

Dear Joan - Thanks for asking me to be a patron again of the International Marimba and Steel Pan Festival. I am as always delighted to accept. Adjudicating the past four years at the festival has been among the most unforgettable and inspiring experiences of my life. To watch 2000 young musicians playing marimbas, percussion, steel pans, singing, and dancing with so much joy, I feel privileged to be there to listen, give them comments on their performances, and encourage them. The overall organization of the festival is amazing - 225 performances in 2 days! All this is even more impressive considering how many of the groups have limited resources and need assistance from the festival in order to be there, and that groups came from all over South Africa, Swaziland, Botswana, and Zimbabwe.

I am more and more impressed by your work outside of the festival, developing a method for teaching marimba to beginners, and training music teachers to direct marimba ensembles. It has obviously been fruitful, as evidenced by the number of high achieving ensembles I've seen from every age group, and this year's coverage of the festival by CNN's Inside Africa is another example of the world taking notice.

I'm glad that the festival is featuring new compositions for marimbas and steel pan, particularly encouraging young composers to enter their works, perform them at the festival, with a chance to win prizes and financial assistance. At the 2016 festival we again had some good compositions from very young composers - we can see growth each year. I look forward to adjudicating the new compositions again.

As you know, I've been playing and teaching steel pan for more than 5 decades, and I am fascinated by the development of steel bands in South Africa. I'm especially interested in its potential for bringing young people from all parts of society

together to play music, and in the development of a South African style of music for steel band. Your inclusion of steel pans in the festival is giving a great deal of impetus to the development of steel bands in the schools of South Africa and beyond.

The 'pan,' as it is called in Trinidad, was created by young men from the poor neighborhoods of Port of Spain and other cities in Trinidad, and there was a great deal of fighting amongst them in the beginning. These young men started by beating rhythm on paint cans and biscuit tins, and created a family of instruments from oil barrels that cover the entire range of a symphony orchestra. The music became polyphonic and they created sophisticated arrangements for their newly created orchestras. In the process, they also went from fighting with knives to competing with music, and the steel band music festivals and competitions in Trinidad are world class events featuring the greatest steel bands in the world. They also changed their society in profound ways and became one of the most inclusive and unifying forces in the music world, crossing all the lines of gender, age, race, and ethnicity. The instrument is now known all over the world and is being played by more and more people, and everywhere it goes it seems to take root as both a musical and social force.

So once again, thank you for inviting me to participate in this amazing event, and I look forward to working with you and your fantastic team.

Sincerely,

Andy Narell  
Nov 8, 2016