

## SETTING THE TEMPO IN TRINIDAD



Submitted photo

The Silver Stars perform with energy and excitement during the finals of a steel pan percussion competition. The group brought members from a variety of different countries, including France and Japan. Graduate Brett Morris and senior Marcus Rattler-Blevins were the only two performers from Missouri.

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Graduate student Brett Morris and senior Marcus Rattler-Blevins took a four-week journey to the heart and soul of steel pan music after a semester of music and percussion.

Morris and Rattler-Blevins took music professor Michael Bump's "Steel Pan Music of Trinidad and Tobago" class to learn about a genre of music that stemmed from leftover oil drums from World War II, and have spent multiple years in the Truman Steel Pan Ensemble.

Bump said he took a sabbatical during 2011 that allowed him to go to Port of Spain in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for seven weeks. He said the trip inspired him to come back to Truman and start a steel pan percussion ensemble.

More recently, Bump said Liam Teague, a world-renowned steel pan drum percussionist and professor at Northern Illinois University, listened to the Truman steel drum ensemble play and was impressed by the talent he heard. Bump said Teague invited Truman steel drum percussionists to Trinidad to perform with The Silver Stars, one of the Trinidadian bands he was arranging music for and leading, an invitation which Morris and Rattler-Blevins accepted.

"When that invitation came about, I encouraged them to beg, borrow or steal but get on that plane and get down there because this is going to be one heck of an experience," Bump said.

The students participated in drumming competitions with The Silver Stars, including the finals of an international competition, which were televised worldwide with an audience of about 75,000 people.

Bump said he was thrilled Morris and Rattler-Blevins got an opportunity to perform and study abroad in Trinidad. He said Morris and Rattler-Blevins took the initiative to get the funding for traveling expenses themselves.

Bump said he thought the opportunity for any steel pan percussionist to study abroad in Trinidad would be an amazing and educational experience. He said both students embraced the new opportunity.

"To step on native soil, be among the people and appreciate the art they've created out of their own blood, sweat and tears is the best experience for anybody at all who would be interested in steel pan music," Bump said.

Bump said he encouraged Morris and Rattler-Blevins to go to Trinidad and play with The Silver Stars because it was such a rare opportunity. He said it was an amazing experience to have an international guest artist recognize Truman students and invite them to perform.

Morris said any student who has the chance to study abroad in a different country should take it.

Morris said one thing that stood out to him was the difference between how Trinidadians and Americans look at and play music. He said while classical American music is more logical because it focuses on rhythm and harmonics, Trinidadian music is more about feeling.

"They're good at hitting the stuff you can't really teach," Morris said.

Rattler-Blevins said he learned a lot as a pan player and also learned a lot about Trinidadian culture and appreciated the kindness of the people. He said Trinidadians are loving and open-minded people.

"This was a great, amazing, educational opportunity," Rattler-Blevins said. "I know now the difference between going and not. [It was] well worth the money out of my pocket."



Submitted photo

Graduate student Brett Morris (left) and senior Marcus Rattler-Blevins (right) meet with Liam Teague, professor at Northern Illinois University and the musical arranger for The Silver Stars.