

Submitted photo

Truman State's newly formed steel band poses for a photo. The instruments the band plays were made from 55 gallon oil drums in Trinidad.

Professor fosters a new beat

New Truman State steel band inspired by professor's sabbatical

BY JOHN BROOKS
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When Truman State students play in the upcoming steel band concert, they'll be using some unusual instruments.

This will be the steel band's first concert, and it will feature instruments made from 55 gallon oil drums in Trinidad.

The instruments were made by a Trinidadian named Mappo Richardson that music professor Mike Bump befriended during his research sabbatical there, Bump said.

"This is not only Truman's first steel band, but this is also Truman's first world music ensemble, so it's a real double whammy," Bump said.

To create the steel drums, the top is taken off a 55 gallon oil drum and turned upside down so the bottom can be used because it is a thinner metal, Bump said. He said the drum is put over a fire and heated until the metal is red hot, at which point the tuner starts beating the metal with a hammer until it is concave.

"We told him we were starting a band and he agreed to [make drums], and about a year from that we got our first set," Bump said. "Our friendship bore fruit in that we were able to convince him to make a set for Truman."

Bump said the tuning process is

an art form that requires skill.

"They blend the fundamental of the pitch and the harmonic of the pitch to produce a single tone, much like tuning a piano," he said.

To play the drums, the players use a wooden mallet with gum rubber at the top, which produces a mellow sound as opposed to a harsh sound, Bump said.

During Bump's sabbatical in Trinidad and Tobago he performed with one of the neighborhood steel bands, he said. There were hundreds of steel bands affiliated with neighborhoods, and generations continue to play steel drums there, Bump said.

"I was asked to play in the Invaders, which is an old band that goes back to the 1930s during what they call the panorama during the last week of February and the first week of March," Bump said. "It was a life-changing experience to be able to perform on steel drum with natives of Trinidad and Tobago."

Bump said that in Trinidad there are as many as 170 players with hundreds and hundreds of instruments.

Truman's band has about 30 instruments total, which will support 17 players, Bump said. He said some students play one instrument, while some play as many as six.

Bump said he played in a steel drum band at the University of Illi-

nois and when he was a professor at Ohio State University, but this is his first time at Truman.

Senior percussionist Emily Pierson said it wasn't a question of if the steel drum band would happen, but when.

"Dr. Bump has talked about it ever since I've been at Truman," Pierson said. "It wasn't hearsay, it was, 'oh we're finally getting the steel pan class.' It wasn't like, 'oh should I take steel pan,' it was 'I better make room in my schedule for it.'"

Pierson said steel pan quickly is growing in popularity.

She said half the class is a history lesson about the origins of steel drum playing in Trinidad, while the other half is spent practicing their ensemble.

Pierson said that she has learned more history in the steel pan class than in other music classes.

Graduate student Harry Hackel said Bump does a good job connecting the culture of the steel pan with the world and teaching how the instruments gained acceptance into the world music scene.

"I think everybody in the band and everybody who has heard us playing is excited," Hackel said. "It's a really high energy style of music. High energy, club music, house music from the 90s and 80s — all those musical styles are really present and [the

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Trinidadian steel drum

music has] a lot of history tied into the Caribbean."

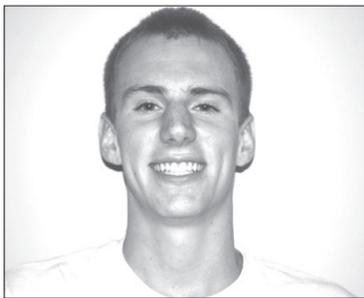
Bump said while some students in the band are music majors, there are those who are not.

The steel drum band's first concert will be 8 p.m. Dec. 6 in Baldwin Auditorium.

"To really know what this music is about is to experience it live," Bump said. "It's infectious, it's not something you sit down and politely applaud at the end. It's dance music, it makes you smile. You never walk away from a steel band performance unhappy."

See the steel drum band at 8 p.m. Dec. 6 in Baldwin Auditorium

Toying with the idea of growing up



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This past week, I went home to sell my childhood toys.

I played with many different toys as a kid, but there was one specific collection that never failed to capture my imagination and force my parents to open their wallets come Christmas — LEGOS.

I don't recall the exact age when I received my first LEGOS set, but I do remember it. It was Luke Skywalker's X-wing, and it caught my attention from the moment I unwrapped the package. It had none of the accoutrements or fancy cosmetics many sets today are embellished with. I put it together with the help of my sister on a brown fold-up card table, a table that I set up every time I got a set for Christmas and birthdays. It had slender wings prone to falling off, but I never considered gluing them on. I recall being horrified to learn that a childhood friend of mine frequently glued his sets together.

My LEGOS phase, as some family members refer to it, lasted about five years, from ages 8 to 12. I built many sets, mostly on my own. I built them in various locations, mostly at that card table, but the hardwood floors at my Grandma's sufficed in times of

need. I never took them outside after losing a piece when I was 10, and I always enjoyed myself. It became a running joke at Christmas to ask for the customary jump and shake of the box I frequently did, even as I became older and began to feel embarrassment at such a show of enthusiasm.

When I came to college, I boxed up my LEGOS, separating pieces of sets and clamping plastic lids down on my childhood toys. By that time, I hadn't played with or even picked them up in years, so I had little difficulty stuffing them away into a closet. I imagine it was different for my parents.

Reviewing the state of my finances prior to Thanksgiving break, I began to consider what I could do to improve my bank account. I went on eBay and stumbled across one of my childhood sets, listed for several hundred dollars. As I paged through my mental catalogue of my LEGOS and typed them in searches through eBay, I grew excited. It appeared I had quite the financial windfall tucked away in that little closet. Supply and demand is the name of the game, and I had something that was poorly supplied.

So, I went home to sell my LEGOS. I cleaned out the closet, found instructions and old boxes tucked away in storage, and put them back together.

They're ready now, but I find myself hesitant to proceed with the final step of listing them for sale. Maybe they won't fetch as much as I hope. Maybe I don't need the money. Maybe childhood toys are just plastic, and I'm foolish for wondering if they're more than an asset waiting to be converted to cash. At this point in my life, they certainly would not appear to be. I'm not going to play with them, and by the time I have children of my own they likely will not be interested in dad's old toys. But maybe someday I'll look back and regret selling a piece of my childhood, and it's that thought that keeps me from selling my LEGOS.

Odd interests ought to be encouraged



Unusual interests and talents should be cultivated and pursued by all

BY KATHLEEN BARBOSA
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When I was 14 years old, I discovered that I lacked talent in any and all traditional sports I tried. I fell off every cheerleading pyramid, I missed every bump in volleyball and my basketball skills were best suited for starting as a benchwarmer. When high school started, I decided to try something new — cross country.

For those unfamiliar with the sport, competitors essentially run five kilometers, which is about 3.1 miles, across parks, golf courses and fields.

I was the only member of the girl's team.

This weird, unpopular and somewhat "uncool" sport not only lacked appeal at my high school, but also recognition. Practices consisted of running miles on gravel roads during the hottest months of the year. Despite and because of everything, I loved every moment of it.

Unfortunately, weird and offbeat hobbies often are ditched in favor of

mainstream sports and hobbies. And it makes sense. Equipment for strange hobbies can be difficult to track down, teams and leagues for nontraditional sports are few and far between, and the social pressure to play for the local baseball team or the desire to be a soccer mom can put families and kids into a mundane corner.

Weird hobbies should be encouraged. When children develop a cricket obsession, or start collecting gnomes, encourage them. Sometimes, it's easier to just try out for the local basketball or baseball team, but make the extra effort to find a lacrosse team. Search the yellow pages for an accordion teacher or a poetry writing class. It will provide an opportunity to explore and be a conversation starter for the rest of your life.

If these hobbies are cultivated, the connections you make with people who share your passions will be more special than general fandom for mainstream sports.

Imagine how common it is to find someone who casually follows baseball. Now imagine how rare but incredible it would be to find a fellow bridge playing enthusiast.

These weird hobbies ought to be pursued, embraced, encouraged and applauded. Don't give up on yours. Relearn Irish dancing. Pick back up your knitting.

Those hobbies set you apart from others and provide the daily joy that makes the difference between being complacent and content.

Find these joys, and when you see them in others, ask about them. Watch the way someone's face lights up when you discover his or her weird talent that never comes up in conversation. You will make their day and you'll learn something you never expected to understand.