

ETHNIC FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 4234

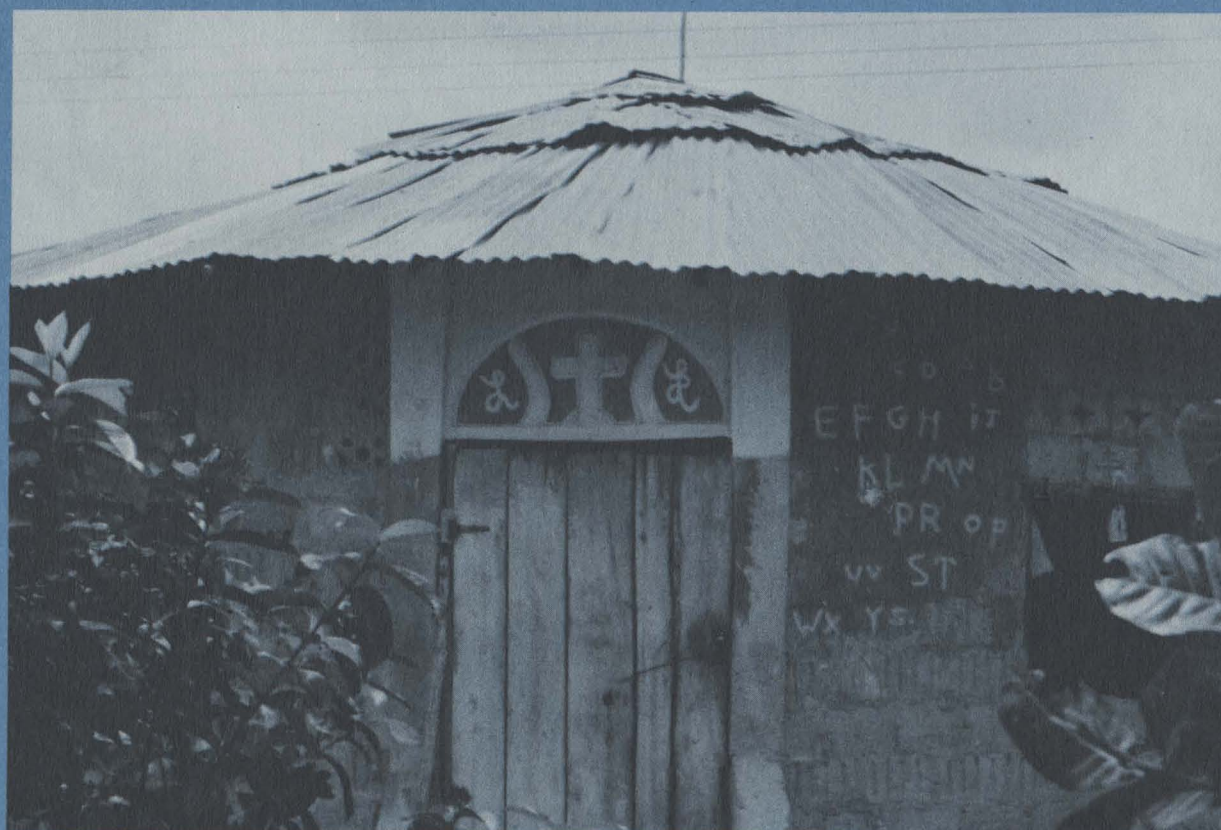


Spiritual Baptist Music of Trinidad

RECORDED IN TRINIDAD BY STEPHEN D. GLAZIER



A JOINT WORSHIP SERVICE, MT. TABOR SPIRITUAL BAPTIST CHURCH, TODD'S ROAD



A SPIRITUAL BAPTIST CHURCH, LOS LOMAS

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

ETHNIC FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 4234

SIDE 1

- Band 1 Marching the Children Home
- Band 2 Glory Halleluja
- Band 3 Now Let Every Heart Prepare
- Band 4 Glossolalia
(When I saw my Savior there)
- Band 5 Jesus on the Cross

SIDE 2

- Band 1 By the Cross
(Where I first saw the Light)
- Band 2 I heard the Voice of Jesus say
- Band 3 A Shout

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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Introduction and Notes by

Stephen D. Glazier, University of Connecticut

Trinidad, the southernmost of the West Indies, lies immediately opposite the delta of the Orinoco River. The island has an area of 1,863 square miles. The island was discovered by Christopher Columbus on his third voyage to the New World in 1498 when he took possession in the name of the Spanish Crown. The Spanish, however, paid little attention to Trinidad until the 17th century when Sedeño successfully established a small colony there. In 1797 the Spanish garrison on the island was defeated by British forces under the leadership of Sir Ralph Abercromby. In 1802, the island was ceded to the Crown of Great Britain by the Treaty of Amiens.

Island aborigines (Arawaks, Salvaos, Sepuyos, Carinepagotos, and Yaos) disappeared rapidly due to Spanish (and Carib) slave raids and the influx of European disease. This led to severe labor shortages, and in 1783 the Spanish governor opened Trinidad to settlers from other Caribbean islands. At that time a number of white planters from Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Santo Domingo arrived along with their slaves. Some areas of the country continue to boast pockets of French and Spanish speakers, although English is the official language.

The number of slaves increased under British rule; however, a majority of Trinidad's Blacks migrated from other West Indian islands after emancipation. There were also immigrants from the Azores, Madeira, and parts of Europe and the United States during the 1800's. American immigrants were predominately Blacks from the Southern states. The British colonial government of Trinidad laid aside tracts of land for American slaves who fought against the United States in the War of 1812. Settlers on these tracts of land (known as the "company villages") have played an important part in the religious history of Trinidad.

Between 1845 and 1917 indentured laborers from China and India came to Trinidad. Chinese laborers had a limited influence as many of their number returned home after completing their period of indenture. Indian laborers, on the other hand, often remained on the island as wage earners. Many bought land and settled permanently.

According to a recent island census the population is roughly 45% East Indian and 45% Black, with the remainder classified as White, Colored (Creole), Chinese and Syrian.

The Spiritual Baptist Faith in Trinidad

Trinidad's Spiritual Baptists are part of an international religious movement with congregations in Tobago, St. Vincent, Grenada, Venezuela, Guyana, New York City and Toronto. In Trinidad, the religion is also known as the "Shouters cult" an appellation believers neither use nor appreciate.

There are approximately ten thousand members of the Baptist faith in Trinidad. Membership cuts across social and economic lines. Over the last ten years an increasing number of East Indians and Creoles have become involved in the religion.

Most churches are small. Their memberships range from less than fifty to two hundred. The music presented in this album was recorded at churches at Curepe, San Juan, East Dry River (Port-of-Spain), and Arima. All of these churches are located in the northwestern part of the island.

Although there is some variation among churches, most Spiritual Baptist churches are dominated by an altar filled with candles, crucifixes, chalk writings, and religious pictures. The center of a church is marked by a post decked with flags. At the center post there is also a large brass handbell, several vases of flowers, and lighted candles.

The church floor is usually of packed earth or cement, and benches are placed around all available floorspace. In addition to the main building where public worship is held, each church maintains a number of out buildings. Most churches (no matter how poor) construct a small separate chamber for mourning rituals (to be described below).

Regular Spiritual Baptist religious services last from three to six hours. They are held on Sundays and in many churches on Wednesday evenings as well. Leaders occasionally organize a series of special nightly services known as a "rally." Rallies may occur over a period of several weeks and do not differ markedly from regular Baptist ceremonies.

Behavior during ceremonies varies considerably. Most leaders begin their services with elaborate rites of purification. Purification rites are intended to cast out evil spirits ("orisha") from the place of worship. Candles, located at all church openings, are thought to discourage evil spirits from entering the building while ceremonies are in progress and incense, bell ringing, and strewing of perfumed water serve to dispell those spirits already inside. Visitors and other unbaptized participants are believed to be most vulnerable to attack by evil spirits, and such individuals receive special attention. In Curepe, where a neighboring Pentecostal church specializes in demon exorcism, Baptist churches take special care in purification since it is believed that an abundance of recently exorcised spirits are looking for new hosts in the area.



Baptist Altar, Los Lomas

Rites of purification usually begin one hour before the stated time of worship but are seldom completed before worship has begun. Between the start of worship and the completion of purification rites the congregation sings slow unemotional hymns said to "keep the Holy Ghost from manifesting Himself before the church is clean" (SIDE I, Band 3).

High ranking church members often do not appear until service is well underway. In general, higher ranking members should be among the last to arrive, and members who enter after high ranking members are perceived to be challenging the authority of their superiors. Lower ranking members, therefore, take special pains to arrive "on time."

When the highest ranking church member (also known as the paramount leader) takes his place behind the altar, ceremonies officially begin. From the altar, paramount leaders direct the order of worship. They tell low ranking members when to read the scriptures and high ranking members when they should provide "enlightenment" and/or interpretation of the scriptures. Men are invited to speak from behind the altar while women must address the congregation kneeling before the church's center post.

Baptist ceremonies tend to alternate between periods of quiet contemplation and periods of frenzy. The Baptists refer to these segments of service as "hot" and "cool" periods. Specific types of behavior such as glossolalia and "shouting" (SIDE I, Band 4; SIDE II, Band 3) are only deemed appropriate during certain segments of worship. Hot portions of service include deliberate attempts to induce manifestations of the Holy Ghost ("speaking in tongues"). Various techniques are used, and the most common are: stamping, clapping, hymn singing, and "adoption" (a form of hyperventilation also known as "trumpeting in the spirit").

Periods of frenzy eventually give way to periods of illumination and contemplation. This part of service, consisting of scripture readings and short homilies by members of the congregation, is devoted to the Word of God. At this time, Bible passages from the New Testament (especially the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation) and the books of Daniel, Psalms and Ezekiel are favored.

All high ranking churchmen are expected to offer some illumination. This is a way to make one's talents known to the paramount leader and may also increase one's reputation within the church. Baptist etiquette dictates that all high ranking members should allow all lower ranking members to speak first. This is advantageous to high ranking members who have a longer time to prepare their interpretations, and it may enable them to benefit from earlier discussions. In all cases, paramount leaders are the last to speak.

After the paramount leader offers his interpretation, there is usually a brief period of religious frenzy consisting of glossolalia, bell ringing, and (sometimes) dancing. The final period of intensification may last from ten to fifteen minutes before the paramount leader calls for benediction. Benediction marks a period of contemplation and is followed by announcements from the floor concerning upcoming baptisms, mourning ceremonies, and joint worship with other Baptist churches.

Within this general order, Baptist worship is very flexible. This permits leaders to make additions to the basic service outlined above. Embellishments may include: African dances (rites associated with Shango), sacrifice of a chicken or a goat, exorcisms, ritual meals, Islamic or Hindu healing rites, confession, or private consultations. For the most part, embellishments occur either before or after regular service; therefore, leaders say that they are able to borrow rituals from many religious traditions without losing their identity as Baptists. Leaders claim that embellishments are very important because they serve to differentiate one Baptist church from another and they are a means of attracting new members.

Baptism and Morning Rites

In the eyes of many Baptists two rituals distinguish their religion from all other religions: baptism and mourning ceremonies. Baptists are very particular about these ceremonies and in these rituals no embellishments are permitted.

All candidates for baptism are expected to receive religious instruction of varying intensity prior to the rite. Instruction may last from several hours to several months, although one week is considered the normal period of preparation. Teachings consist of Bible readings, prayer and a type of divination known as "proving". In proving candidates are asked to close their eyes, open the Bible and pick a random verse. Verses thus chosen are said to reveal a candidate's readiness for baptism and in addition these verses serve as a basis for later instruction.

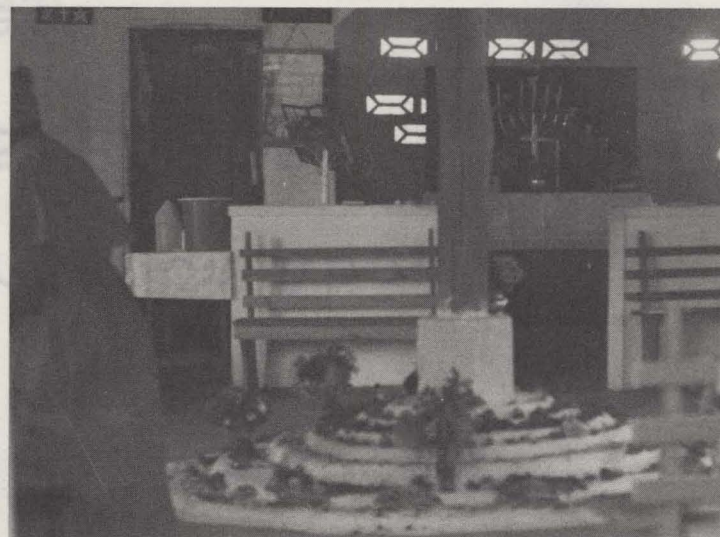
Church leaders say that they scrutinize candidates for baptism carefully; however, they seldom deny anyone participation in the rite. Baptist churches constantly seek new members and leaders are aware that if a candidate experiences too much resistance at one church he will simply become a candidate for baptism at another church. Under certain conditions, most leaders admitted that they would be willing to baptize a candidate without a period of formal instruction.

In the past, Spiritual Baptist leaders imposed restrictions on personal behavior prior to the rite including demands for sexual abstinence and fasting. This is no longer the case in most churches because candidates frequently come from distant villages and restrictions are difficult to enforce due to this increase in geographical mobility.

Most often, rites of baptism begin on a Saturday evening and continue until the following Sunday morning. In recent years, some leaders have offered shorter ceremonies on other nights of the week. Shorter ceremonies contain all of the elements of longer ceremonies, although less time is devoted to each segment of the rite. Although shorter ceremonies have been criticized in some quarters (and privately by some leaders who themselves perform the ceremonies), so-called "quicky baptisms" are rapidly growing in popularity. One reason may be that they are less expensive than the traditional rite.

In the first segment of the baptism ritual, candidates are given white robes and "bands" to wrap around their heads covering both eyes and ears. In some churches, candidates are expected to bring their own "bands" while at other churches leaders wash used "bands" and provide them to candidates for a fee.

The candidate, unable to see, is led to the church building and placed on the Mercy Seat, a front bench signed with mystical writings and symbols. Lighted candles are placed in each hand of the candidate. Candidates are expected to hold these burning candles for several hours, and it is believed that as long as



The Center Post, Holy Nazarene Spiritual Baptist Church, Curepe

the Holy Ghost is with them, they will not be burned by hot wax. In the early part of the ritual, church leaders attempt to make the Holy Ghost manifest by using techniques of "adoption".

Between six o'clock in the evening, when the candidate is placed on the Mercy Seat and dawn, when actual rites of immersion take place, members of the congregation offer words of "consolation" to the candidate. Most congregants take this opportunity to tell candidates about their own baptisms. Members present also take candidates for walks, get them water, or take them to the church latrine. In some churches candidates are allowed to sleep between midnight and four A.M.

At four o'clock, candidates are awakened and begin preparations for immersion. They leave the church building and are taken to a body of "moving water" (usually a river) where immersion occurs. Candidates who have been baptised previously in another denomination are separated from those candidates who have never been baptised. The former individuals are "re-washed" (sprinkled with water), while the latter are totally immersed three times. Once, in the name of God the Father; once, in the name of God the Son; and once, in the name of God the Holy Ghost. In many respects, immersion rites parallel baptisms among the London Baptists and other standard Baptist denominations.

After immersion, candidates remove their wet clothing, re-dress, and return to the church to be anointed with oil. Following hymns, exhortations, glossolalia, and prayer at the church, the baptism service comes to a close.

Elements from baptism rites also play a part in mourning ceremonies. A major difference between the two ceremonies is one of duration. While candidates for baptism may wear their "bands" for sixteen hours, mourners may wear their "bands" for up to three weeks. Also, candidates for the mourning ceremony are scrutinized even less carefully than are candidates for baptism. It is assumed that all mourners have been baptised previously, but no attempt is made to verify whether or not this is the case.

In some churches observance of mourning rites is very lax. After the public aspects of the ceremony have been completed, Baptist leaders sometimes allow their mourners to take off their "bands", smoke, talk and laugh with friends. Formalities are difficult to maintain because mourners and their supervisors are often close friends outside the mourning chamber.

The purpose of the mourning ceremony is to induce visions which are believed to reveal one's "true" rank within the faith. Twenty two separate ranks are recognized within

each church and with each rank is associated specific duties. Typical ranks include: shepherd, healer, pointer, diver, prover, nurse, Brother, Sister, Mother and Pastor (SIDE I, Band 1).

In addition to its association with church rank, the mourning ceremony is also considered one way of combating orisha and bad luck. Misfortune and illness are often interpreted as calls to mourn, and it is widely believed that if one enters the mourning chamber sick, he will emerge from the ceremony in a healthy state.

Notes on the Recording

Selections for this album were chosen from over forty hours of recorded Baptist music taped between 1976 and 1979. I wish to publically acknowledge the support of many Baptist leaders who responded enthusiastically to my requests to record their religious services. Without their help and encouragement, this project would not have been possible. I also wish to thank the University of Connecticut Research Foundation for helping to sponsor my fieldwork in Trinidad.

I regret that it was not possible to include cuts from all churches surveyed. Criteria for selection were predominantly aesthetic. A disproportionate number of "hot" and/or "spirit filled" hymns are included because: a) many slower hymns did not record well on my portable equipment, and b) livelier hymns tend to be more innovative. Recent trends in Baptist worship are more easily noted in the so-called "hot" portions of their worship.

All music in this album is spontaneous, unrehearsed, and many church members did not know that I would be recording their service before I actually arrived with my equipment. However, there is a sense in which many church members have been rehearsing these hymns and shouts for most of their lives.

The Spiritual Baptists of Trinidad take great pride in their music. They look forward to the day that their voices will be heard all over the world and are especially pleased that Spiritual Baptist brethren in the United States and Canada will be able to hear this album.

This album updates the work of Professor George Eaton Simpson whose 1961 Folkways Ethnic recording (FE4478) Cult Music of Trinidad was among the first to devote attention to this important religious group. The most dramatic changes since Simpson's recording have been the increased use of elaborate sound systems (microphones, amplifiers and speakers) in Baptist worship and adoptions from popular music (especially jazz and rock and roll). In southern parts of the island, East Indian music has also influenced Baptist services.

SIDE I, Band 1: MARCHING THE CHILDREN HOME

At the conclusion of the mourning ceremony, candidates return to the main building to tell their visions to waiting members of the congregation. This hymn is sung as they enter the church. Baptist mourning ceremonies are also known as "pilgrim journeys" and Baptists use the terms "pilgrim" and "mourner" synonymously. St. Francis Spiritual Baptist Church, East Dry River (Port-of-Spain). Leader Fitzroy Small.

SIDE I, Band 2: GLORY HALLELUJA

A lively hymn. Note change of tempo. The Holy Spirit is called to hear the mourner's vision. At the service, this particular hymn lasted fifteen minutes. St. Francis Spiritual Baptist Church, East Dry River (Port-of-Spain). Leader Fitzroy Small.

SIDE I, Band 3: NOW LET EVERY HEART PREPARE

This popular slow hymn was used to open the service before the paramount leader had arrived. Holy Nazarene Spiritual Baptist Church, Curepe. Mother Grizette.

SIDE I, Band 4: GLOSSOLALIA (WHEN I SAW MY SAVIOR THERE)

Unusual speech patterns in this selection are manifestations of the Holy Ghost. Slow hymns (e. g. When I Saw My Savior There) are used to "cool" the Spirit and restore order. Much glossolalia in this service resembles animal noises. Holy Nazarene Spiritual Baptist Church, Curepe. Mother Grizette.

SIDE I, Band 5: JESUS ON THE CROSS ALONE

This very popular hymn is often sung between homilies and scripture readings. Most Baptists know the tune, but few seem to know the words. At the service, this hymn continued for seventeen minutes before breaking into a Shout. Mt. Tabor Spiritual Baptist Church, Todds Road/ Arima Road. Leader Albert A. DeBique.

SIDE II, Band 1: BY THE CROSS (WHERE I FIRST SAW THE LIGHT)

A traditional hymn used to open service after the paramount leader has arrived. Little Flock Spiritual Baptist Church, San Juan. Leader Nurse.

SIDE II, Band 2: I HEARD THE VOICE OF JESUS SAY

An unusually clear rendition of this hymn. This marked the transition from Old Testament to New Testament scripture readings. Little Flock Spiritual Baptist Church, San Juan. Leader Nurse.

SIDE II, Band 3: A SHOUT

A fine performance by one of the most musically innovative congregations on the island. Note several false stops and the dramatic change of tempo at the end. The influences of popular music are very apparent here. Also it is interesting to note that the lead singer continues to assert and reassert his authority throughout this selection. Holy Nazarene Spiritual Baptist Church, Curepe. Mother Grizette.

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