

A Quaker Steel band! Whatever next?

If you happen to walk past Sutton Quaker Meeting house on a Tuesday morning, you may well hear the sounds of The Quaker Steel Band coming from the basement as they practise pieces which range from Schubert's *Ave Maria* and Mozart's *Ave Verum Corpus* to *Bring me sunshine* from the Morcambe and Wise TV show. The band's repertoire includes arrangements of traditional songs from Russia, Paraguay, New Zealand and the Caribbean, as well as Spanish gypsy music and Viennese waltzes.

The Band's founder, Carol Contant arrived from Guyana, then British Guiana, in 1958 to study the violin and viola at the Royal Academy of Music. She later married Michael Contant, a well-known maker and player of the 'pans' (the original and widely-used name for steel band instruments). Michael died in 2002 and four years later Carol discovered the Religious Society of Friends and her local Meeting in Sutton. She found herself at home and soon applied for membership and was welcomed into the Meeting.

While chatting about having played the pans, Carol raised the possibility with Friends of teaching them to play Mike's pans, which were being stored in an attic. The idea was enthusiastically received and the band was formed. The Sutton Quaker Steel Band has been going now for four years and is a source of fun and fellowship for its nine members from the Area Meeting, some of whom are in their 70s and 80s – 'recycled teenagers' as one listener put it. The band have played on several social events for the Meeting. Local churches have got to know about them and they have done a number of very successful performances in the Sutton area, no doubt causing puzzlement about what Quakers get up to! They now have a string of bookings lined up in the time leading up to Christmas.