

## *CHS Steel*, the Catonsville High School Steel Band

Celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, *CHS Steel*, the Catonsville High School Steel Band directed by Jim Wharton, was founded in 1991 and for seven years was the only school steel drum program in the state of Maryland. From a four-piece ensemble, the band has grown to its present size of 25 musicians.

Formed as a means for students to study and perform music from a culture other than their own, the band shares the music of Trinidad and Tobago with audiences throughout the Maryland region. Over 25 performances are presented annually in settings as diverse as school assemblies, jazz festivals, university conferences, state and national conventions of music educators, community festivals, church and synagogue social events and services, and the back of a flat-bed truck in the local Catonsville Fourth of July Parade. The band has appeared on the Baltimore County Education Channel, WJZ-TV, WMAR-TV, and WBAL-Radio. The band has been featured in articles in the *Baltimore Sun*, *Baltimore Magazine*, and *Newsday* from Port of Spain, Trinidad. Additionally in 2001 and 2008, the band performed with the internationally known jazz composer and pan master, Andy Narell, at the Berks County Jazz Festival in Reading, Pennsylvania. Andy will return to Catonsville for a concert with *CHS Steel* on April 16. Recently, the band was the opening act for concerts with jazz mallet player, David Samuels, and for Robert Greenidge, the steel pan player with the Jimmy Buffett Band. The band has performed with the Trinidadian steel pan composer and arranger, Ray Holman, and the Trinidadian steel pan recording artist and arranger, Ken "Professor" Philmore. The band has produced compact disk recordings of the spectacular concerts held at CHS with these and other famed artist/composers of the pan world.

Each year on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, the band performs along with brass players from the Baltimore Symphony, National Symphony, and area military bands at the annual *Holiday Brass* concert. In early January, the band accompanies Cantor Thom King and the choir of Beth El Synagogue for their annual *Island Shabbat*.

Most students in the band are also members of the school chorus, orchestra, guitar, or band program and represent all grade levels in the school. Two-hour rehearsals are held after school three days every week. Each year, auditions are held for the few open positions in the band. None of the students in the band have had prior experience playing steel drums.

The repertoire of the band covers many different styles, from classical to jazz and rock. Emphasis is placed on learning to play calypso and soca, the most popular styles of music heard in the island nation of Trinidad and Tobago.

In September of 2008, five CHS Steel Band alumni and Mr. Wharton performed with Yo Yo Ma and the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Marin Alsop at Baltimore's Meyerhoff Symphony Hall for the *Opening Gala* of the BSO's 2008-09 season.

Instrumentation of the 2015-16 *CHS Steel*

Seven leads  
Four double tenors  
Three double seconds  
Three sets of guitar pans,  
Two sets of cello pans  
Two sets of tenor-basses  
Two sets of six-basses  
Engine Room