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Drums of Trinidad

tribal rhythms from Carriacou

6 man drum orchestra
recorded in
Little Carib Theatre
in Port of Spain

The Men

Hunched together over their large drums, the six men* who made this record are no savages from thatched huts in the jungle. They create a high-voltage communication which never could be matched in any jungle for power or primitive virtuosity.

Andrew Beddoe . . . (see photo, center), whose sharp vicious bursts run whip-like over the whole rhythmic structure, lives in a corrugated iron shack in Port of Spain's shanty town. Bruce Procope is a practicing lawyer. Coming from diverse backgrounds, all are master drum beaters, products of the Trinidad setting,—an area where the rhythmic impulse may well have reached an all time peak.

The Language

The language of drums is one of disturbance. They speak with rhythms of untranscribable complexity, a basic message capable of producing strong unexpected reactions in listeners. Powerful repeating bass figures mesmerize and focus the senses; intense interrupting beats added on top create a kind of emotional tug of war within. And fundamental in all drumming is the immense stimulation of the always-approaching climax.

In these 45 minutes of drums, dancers find compulsions to move; jazz enthusiasts, the mad improvisations of a supercharged jam session; serious musicians, an overwhelming vocabulary.

Drums have been beating over centuries, even before recorded history. An epoch of experience has refined the secret formulas for inciting, exorcising, transfixing the human spirit. There is almost no one so blunt who can listen completely unmoved. For here we are face to face with a sure manipulation of an elemental human instinct.

Primitive Rhythms

Significantly, most of the selections recorded here stem from "everyday" activities: the boat launching, the fishing, harvesting, dancing. The unspoiled people of Carriacou, for example, do not limit their drumming to the narrow requirements of special occasions. On the other hand, neither do they take a boat launching lightly. Their use of drum rhythms is natural and unaffected as an accompaniment to the events of daily life.

The horn-rimmed investigators sometimes forget that so called 'primitive' drums are used for fun too. When it came time for *Calypso in Drums* (opening side A), these same men of the glistening bodies and furious hands relaxed into smiles and poked around for unlikely objects of percussion. Shortly these appeared, a motley assortment of glasses, rusty flat irons, bottles, brake drums and spoons. They were still being added to during the playing.

Calypso in Drums is the real thing: an effervescent improvisation of dance rhythms which are equally at home in a North American night club or on a tropical island 10° above the equator, where they were invented. Entrances, rhythmic shifts and frenzied drum dialogues all arise from the same mysterious rapport which cues and knits together memorable jam sessions.

Drumology is another festive dance improvisation. The wild conga-like variations are led by "Popsy" Charles, who uses two thin sticks, alternating swiftly between head and wooden sides of the drum.

Primitif is a free improvisation in primitive style, both title and and basic rhythms coming originally from the western coast of Africa. The sound of *maracas* emanates from a giant edition of the instrument which is shaken upright on its 4-foot handle.

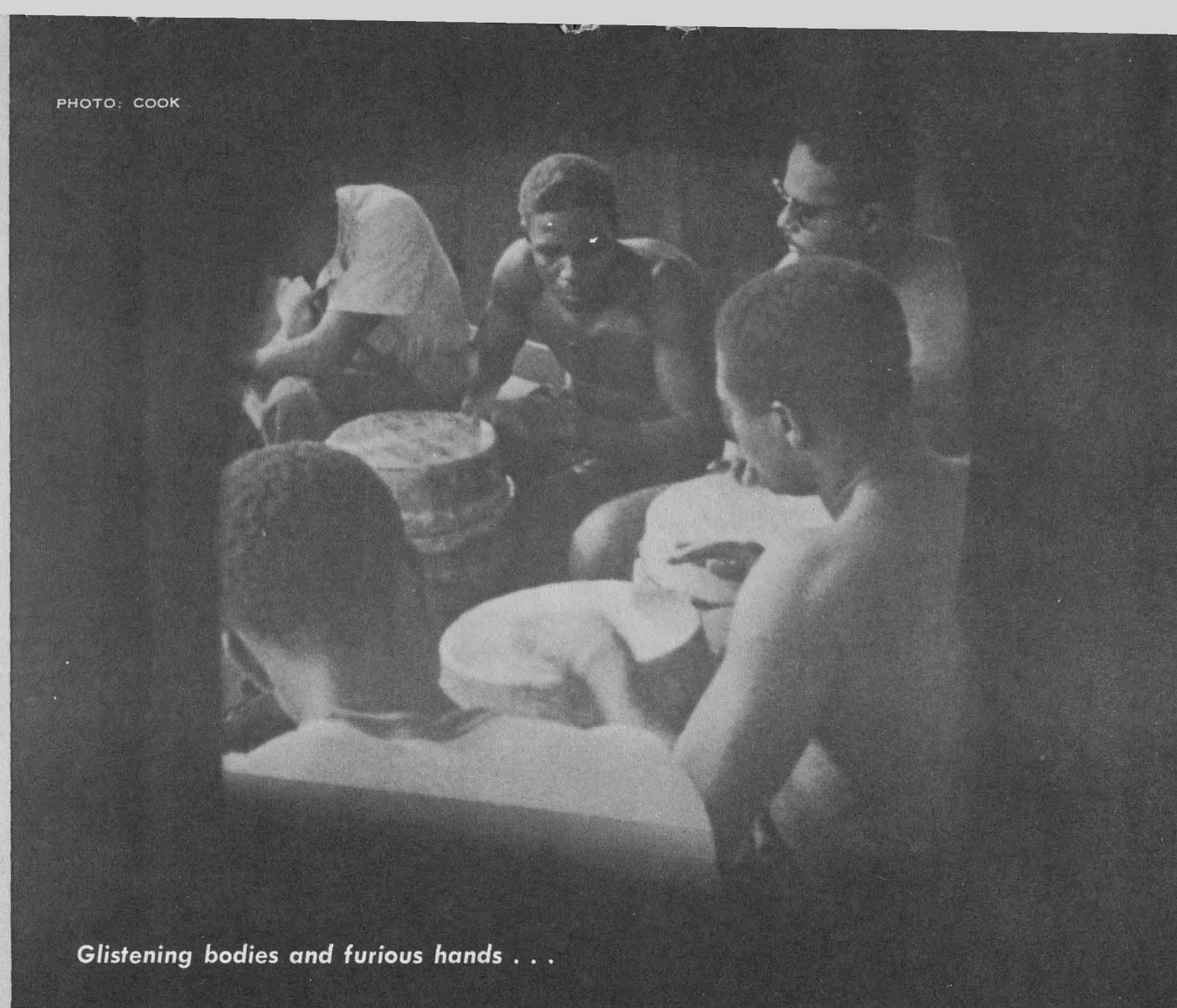
After the session, the men rested, stored their drums, put on shirts to go to their separate ways. Andrew Beddoe's black beret lent a touch of what might have been French Apache, or U. S. bebop, both strangely out of place in Trinidad. Hidden somewhere beneath this gentle speech and the beret were the lashing, driving animalistic rhythms which had shaken the theatre a few minutes before. Lawyer Procope left amid a flurry of arched eyebrows centering around his new Bermuda shorts.

We didn't see any of the six again, except for a brief glimpse of a costumed Popsy in the Carnival parade, shuffling behind steelband, like thousands of other Trinidadians. By then his rhythmic outlet had turned into that subtle hip-rolling step which, with variations, infects a whole population at Carnival time.

B.B.

*Andrew Beddoe, "Popsy" Charles, Renny Cooper, Laurence Douglas, Bruce Procope, Selwyn Solomon

PHOTO: COOK



Glistening bodies and furious hands . . .

Technical Note

This record contains extremes of frequency and dynamic range. The transients of large drums, and high frequency content of glass bottles, brake drums and maracas extend to both limits of the audible spectrum. The full range of the original performance has been transferred to grooves with no compromises or compensations made for inferior playback equipment. The V-grooves were mastered at fewer lines per inch than normal due to the nature of the material. The original recording was made with our own wide range equipment in Port of Spain, in Beryl McBurnie's Little Carib Theatre, a moderately large cinder block structure, open on three sides above the five foot level.

SIDE A

1. Calypso in Drums 2. Drumology
3. Primitif

SIDE B

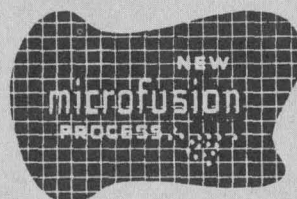
- Nation rhythms from Carriacou
1. Nation 2. Koromanti 3. Manding
4. Halicord 5. Congo 6. Calinda

Records in the Carnival Series:

- Jump-Up Carnival in Trinidad* 12" LP cat. #1072
Le Jazz Primitif; John Buddy Williams, Rupert Clemendore, 12" LP cat. #1082
The Drums of Trinidad; nation rhythms of Carriacou, group drumming by Little Carib Theatre drummers, 12" LP cat. #1045
Calypso Lore & Legend; Patrick Jones chants and stories, Poposit's oldtime string orchestra, 12" LP RR #5016; ethnic
Bamboo-Tambo, Bongo & the Belair; native dances and percussive forms, singing, chanting and drumming, 12" LP RR #5017 ethnic
East Indian Drums of Tunapuna; Moslem ritual drums, wedding and ceremonial, 12" LP RR #5018; ethnic

also in Caribbean Series:

- Brute Force Steel Bands of Antigua*; 12" LP cat. #1042
Steel Band Clash; 12" LP cat. #1040; both contain mambos, sambas, calypsos, etc. by Brute Force, Big Shell, Hellsgate Bands of Antigua
Jawbone of an Ass; Cuban jazz from Santiago, one band uses jawbone as percussion instrument, 12" LP cat. #1083
Three Rituals; Shango from Trinidad, Tumba Francessa from Cuba, 3 Yemenite songs from Israel, 12" LP cat. #1043; ethnic
Caribbean; calypso from Jamaica, Lebanese ud from Port au Prince, harp & jarana from Vera Cruz, etc., 12" LP RR5003
Tiroro; best drummer in Haiti, with jacket notations by Henry Cowell, 12" LP RR5004



COOK

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