

# The music of the islands

By Eva Murray

(July 7): The Stonington-Blue Hill area steel band Planet Pan returned to play Matinicus again a couple of weeks ago. We're on their touring schedule. There ought to be a black T-shirt with the list of cities down the back. A lot of us hope they come through here every year. I think they also play Isle au Haut.

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The band with the banner and the *Sunbeam*; listening, to the extreme right, are Ray and Jeanette Beaudoin. (Photo by Eva Murray)

As with anything else done on Matinicus Island, the devil was in the logistics. The *Sunbeam* brought the band, and the pans of course. Rob the boat minister called around to find the band a couple of roadies who might show up with a truck to deliver what looked to the casual observer like a large pile of oil barrels up the island to the school. Captain Mike Johnson brought the *Beam* in to the end of the wharf, and they unloaded the pans and the 13 or 14 teenage band members over the ferry ramp, as the spot inside the wharf where that 75-foot floating community center, clinic, cafe and, I suppose, musician's youth hostel usually berths was occupied by one of the larger lobsterboats, unloading a sizable quantity of lumber. Said lobsterboat turned out to be without its own power and needing towage; Mike backed the *Sunbeam* off and the lobsterboat was pulled by skiff the few feet to the end of the wharf; Mike offered to anchor off in the mouth of the harbor so the other boat wouldn't have to move, but no, should that lobsterman have to head for Billings Diesel in Stonington for repairs, he explained, he didn't want to be stuck aground beside the wharf, which is what happens. Meanwhile, Captain George Tarkleson came in to the wharf with the new (and bigger) *Robin R.* to load his scheduled water taxi passengers, island visitors of unknown provenance who showed up on the wharf with the usual kayaks, luggage and several small and boisterous dogs which may or may not have been Jack Russell terriers. The woman who came with the dogs produced several small canine life

jackets or personal flotation devices, and strapped the dogs in. Onlookers must have appeared a bit puzzled; she offered up the fact that “that one there,” indicating one of her pack, “sinks like a stone.” At any rate, the doggie life preservers became entirely sensible when it was revealed that they also each came equipped with a convenient handle on the top, as George's boat had to be loaded across the deck of the disabled lobsterboat with the help of a group of stemmen and other handy assistants. The dogs could be picked up like a small suitcase and handed across with perfect convenience, little legs running furiously in midair.



The band up close. (Photo by Eva Murray)

Once the usual Matinicus heave-and-tug routine had been completed, and all the musical instruments (for certainly they are) were set up in the island's one classroom, the band offered a short steelpan workshop for any who cared to participate. This made great use of the one-room schoolhouse space after school was out for the year, and proved to be the most fun I've ever had in a classroom (although I said the same thing last year). A side note: mainland readers might be surprised that school was out as early as June 10, when some of you poor suckers had to go for nearly another two weeks, but recall that we do not have the frequency of “snow days,” having no school buses whatsoever. (A snow day here is, I guess, when the teacher is stuck on the mainland by foul weather and there aren't any available substitutes. I digress.)



Andrew Thompson, Mo and Margret Maloney (Photo by Eva Murray)

Planet Pan's scheduled performance on the Matinicus wharf that afternoon was a terrific and welcome break in the routine. The sun was out, which fact is better for the audience than for the performers; hot sun on sheet metal doesn't do much for the tuning, but they sounded just fine. The whole thing was good for our mental health. We've had a rough couple of months around here, and there's nothing like music, live and loud, to help push back the evil spirits. A few of the guys were still working on traps on the wharf. Not everybody likes to read signs, and this community has at present a shortage of logical places to post notices of events anyway, so the presence of a large steel drum band artfully rendering "Tequila" or the Radetzky March on the Steamboat Wharf was not universally expected. With a look of confusion, although not unhappiness, they coiled up their extensions cords, put away their hog ring pliers, and collected their dogs. The island dogs were a significant portion of the audience, and Mo, Rossi, Solomon, Louie and Elsie and the others seemed to dig the music as much as the rest of us. These kids are really, really good.



Storey King, the engineer of the *Sunbeam*, Andrew Thompson and Mo, Dorothy Bunker and Margret Maloney sitting. (Photo by Eva Murray)

Lisa, Jasmine, Lydia, Emily and I, with and without painted toenails, learned our parts in the workshop and were invited to play along for one song with the rest of them, and I cannot think of the words to describe how much fun that was. A few of us are wondering if the next iteration of the Carl and Nigel Chase down-east steel-pan extended family, which includes Flash in the Pans, the Atlantic Clarion Steelband, the Rhythm Rockets Steelband (for children) as well as Planet Pan, might not ought to be right here on Matinicus. Like the Caribbean islands where this music originated, we sure do have oil barrels.



The family dancing is Nat, Ryan, Fiona and Lisa Twombly-Hussey.  
(Photo by Eva Murray)