of the world. This development was the creation of the steel pan, which paved the way for the steel band, a musical ensemble formed by steel pans. The steel pan, which was made from the steel drum, is referred to as “the only musical instrument invented in the twentieth century.”² At the outset, the steel band was associated with Carnival festivities. In time, significant strides and developments were made, which brought the steel pan to the center stage as a musical instrument. The church initially frowned on the use of the steel pan as an instrument of worship. In early 1975, however, a young ministerial intern named Dennis Kadan made the bold move to organize a steel band comprising young men of Laventille Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In the meantime many of the Church’s leaders had left Trinidad to attend the fifty-third world session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists which was held in Dallas, Texas April 17-26. Accompanying the delegation was the Maranatha Steel Orchestra. The orchestra, under the direction of Dennis Kadan of Caribbean Union College, was among many groups from the United States, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Poland, and other countries which provided music during the session. It was the first time that a steel orchestra had played at the world session of Seventh-day Adventists.³

Prejudice against the steel pan gradually abated. The band went to the General Conference in 1980 for a performance. Steel pans are now well-accepted musical instruments in most Caribbean islands and further beyond.

SOURCES

Murray, Eric John. *A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Trinidad and Tobago: 1891-1981*. Port of Spain, Trinidad: The College Press, 1982.

Phillips, Glenn O. I. *The Making of a Christian College: Caribbean Union College: 1927-1977*. Port of Spain, Trinidad: The College Press, 1977.

“Steelband.” *Trinidad and Tobago Nalis: National Library and Information System Authority*. Accessed September 12, 2019. <https://www.nalis.gov.tt/Resources/Subject-Guide/Steelband>.

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1. Glenn O. I. Phillips, *The Making of a Christian College: Caribbean Union College: 1927-1977* (Port of Spain, Trinidad: The College Press, 1977), 74.

2. "Steelband," *Trinidad and Tobago Nalis: National Library and Information System Authority*, accessed September 12, 2019, <https://www.nalis.gov.tt/Resources/Subject-Guide/Steelband>.
3. Eric John Murray, *A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Trinidad and Tobago: 1891-1981* (Port of Spain, Trinidad: The College Press, 1982), 152.

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