

## ***Carnival Dawn: An Approach to Cross-Cultural Musical Fusion in Times of Change***

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### **Abstract**

*Carnival Dawn* is a work for percussion ensemble written by British composer Adam Walters in response to a pre-pandemic commission by American percussionist Joshua Watkins. Originally intended to be performed live, Walters and Watkins, colleagues on the music faculty at The University of Trinidad and Tobago, reconsidered and refashioned the piece during the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic in order to make it appropriate for online participation by music students. This article describes the national musical context, examines elements that moulded the composition such as aspects of Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival culture and western classical sonata form, and discusses the educational benefits of bespoke new music commissions. It also details the ways *Carnival Dawn* utilised current technological possibilities to become a vessel for student participation and collaboration that has the potential to connect people musically during times of social distancing occasioned by a pandemic. Accompanying this paper is an audio recording of Watkins playing the musical examples notated in the text below. Additionally, Watkins' recording of the first section of the *Carnival Dawn* reference track can be heard at the following link, which includes a scrolling score: <https://youtu.be/ILXl3W6RFo8>.

**Keywords:** steelpan, percussion, musical fusion, music education, new music

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### **Creolisation and Musical Fusion in Trinidad and Tobago**

The Caribbean region has for centuries absorbed diverse cultural influences. European elements were imposed in the days of empire building and colonisation; African culture arrived amid the horror of the transatlantic slave trade; indentured labourers brought their traditions from India; and immigration from countries such as China and Syria also contributed to the cultural landscape. This process of cultural syncretism in the region came to be known as *creolisation* (Dudley, 2004, 2008; Manuel, 2016; Young, 2003) and has impacted all aspects of life, including cuisine, religion, and artistic expression.

In the Caribbean, creolisation represents the dynamic interaction between peoples with different heritages and from different social classes; a process that over time gave rise to new traditions and cultural practices. It should be noted that creolisation is far more complex than being simply a happy blending of artistic styles in a context of mutual respect. On the contrary, many enduring innovations in the arts arose from a climate of racism and repression, even after slavery was abolished. The invention of the steelpan and the emergence of Trinidad and Tobago's traditional Carnival characters are examples of creative responses to oppression. Creolisation is therefore the result of dialogues and tensions between different ethnicities and classes from the time that Europeans first arrived in the Caribbean. This is a fundamental aspect of the Caribbean context.

A thorough overview of the many aspects of creolisation is beyond the scope of this paper; suffice it to say that no island in the Caribbean exemplifies the cultural melting pot more than Trinidad and Tobago (T&T). With its history of cultural fusions, the national context is a particularly apt one for a composer who wishes to explore ways to mesh stylistic features of different musical traditions. The phenomenon of creolisation provides an appropriate backdrop to the composition of *Carnival Dawn*, which demonstrates an approach to blending musical influences rooted in different cultures. Whilst this piece would not itself be termed *creole* – which implies the blending of cultural influences on a societal rather than individual level, over a multi-generational timeframe – it is nonetheless an attempt at musical syncretism in a Caribbean context, and accordingly connects with the region's long-standing tradition of musical and cultural reinvention.

### **Approaches to Musical Fusion by Walters and Watkins**

There exists an extensive repertoire of art music by Caribbean composers (Gangelhoff & LeGrand, 2011, 2013). Whilst definitions can be problematic, the term 'art music' in this paper is used to describe music in the style descended from the tradition of western classical music in the way articulated in Gangelhoff and LeGrand (2013). Composers who are 'cultural insiders' are likely to have a familiarity with local musical gestures which can assist in their ability to express something of the musical character of a given location. A composer who is a 'cultural outsider',

however, could well have a very different musical background and could have had no previous knowledge of the new culture at all. This state of affairs would afford an opportunity for such composers to create music that combines their different musical experiences. A cultural outsider is very likely to approach an unfamiliar culture's music from a different angle than someone who grew up immersed in that style. It is in this context that this article analyses the work of British composer Adam Walters and American percussionist Joshua Watkins, colleagues on the music faculty of The University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT).

New works by composers who are cultural outsiders could reveal previously hidden musical possibilities, and as a result express something fresh and original. At its most basic level, this might be a new combination of instruments. However, newcomers who seek out salient aspects of a culture and allow these to influence their approach to manipulating musical parameters could achieve fusion at arguably a much deeper level. Naturally, this is just one possible approach to music that might be labelled 'cross-cultural'. For instance, a number of composers who are cultural insiders (in this case, Trinidad and Tobago composers steeped in local music styles, but heavily influenced by music and approaches from elsewhere) also write music that throws new light on traditional themes. Notable examples include Roger Henry's *Remembrance* from 2017, which is structured and orchestrated in a similar fashion to Brahms' *A German Requiem*, and incorporates Trinidad and Tobago's stick-fighting chant *mooma, mooma* as a unifying melodic thread throughout the entire forty-minute work; Henry's *Symphony Number 3* written in 2021, whose finale blends rhythmic and melodic language typical of Trinidad and Tobago's national steelpan competition, Panorama, with orchestration and structural aspects from the European symphonic tradition; and the atonal *Stop the Horrors* from 2017 by Renaldo Ramai, whose pitch row and note durations are derived from data pertaining to Trinidad and Tobago's crime rate between the years of 1994 and 2006.

A small number of composers routinely integrate steelpan into more traditional percussion ensemble set-ups, but this is an area that remains relatively unexplored. Blending steelpan with other universal percussion ensemble instruments such as marimba is a concept Watkins was introduced to through the piece *Open Window* by Robert Chappell, a composer and past professor of percussion at Northern Illinois University. Inspired by this juxtaposition, Watkins began to commission innovative compositions for steelpan that combine different genres and instruments. These include *Scatter Drill* by Todd London, a composer and an adjunct percussion faculty at Belmont University, for solo steelpan (with looping pedal), marimba, and percussion accompaniment; *Mind the Gap* by Adam Hopper, a free-lance percussionist, arranger and composer from Kentucky, USA, for solo steelpan with backing track; *Untethered* by Tyler Swick, a public school percussion teacher and composer from Nevada, USA, for solo steelpan and tassa drum with one player; and *Looking Down to See the Sky* by Thom Hasenpflug, a composer and percussion professor at Idaho State University, for steelpan and marimba. This last one was a

consortium commission. Because commissioning new music can be expensive, a consortium allows multiple individuals or groups to pay a portion of a composer's fee for a commissioned work. Despite these examples and a small number of other pieces, there continues to be a need for the development of literature for ensembles that blend steelpan and other percussion instruments.

Any attempt at musical fusion requires a composer to have at least some understanding of the styles being combined, and some situations require even more sensitivity to context. The music of Walters, written by a white, middle-class, British male living in a former British colony of which racism and slavery were constituent parts, is a case in point. Some may even argue that it is inappropriate for a composer of his demographics to make an artistic response to this context. On the other hand, by careful and respectful consideration of the context in which one is working and of the musical traditions one is referring to, a composer can justify her or his artistic contribution. Further, this contribution may be well received by cultural insiders themselves as fresh approaches to local subject matter, both musical and non-musical, and can produce interesting and aesthetically pleasing results.

By infusing a musical language rooted in the western classical tradition with features of Trinidad and Tobago's own music and particular aspects of the national culture, Walters has written works that demonstrate an exploration of ways to represent – or, rather, re-present – local themes and narratives. Prior to the composition of *Carnival Dawn*, Walters had written a number of works that integrated themes relevant to Trinidad and Tobago and incorporated locally recognisable musical elements into a musical language that reflected his own training in the western classical tradition. In *Little Red Riding Hood* (2011) and *The Old Yard: Portraits of Carnival* (2012), he turned to the traditional characters of Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival for inspiration. *River of Freedom* (2015), a collaboration with writer Caitlyn Kamminga, drew upon the history of the Merikins who settled in southern Trinidad after the Second War of Independence, also known as the War of 1812.

In *River of Freedom* (2015), Walters references music he experienced when, for several months, he attended Spiritual Baptist church services across Trinidad and Tobago, and the motivic material of the score is derived from the national anthems of Trinidad and Tobago, the UK, and the US. Other works reflect less conventional approaches, such as using pre-recorded local birdsong as a sonic backdrop to live music (*Prayer*, 2016) and integrating a *tambo-bambo* percussion ensemble into a piece that evokes the evening ritual of birds settling into the trees of Trinidad's Caroni Swamp (*Flight*, 2018). Walters' *Engine Room* (2017), for a body percussion ensemble and three percussionists, reflects his first-hand experience of playing in the national Panorama championships with Massy Trinidad All Stars Steel Orchestra from 2014 to 2018.

In preparation for composing his works inspired by Trinidad and Tobago, Walters made extensive field recordings of music played in churches and temples, at Carnival shows, and in the panyard

of Massy Trinidad All Stars Steel Orchestra. Transcribing many of these extracts was a fundamental part of his research as he sought to become familiar with certain traits of the music he had heard in order to re-present them in his own compositions. Over and above affording him the opportunity of simple, live, listening experiences, listening to music in situ was crucial to develop his understanding of aspects of cultural context and musical function in Trinidad and Tobago. Experiencing the hypnotic energy of a Spiritual Baptist chorus towards the end of a four-hour thanksgiving service, for example, allowed Walters an insight into the role of repetition in provoking transformed states of consciousness in this form of worship. Additionally, seeing the facility with which steelpan players who learn by ear are able to learn and recall long passages of music informed how he approached writing *Engine Room*.

With Walters' musical background from the UK very much defining his own musical personality, he felt it important not only to listen to, but also to actively participate in local music-making in order to feel confident about using stylistic markers in his compositions. To this end, he studied traditional local rhythms on traditional hand drums found in Trinidad and Tobago in many intensive practical lessons with Shannon Lewis and Everaldo "Redman" Watson from the Spiritual Baptist and Orisha traditions respectively; and from 2013 to 2014, he spent many hours in Spiritual Baptist churches. Walters attended church services in locations across Trinidad: Curepe, Diego Martin, Fifth Company Village, Gasparillo, McBean Village in Couva, St Mary's Village in Moruga, Toco, Third Company Village and Tunapuna.

Walters was unfamiliar with the steelpan before his move to Trinidad in 2009 and he felt a need to have a physical understanding of the instrument in order to write for it effectively. He therefore taught himself enough to take the Grade 1 exam in 2013 at The University of the West Indies (UWI) which offers exams from Grade 1 to Grade 8 on steelpan. Despite the rudimentary level of the material he learned, this exercise was invaluable from a compositional viewpoint because it gave him a first-hand understanding of the energies and resonances of the different registers of the instrument. By immersing himself in local musical traditions and studying their characteristics, Walters has strived to give an honest and respectful musical response to context in his work. It could be said that the mere evocation of J'ouvert in *Carnival Dawn* is itself part of the cross-cultural fusion in this piece since Walters' immersion in Trinidad and Tobago's traditions for nine years helped him to approach an 'insider's perspective' that has shaped not only the music he writes, but also the extra-musical themes that his music so often references. J'ouvert refers to the early morning festivities that mark the beginning of Carnival celebrations the day before Shrove Tuesday.

Unlike Walters, Watkins was already an experienced steelpan player before his arrival in Trinidad and Tobago. This interest began in secondary school in the US and became integral to all facets of his percussion performance and academic pursuits. Watkins was co-author of the student

organisation grant, which funded the University of Missouri's acquisition of its first steelpan, and he is a founding member of a successful steelband in Mid-Missouri. During his graduate studies, he commissioned steelpan works and authored a steelpan primer. Joining the music faculty at UTT in 2013 was a chance for Watkins to immerse himself fully in the culture of Trinidad and Tobago. Since then, he has been enjoying steelpan while living in Port of Spain, playing with Silver Stars and Massy Trinidad All Stars Steel Orchestras, experiencing the pedagogy of steelpan through the lenses of his students, through joint research with Everaldo "Redman" Watson on Trinidad traditional drumming, and through UTT's Pan Fellowship Programme.

### **Cross-Cultural Fusion in *Carnival Dawn***

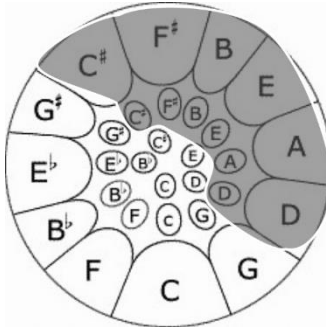
In his 2011 work *The Old Yard: Portraits of Carnival*, Walters used the structure of the two instruments that form the double seconds steelpan to provide a type of ground bass that underpins the *Midnight Robber* movement; and in *River of Freedom* (2015), he used the layout of the 'fourths and fifths' tenor steelpan to create one of that work's main themes. He further explores this technique in *Carnival Dawn*. The idea behind deriving melodic or motivic material from the physical structure of Trinidad and Tobago's national instrument is to justify the music as being rooted in something local. Walters selects patterns for the harmonic possibilities he sees in them, even though the musical effect of a pattern may well be unlike any recognisably stylistic trait in Trinidad and Tobago music. The technique is therefore one of abstraction; a process of making musical choices based on the extra-musical factor of an instrument's physical design. A similar example of an instrument's layout impacting upon a piece is György Ligeti's *Étude No.1* for piano. Here, the left hand plays only black notes, and the right hand plays only white notes.

There are four patterns used in *Carnival Dawn*, each containing twelve notes that sit next to one another on the steelpan. Whilst the patterns start on different notes, playing them requires making the same relative physical movements across the instrument. The four patterns are displayed in Figures 1-4.



**Figure 3**

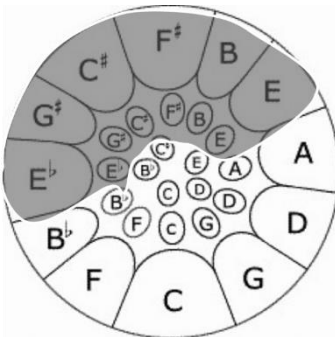
*Pattern 3: Original Form Followed by Retrograde - Carnival Dawn, Tenor Pans 1 and 2, Bars 193 to 195*



*Note:* Shaded area represents the section of steelpan used for Pattern 3.

**Figure 4**

*Pattern 4: Original Form Followed by Retrograde (Fragmented) - Carnival Dawn, Tenor Pan 1, Bars 55 to 58*



*Note:* Shaded area represents the section of steelpan used for Pattern 4.

Walters derived harmonies suggested by each of the above patterns, as shown below in Figure 5 and Figure 6.

**Figure 5**

*Harmonies Implied by The Four Patterns (P1 to P4)*



He used these patterns as the starting point to build the main melody which is structurally the second subject of *Carnival Dawn*. In this way, the physical layout of the steelpan impacts directly upon not just the harmonic material, but also on melodic elements of the piece.

**Figure 6**

*Carnival Dawn, Tenor Pan 1, Bars 124 to 131 Showing the Harmonies (P1 to P4) Underpinning the Melody*



The opening section of *Carnival Dawn* is not intended to be stylistically derivative. Rather, it is a fantastical imagining of evening in Trinidad and Tobago based on Walters' recollection of wind chimes outside a neighbour's apartment. The second section, however, draws heavily on the type of rhythmic gestures commonly heard in Trinidad and Tobago's national Panorama championships (as illustrated in Figures 7 to 11 below), and uses a *soca* tempo to evoke the joyful explosion of J'ouvert. One of the most prominent traits of the Panorama style is the driving energy that steelpan arrangers build from using syncopated rhythms derived from calypso and soca, calypso's more recent, faster incarnation. While some may question the terms "Panorama style" or "Panorama genre", the authors believe that a majority of Panorama arrangers draw upon certain musical gestures so often that they are indeed indicative of a unique style or genre. In *Carnival Dawn*, as in many Panorama arrangements, calypso-derived units are often assigned to the bass line, and here Walters incorporates a calypso-based rhythm that is commonly played on congas as part of a steel orchestra's 'engine room' or percussion section.



**Figure 10**

*Syncopated Passage with Woodblock Providing Rhythmic Stability - Carnival Dawn, Tutti, Bars 140 to 142*

The musical score for Figure 10 consists of seven staves. From top to bottom, they are: Woodblock (W.B.), Bongo Drums (B.D.), Pan 1, Pan 2, Vibraphone (Vib.), Marimba 1 (Mar. 1), and Marimba 2 (Mar. 2, Player 1 and Player 2). The woodblock and bongo parts provide a steady, syncopated rhythmic pattern. The pan parts feature complex, syncopated rhythms with some chromatic movement. The vibraphone and marimba parts provide harmonic support and melodic lines, with the marimba parts showing more intricate rhythmic patterns.

Formally, *Carnival Dawn* is structured as a sonata form movement with an extended introduction and unconventional key relationships. The choice of sonata form suggested itself once Walters had written several disconnected passages based on material from the exposition of the work. Improvisatory in nature and therefore referencing many steelpan players' skills in improvisation, Walters felt that these passages, when woven together, formed an apt development section. Of particular note are the chromatic triplet figures that allude to the more extended chromatic runs that typify many Panorama arrangements. Such an example of extended use of chromatic runs can be found in Dr. Jit Samaroo's arrangement of Lord Kitchener's *The Bee's Melody* played by Renegades Steel Orchestra at Panorama 1992. Another suggestion of a local musical trope in the development section is a syncopated figure based on a rhythmic gesture often associated with playfulness and irreverence that aptly feature in the melody that accompanies the Dame Lorraine character of traditional Carnival celebrations.

**Figure 11**

*Syncopated Figure Evoking Traditional Trinidad and Tobago Repertoire Associated with Carnival - Carnival Dawn, Marimba 1, Bar 188*

The musical score for Figure 11 is a single staff in treble clef, showing a syncopated figure. The figure consists of a series of eighth notes with a syncopated rhythm, starting on a G4 and moving chromatically up to a B4. The figure is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic.

The brief musical analysis of *Carnival Dawn* provided above aims to demonstrate ways in which a bespoke commission can have the benefit of being entirely appropriate for a particular group of musicians working in a particular context.

### **Educational Benefits of Bespoke New Commissions**

Bespoke new commissions afford composers the opportunity to integrate musical gestures familiar in a particular region into new musical lessons for study. From a pedagogical viewpoint, this corresponds to a key learning principle identified by Linda Nilson in her book *Teaching at its Best*: “[People] most readily learn what they regard as relevant to their lives and learn knowledge most easily if it fits in with their prior knowledge” (Nilson, 2016, p. 4). In *Carnival Dawn*, Walters and Watkins sought to provide the percussion students of The University of Trinidad and Tobago with familiar musical starting points. These students, by and large, have a Caribbean background including, but not limited to, experience in panyards, traditional drumming ensembles, and local church groups. Musical examples in Figures 7 to 10 above are examples of basic building blocks in the typical percussion student’s lexicon.

From this familiar scaffolding, students are encouraged to consider other musical concepts such as motivic development, instrumentation, and form, thereby expanding their understanding of traditional and innovative techniques. In this way, *Carnival Dawn* has a familiar base while simultaneously promoting growth through the new elements it introduces. Watkins also wished for his students to have first-hand experience of playing a sonata form movement to align their learning with a concurrent music analysis course at UTT. By providing students with different angles on sonata form in this way, Watkins envisioned a more complete learning experience around this subject and, to the extent that *Carnival Dawn* draws upon the Panorama genre, one that was particularly reflective of a local musical tradition.

From a wider perspective, whilst *Carnival Dawn* was originally written for percussionists in Trinidad and Tobago, Walters and Watkins also expect the piece to attract performers overseas. They anticipate that the work will encourage percussionists from different parts of the globe to develop an awareness of and an interest in gestures of local musical styles, especially rhythmic ones.

### **Online Technologies and Potential for Collaborative Contributions**

*Carnival Dawn* was completed shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic impacted upon the world’s artistic and educational communities. Originally conceived for conventional live performance at an end-of-year university performance, the piece remained unperformed throughout 2019 and 2020, as social distancing became the new normal. During that time, however, Walters and Watkins worked together with music education outreach non-governmental organisation (NGO) Searchlight International on a different project entirely, a project that inspired them to present *Carnival Dawn* in a different way than originally envisaged. As explained below, the *Worldview*

project was a proof of concept in that it demonstrated to Walters and Watkins that a professionally recorded track could support and be integrated seamlessly with recorded contributions of musicians with varying levels of skill.

Searchlight International was founded in 2015 by Kwamé Ryan. Searchlight's camp for young musicians in 2020 was initially conceived as an in-person event but had to be moved online as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, Ryan asked Walters to write an original work for the specific circumstances. The resulting piece, *Worldview* for body percussionists with synthesised backing track, was originally intended to be rehearsed and then performed live online by the teenaged participants. However, Ryan expressed reservations about the quality of experience that the live online performance aspect of the project would provide, and felt that a preferable strategy was for *Worldview* to represent a recording experience for those involved. The young participants therefore learned the body percussion parts by watching online tutorials prepared by Watkins, and then recorded sections on their mobile devices during online sessions led by Watkins and Ryan.

Since it was thought likely that some of the body percussion sections might not be perfected by the young Searchlight musicians in the time available, a decision was taken to create an expert recording to which the students' recorded contributions would be added. Watkins therefore recorded all of the body percussion parts and Walters mixed these lines with the backing track to create a 'reference track'. The existence of a reference track allows for greater flexibility in the way a piece of music is finally presented. The recordings submitted by students in Searchlight International's *Worldview* project were of variable musical quality, so only the well-played sections were used in the final mix, with Watkins' recorded lines brought down in the mix or, in places, removed entirely. Contributions that were not successfully recorded by any of the participants were not used at all, and so, in the version of the piece that resulted from the Searchlight project, in these passages Watkins' recording is the only one that is heard.

The strategy of rehearsing and assembling *Worldview* as described above was such a successful approach to a music education project during the restrictive social distancing conditions imposed by the pandemic that Walters and Watkins decided to use the same approach with *Carnival Dawn*. In the same way as for *Worldview*, Watkins set about recording a reference track to guide students' learning of the percussion parts, and to act as a versatile vessel that could be blended as required with their recorded contributions. The *Worldview* project therefore had a direct influence on the way that the learning of *Carnival Dawn* could be implemented in UTT's percussion studio.

One significant advantage of the reference track is that it greatly reduces the pressure on the participants to make perfect recordings of their individual musical lines. Rather than inducing anxiety about passages that they find overly difficult, student musicians can focus on what they

can play effectively. A further benefit is that the timetable of online sessions can be precisely planned because tutors do not need to linger on passages that prove problematic. Naturally, serious music students do need to learn to be exacting in their execution of material, so tutors need to be wary of an excessive dependence on the reference track. However, because the model is so flexible, it can be adapted to different circumstances and levels. In mixed-ability groups, for example, the reference track allows for everyone to be challenged at their own level, playing fewer demanding passages and omitting difficult ones altogether, but still having the positive experience of contributing meaningfully to a music recording.

*Carnival Dawn* is a challenging work but the high level of technical ability of the students it was written for should allow for most, if not all, of Watkins' reference track to be omitted from their final recording. In future recordings by less accomplished players, however, the reference track may prove invaluable. The reference track is therefore more than simply a definitive recording. Whilst it could be used as such, it also acts as a vessel which can accommodate contributions from other players in different circumstances.

It is important to differentiate a reference track from a backing track. The latter is a static entity, the end result of a digital audio workstation (DAW) project mastered with all levels fixed. Whilst a reference track can be used in this way for practice purposes, it is more dynamic than a conventional backing track because it exists as an ever-open DAW session, ready for other players' instrumental lines to be inserted and for the levels to be adjusted as required. The reference track, then, allows for the creation of many different final recordings of the same piece by players of varying levels of accomplishment. The reference track created for *Carnival Dawn* is used in the same way as it is for *Worldview*.

*Carnival Dawn* has elements of performance such as tempo alterations and fermatas that typically require practice and precision within a group setting. These elements provide a unique challenge in the creation of the reference track. Watkins used the tempo function in Logic Pro software to create a *click track*, a component of an audio file that provides an audible sound with the intention of unifying a tempo. This accommodated the work's requirements of tempo variation. For example, Watkins estimated the duration of each fermata value as twice the value of the given note or rest in the work. He proceeded to test and revise that duration within Logic Pro until a satisfactory result was obtained for the reference track. Having a click track integrated into the reference track allows students to be able to play the sections musically with unity amongst the parts.

In practical terms, the process of learning and assembling *Carnival Dawn* in the remote working context necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic proceeds in the following way. First, percussion students are assigned a part based on each student's prior experience and ability. Next, students

record parts utilising personal mobile devices and the freely available Dolby On application. Audio and video are recorded separately as the optimal recording parameters for each media may vary for each student's mobile device. It is important to note that when recording audio and video at the same time with one device, the quality of each is compromised. If the audio and video are recorded separately, the student can first place the device at the correct location to get a superior quality audio recording. Then the student can determine the best framing for the video recording and record the video separately. The audio and video are combined later in the editing process. Students' learning is enhanced in a relatively stress-free environment (Nilson, 2016), and thus they often feel more relaxed and comfortable performing on camera than in a live setting. Therefore, recording alone at home or in a school practice space can reduce the distracting anxiety of feeling the need to give a note-perfect performance. It is the goal of this recording project to maximise participation and foster online and blended learning.

### Conclusion

Trinidad and Tobago, with its long history of creolisation and cultural mixing, is a particularly apt backdrop for musicians and composers interested in combining different stylistic traits. By immersing themselves in the nation's music scene for several years, Walters and Watkins were able to learn and internalise many of the salient stylistic features of local musical styles, a process that they saw as essential before composing or performing music in a local context in a considered way. Their experiences playing in Trinidad's steel orchestras were important in the conception and performance of *Carnival Dawn*.

*Carnival Dawn* is an attempt at musical fusion that incorporates stylistic gestures often used by arrangers in Trinidad and Tobago's Panorama championships, but with aspects of harmony, structure, and instrumentation not typical of the Panorama style. This is the third work by Walters in which the physical structure of the steelpan has had a fundamental impact upon the resulting music. The idea of taking inspiration from an instrument's design has endless possibilities, and the work presented here is just one example of what this approach can yield.

The evolution of *Carnival Dawn* from a conventional concert work to a piece intended for online preparation and presentation was precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst online concerts and recordings have become widespread since the first restrictions on social gatherings, they can amount to little more than digital versions of performances of pre-COVID material that previously would have been experienced live. The more innovative online offerings from 2020 and 2021 such as Searchlight International's *Worldview* project have embraced the possibilities afforded by the global connections that, paradoxically in a socially distanced world, have become easier than ever to establish because of ever-improving online technologies.

Creating a professionally played reference track affords a great degree of flexibility with online participation in music projects, as was Walters' and Watkins' experience with *Worldview*, and as is the case with *Carnival Dawn*. Allowing student participants to contribute to a recording at their own level allows for far greater inclusivity in online music-making than is often the case with live projects, and to this end, a reference track is a useful tool for educators. Whilst Watkins' reference track could certainly serve as a stand-alone definitive recording, it is really intended to be used in a supporting role, underpinning the recorded contributions of students.

*Carnival Dawn* is just one example of a new music commission that aims to draw together salient musical gestures from different musical traditions. Composing and performing bespoke new musical works is one way that composers and performers from all backgrounds and traditions can continue to celebrate different cultures and draw them together in new ways.

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