



# Cultural Exchange with a Host Town through Trinidad and Tobago's National Instrument

Tobago's music and food culture, raising interest in steel pans and the island nation among residents. Made from steel drums, steel pans are percussion instruments originating from Trinidad and Tobago. Steel pans are known as essential instruments for the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival, one of the world's three largest carnivals.

**Cultural exchange between Nakatoso Town in central western Kochi Prefecture and the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (hereinafter Trinidad and Tobago), located in the southern part of the Caribbean Sea, is progressing via the internet.**

**SASAKI TAKASHI**

**I**N June 2019, Nakatoso Town in Kochi Prefecture was registered as a Host Town for Trinidad and Tobago, an island nation in the Caribbean. Exchange between these two areas located on nearly opposite sides of the globe goes back about three years.

In August 2018, volunteers in Nakatoso screened a documentary film entitled "PAN! OUR MUSIC ODYSSEY<sup>1</sup>" and hosted an event introducing the charms of Trinidad and

"At that time, an official of the Embassy of Japan in Trinidad and Tobago contacted Inoue Tomoko, representative of Japanese record company LIME Records, and informed her that their Host Town for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games had not yet been decided," says Inui Tomoya, who worked as an officer of the Town Development section of Nakatoso Town until March 2021.

Inoue, whose grandparents were from Nakatoso Town, has been actively involved in cultural exchange activities with Caribbean countries including Trinidad and Tobago, and she contacted Nakatoso Town.

The Trinidad and Tobago Carnival has a joyful atmosphere that is similar to that of Kochi's traditional Yosakoi Festival<sup>2</sup>. Because of that, talk of becoming a Host Town rapidly gathered pace. In July 2019, Nakatoso Town and Trinidad and



Students from the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) join in a Yosakoi dance performance in Nakatosa Town, August 2019



UTT PAN PHOENIX put on a show the same night, August 2019

Tobago officially entered into a Host Town relationship, and it was decided that they would actively carry out cultural exchange through music and festivals. The following month, UTT PAN PHOENIX, a group of five students from the University of Trinidad and Tobago, came to Japan to give steel pan performances. They were invited to Nakatosa Town, where they held an event playing together with local elementary school students using mini steel pans that the children made themselves.

After that, the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and Paralympics were postponed due to COVID-19, and unfortunately, the planned support tours, cultural exchange events between athletes and residents, and other events involving in-person visits had to be cancelled. Online cultural exchange, however, has steadily continued up to the present. The Host Town Summit 2021, held in February 2021 and hosted by the Japanese government to connect Japanese Host Towns with participating countries, was one such cultural exchange event.

At this online event, UTT PAN PHOENIX, which visited in 2019, and Oh!No!!Me!!!, a band set up by people in Nakatosa Town who had exchanged with UTT PAN PHOENIX when they visited, engaged in a collaborative steel pan performance online. In addition, local children and members of

Onomi Genryu Children’s Taiko (*genryu* means headwaters and *taiko* are Japanese drums) participated in a lively Yosakoi performance and dance arranged in a soca<sup>iii</sup> style, a genre of music that originated in Trinidad and Tobago. Between performances, the children from each of these two distant regions also spoke to one another through an interpreter.

Inui says, “It’s too bad that because of COVID-19 we can’t directly meet and talk, but I still feel that there has been a great response to the online interactions. To actually travel between Japan and Trinidad and Tobago takes a very long time, more than one day including the time for flight connections. It is also costly. However, online exchange allows us to actively interact on a personal level that transcends barriers of place and time, although we do need to consider the time zone difference.”

It is expected that this cultural exchange that began with music, festivals and the Olympics will develop even further after the games end by continuing to make use of the internet. **V**

i A non-fiction drama based on the story of the birth of steel pans in the 1940s on the islands of Trinidad and Tobago.  
 ii The most famous festival in Kochi Prefecture. Holding clappers, people dance to traditional or modern music all over Kochi City.  
 iii Soca is a genre of music that originated in Trinidad and Tobago in the 1970s fusing the music of the islands’ East Indian and African populations, such as soul and calypso, and which now has many sub-genres.



At the online Host Town Summit 2021, children perform a Yosakoi dance arranged in a soca style using a steel pan in addition to the traditional clappers