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IT IS very obvious that the national musical instrument “steelpan” is under- utilised in the land of its birth. Apart from the pan camps and National Panorama competitions which determine the best playing steel orchestras in the land, there is nothing.

Sorry, I missed the fact that Pan Trinbago takes the steelpan to some people with their Pan in the Country series but this pales in comparison with the latest initiative I discovered last month.

I can call names that you cannot pronounce, names like Roten Pick, Yahli Segev, Saleh Shanawi, Yuval Azrad, Dror Cohen Sefer and Ziv Meir and tell you they are associated with pan and you might think I am going off. But the truth of the matter is they all belong to a steelband called Peace Drums SteelBand.

The main aim of this steelband is “peace making through music” in Israel, yes, war-torn Israel. The people associated with the steelband project speak about it with a passion.

Yet, not one member of the judiciary has seen it fit to sentence anyone to a life of music, pan music if you may. The steelband yards/theatres are peaceful places in TT.

The Peace Drums Steel Band was founded by the Peace Drums interfaith initiative in Delaware, USA. It promotes reconciliation and peace among Jewish, Muslim and Christian youth in the Galilee region of Israel also by building trust that will continue into the future and touch many people.

The genesis of this band took roots in 2011 when the clergy of Delaware Churches for Middle East Peace and four Delaware rabbis- Orthodox, Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist met to exchange views regarding the Israel/Palestine conflict.

They then began to explore how they might collaborate locally to promote peace in their shared Holy Land. An interfaith committee was formed to develop a peace-making project with Israeli and Palestinian youths.

They enthusiastically adopted a model created by Professor Harvey Price in 2007, when he formed steelbands in Israel with Jewish Ethiopian youths. This concept was wholeheartedly embraced as a way to foster co-operation, build trust and nurture reconciliation and peace among Jewish, Christian and Muslim youths through teamwork and music.

In October of 2013 working with Delaware’s Christian and Muslim partners in the Galilean village of Ibillin and Jewish partners in the city of Haifa, Price began a Christian/Muslim/Jewish youth steel band to model reconciliation and promote conflict resolution through joint instruction, rehearsals and performances.

Price first visited the Mar Elias Educational Institute in Ibillin and the Leo Baeck Education Centre in Haifa. Both enthusiastically agreed to work together to recruit ten Christian, ten Muslim youths and ten Jewish youths and provide on-going support for Price to teach them to play pan and to form an interfaith steel band.

When the first \$50,000 was raised Price took the first set of drums to Israel in October of 2013 and began instructing the first ten youths at Mar Elias.

When another \$40,000 was raised he took the second set of drums to Haifa and began instructing Jewish students.

By then the band had its full complement of 20 middle school musicians plus two local music teachers who worked with them.

Three years after, the Peace Drums Steelband made its first US tour from April 13 to 19, 2016.

On April 13, the band played along with the Cab Calloway Steelband at the Cab Calloway School of the Arts in Wilmington. Guest artistes were former Archbishop Abuna Elias Chacour and steelpan jazz player, Andy Narell.

On April 14, the band travelled to Mt Kisco, New York, where they performed at Bet Torah with Somers High School Orchestra.

On April 16, they were at the University of Delaware where they performed with Delaware Steel. Here the guest were Trinidadians Aneysha De Coteau and Selwyn "Fruits" Williams.

Williams lectured on the history and development of the pan while De Coteau who is a teacher spoke on playing the instrument.

Williams said he was working with Price for some time now and they developed the pan for peace initiative.

The band played in Pennsylvania on April 17 and April 19 before leaving for home.

According to Elias Chacour, "The children of Peace Drums are creating the image that we want of Israel. To be a state for all its citizens, where happiness, joy and equality would be the rule. It is possible to do this. God bless the participants of the Peace Drums band." Co-chair of Peace Drums Rabbi Michael Beals said, "Not only can we measure the success of this programme in the Galilee region of Israel but also we can measure how successful the project is in Delaware where Jews, Christians and Muslims are coming together to help build this programme.

Our hope for peace is very similar.

"I like the fact that the steel drums are not a part of the Jewish, Muslim or Christian traditions.

Nobody can claim them for their own.

Peace Drums is about planting seeds of hope where people get to know each other. Where together

they begin to create a different future, a new future, a future of hope,” says Dr Greg Jones, Peace Drums cochair.

Headmaster at Leo Baeck School in Haifa, Dani Fessler says, “The kids are excited to play this wonderful voice of steel drums together.

This is an opportunity to show people that we can be together, play music together and create together in coexistence in the same country.” The players of Peace Drums Steel Band say, “Music is a peace language, we are trying to make peace through our music.”