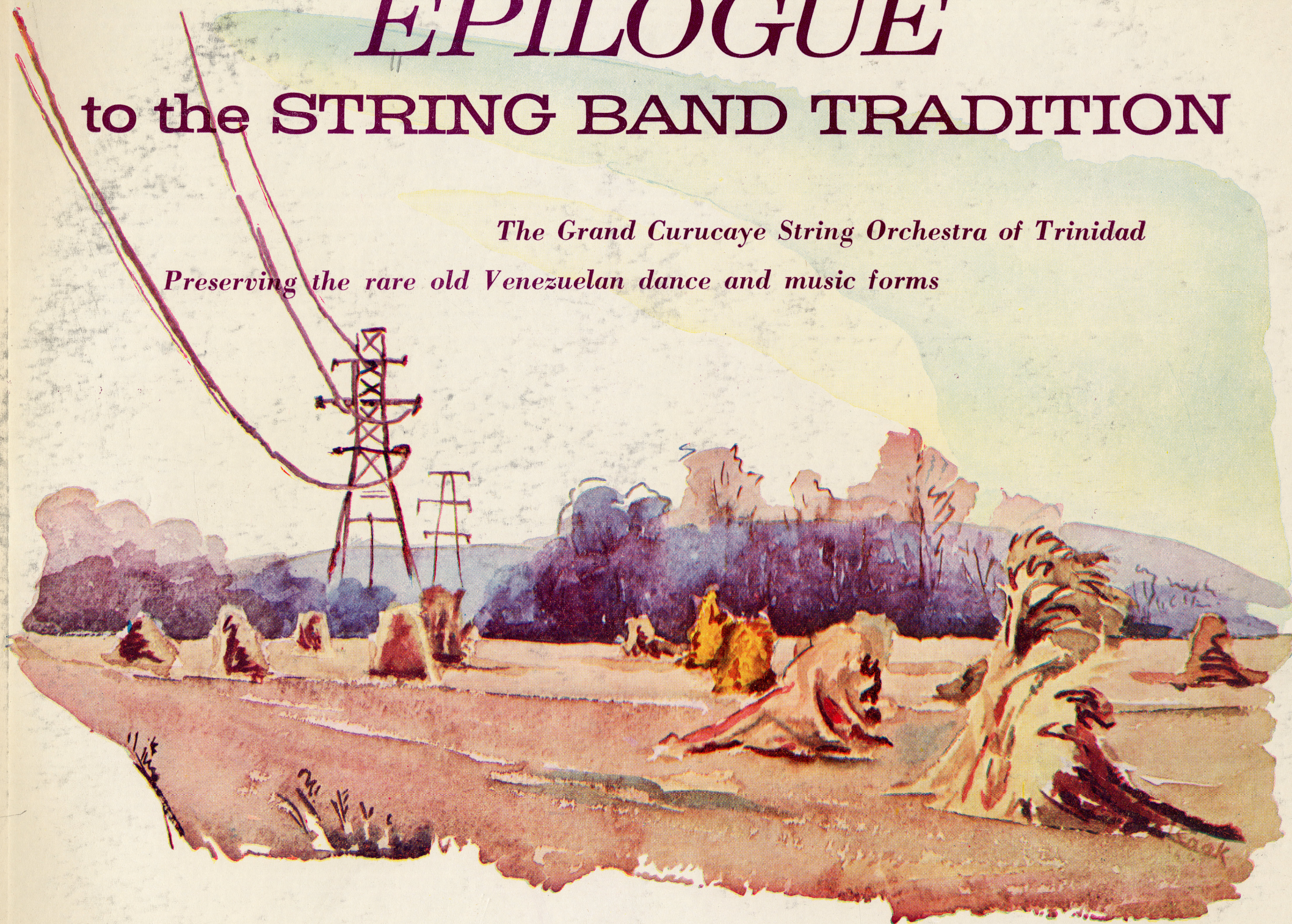


EPILOGUE

to the **STRING BAND TRADITION**

The Grand Curucaye String Orchestra of Trinidad

Preserving the rare old Venezuelan dance and music forms



Galerons, Serenals, Joropos, Manzanares, Vieux Croix

3 CUATROS • GUITAR • FLUTE • VIOLIN • BANDOL (Spanish Mandolin) • CELLO • BASS • PIANO

... like a voice from long ago

'... at the last moment the bandol player didn't show up. Being the most important member of the band, he fully expected to be cajoled into coming,—which he was. You can't allow yourself to take offense at this sort of thing in the field or you're all through ...

As a result Beryl McBurnie had to make a fast precarious fifty-mile-an-hour trip, careening through Maraval into the notch and down into Santa Cruz valley to pick him up at his house, where he was patiently waiting for her to arrive. Beryl dragged him back, preened plumage and all. Then we proceeded.'

Nowhere else but in Trinidad, and perhaps by no one else but Beryl McBurnie, could the old time Spanish string orchestra have been recreated. They were rehearsing for three months on and off prior to the recording. This in itself is an extraordinary thing because it takes a great deal of ingenuity and persuasiveness to get the same people to come together a number of times to try to play music which many of them have begun to forget. Everyone in Trinidad says it,—that this is really remarkable, that it is like a voice from long ago.

Grand Curucaye

North and east of Santa Cruz in Trinidad there is an area called Grand Curucaye. Isolated there from the ebb and tide of Port of Spain, live the Venezulean Spanish, many of them old political refugees from Venezuela, or their descendants. Along with themselves, they brought their music; in Grand Curucaye almost everyone plays or sings.

Actually it was a matter of pride. The only reason they stuck together for these three months was that they were going to be recorded, to be heard 'round the world' in their own music. Here in Grand Curucaye, they understood, was one of the very few places where it could be recreated.

In centuries past, the Spanish string orchestra used to be something of the size of the Grand Curucaye. Then it was less difficult to hold together groups of eight or ten players to form an orchestra. Today, in the country, they still play for dancing and religious festivals, but during the last fifty years the size of the band has diminished to four or five,* mainly because of organizational difficulties found in the climate and temperament. The character, the flavor has deteriorated, and the music has begun to slip away into a folk limbo.

and why strings?

The one thing that the Spanish demand from their music is an interesting complexity of rhythm. Until this point is well understood, the obscurity, occasionally repetitive nature and sometimes total absence of melodic line may deceive the listener into classifying the music

as esoteric or ethnic. Plucked string instruments have a rhythmic attack rather totally absent in the blown horn. For instance, in a superficial sense the cuatro is strictly for accompaniment and chords, but the Spanish do not listen to it that way. To them it is a rhythm instrument, imparting its nuances through the tiny variations made within the strict beat. So also is the cello, with its string slapping percussively on the base of the neck. Above all this, a clear melodic line would have been sung in the old days, floating, legato and lyrical over the busy maddening accompaniment. Especially this would be true of the serenals, the *Vieje Croix*, and the *galeron* (corruption of *galeon*=galleon), a sort of

Spanish sea chanty dating back to the 16th century, sung by slaves manning galleons in the naval battles between the English and the Spanish in the straits between Trinidad and Tobago, where the Spanish suffered defeat. It is possible by listening with extreme care to pick out or to imagine a variety of hauntingly beautiful melodies and counter melodies buried in the old music of the Grand Curucaye orchestra.

E. C.

*hear Poposit, Calypso Lore & Legend RR#5016

It was a matter of pride.
Grand Curucaye—one
of the few places where
it could be recreated.

bandol, and player
... a fast, careening
50-mile-an-hour trip

Side A:

FIVE JOROPOS

Manita Octavo
Caracas
La Tribil
La Vaca
El Pero

TWO GALERONS

D Major—D Minor
C Major

TWO SERENALS

Salutation
Entertainment House

Side B:

AMBA CAILLA

(Jal La Suque Kow Mwe
Ke Bow)

PARANG

MANZANARES—D Minor

AGUINALDO

VIEJE CROIX

Mampo
Pecao Salao
Crucao

TWO SERENALS

We Are Together As One
The Baboon

Send for catalog
of exclusive
on-the-scene
Caribbean recordings
by Emory Cook



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