

TIRORO

the haitian drummer

recorded by Sam Eskin

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The world renowned Haitian drummer in an early sound study. Liner notes are by American composer Henry Cowell. "*Astonishing rhythmic and melodic effects*" – Christian Science Monitor.



In singing, dancing or in religious practices in Haiti, the drums can always be heard. And Tiroro is "the greatest drummer in Haiti".

Tiroro and his drum speak the language of the Haiti of yesterday and today. Tiroro can be heard at voodoo ceremonies drumming the rhythms of the ancient ritual; at an elegant hotel entertaining the guests; at gathering places not so elegant where his people listen as his capable hands evoke from the drum exciting, vivid remembrances that stem from an African past and bring his hearers right up to the living present. Everything Tiroro has to say is said with those amazingly nimble fingers on his drum. Tiroro, the greatest drummer in Haiti speaks eloquently for Haiti.

SAM ESKIN



Tiroro uses a single drum, which he manipulates in such a way that he obtains four definite musical pitches — low, medium, medium-high, and high; and between them he produces several graduations of pitchsound. In addition he makes sliding tones, always from the given pitch upward, by tightening the drumhead with his thumb after striking the drum. He uses in general three drumming styles, which are related and run into each other unnoticeably.

His most personal style is that of the solo virtuoso drummer, rhapsodic, fast-changing, both in pace and fundamental beat, created deliberately to be masterful, dramatic, unpredictable and astonishing. Juba is a good example; and "Smoscow". There are many rhythmic patterns. The sense of variety and complexity is produced by contrasts between successive patterns. They are usually repeated four or more times. A sense of terrific irregularity is produced when each is repeated only two or three times; or in some breath-taking passages, not repeated at all.

In a few, Tiroro contrasts the low and the high so that each has its own independent rhythmic line — usually a matter of one line syncopating against the other. Each change of pattern includes different tempo, and different pitches, as well as the actual note-lengths, creating the feeling of endless change and variety.

When Tiroro sings with his drums, there is another, slightly different style. In the opening Timbale, the drum, at times, follows the rather simple vocal rhythm. At other times it gives only more fundamental beats, and the voice produces rhythmical variety; sometimes a totally contrasting rhythmical line against the drumming.

The third drumming style is illustrated by the last two parts of side two (5004B). Here there is a regular rhythmic background, a groundwork of a recurring rhythmical figures. (In one instance, a single figure is played on the drum over forty times without variation, while the voice supplies variety.) As the dances develop, there is more and more decoration, — a theme with variations, instead of, as is the case with Juba and Smoscow, variations and contrasts with no one underlying theme. The tunes employ two scales. One is a simple major scale, used as it is in French folk songs; yet the style of singing is unmistakably African, as in West Nigerian

TIRORO

Tribes. The other scale, evidently meant to sound African, is a "natural" minor mode, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A. (The original African five-tone scale after which this is patterned has fewer tones: A, C, D, E, G, A. So there has been an unconscious sophistication.)

The singing style, therefore, is a real mixture of African and French; to wit, Haitian. The drumming style is also Haitian; while based on African drumming patterns, there is found nowhere in Africa such sudden contrast of successive rhythms, or such virtuosic solo drumming. In Africa there are usually several drummers playing together, and the basic fast note is an eighth note; Tiroro, playing alone, makes his drum sound as though there were several players playing; and his basic fast note is the sixteenth note — twice as fast as the African.

HENRY COWELL

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Records, Stamford, Conn.