

RECORDED AND ANNOTATED BY DAVID BLAIR STIFFLER



ETHNIC FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 4238

Traditional African Ritual Music of GUYANA

"Queh Queh," "Cumfa" and "Come Tru"



COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

ETHNIC FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 4238

SIDE 1

Recorded at the "Guyana United Apostolitic
Mystical Council"
Berbice Branch, Stanleytown, New Amsterdam

Band 1 Prayer and invocation
Band 2 Nation
Band 3 Granny me coming
Band 4 One Day
Band 5 Mama Ma Ahwe Day Mama Ma Ahwe
Day Oho
Band 6 Achae Bolo
Band 7 Ebinday

Singers: Caterine Skeet - Shak Shak or Ratle,
Margo Johnson - Call Drummer, Barbara Pilgrim,
Elder Alphonso Gray - Second Call Drum, Hubert
Johnson - Gut Drum.

SIDE 2

Recorded at St. Matthews Apostolitic Mission -
Rossignol, Guyana

Band 1 Lead Us Heavenly Father, Lead Us -
Anglican Hymn
Band 2 Nation
Band 3 Goo Night Eh
Band 4 Uti Tendi My Ma Nicki La
Band 5 Ginga Roo
Band 6 Tell Mairi, Didi Gone Away
Band 7 Yar Away Achae Moro Ko
Band 8 Cuma Fish
Band 9 Walking & Talking Down Jericho Road
Band 10 Chin Mongo

Singers: Charles Pilgrim - Drummer, Frederick
Donald, Mistress Bently, Sybil Baker, Mother Baker -
Mother of the Church, Mary Solomon - Shak Shak,
Charlotte David.

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Traditional African Ritual Music of GUYANA

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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TRADITIONAL AFRICAN RITUAL MUSIC OF GUYANA

"Queh Queh," "Cumfa" and "Come Tru"

by David Blair Stiffler



The country of Guyana is located on the north-east shoulder of South America. It is populated mainly by Negroes, East Indians and Amerindians. Over 90% of its population lives on the narrow strip that runs along the coast for some 200 miles. It is separated from its continental neighbors by wide rivers and large tracts of tropical forest. It was originally settled by the Dutch and English at the beginning of the 17th Century who established trading posts up river, in the hills, with the Amerindian natives. Plantations were later laid out and worked by the slaves from Africa.

The first real settlements were established between 1616 and 1621 by the Dutch West India Company, who grew coffee and cotton, with a little tobacco and sugar cane (which became the dominant crop by 1820). To grow it, 110,000 slaves had been imported. When slavery was abolished in 1834, the slaves scattered as small landowners and the plantation

owners had to look elsewhere for another source of labor which was provided by indentured servants from British India (approximately 240,000 had come by 1914) along with a few Chinese and some Portuguese from the Azores and Maderia. At the end of their indenture many remained.

Europeans consist of about 1% of the population while East Indians comprise over 51%, the Africans 43% and the others, including the Amerindians 5%.

With the introduction of slavery into the new world a fusion of both the Africans' Animism and the Europeans' Christianity developed unique forms of religious practice and custom. Wherever the African was settled, he brought with him his particular traditions, language, Gods, rituals and the memory of his homeland. With this album some of the unique manifestations of the African in Guyana will be experienced through the music of "Cumfa," "Come Tru," and "Queh Queh." By integrating around a core of what they held in common, the African preserved many of his traditions and beliefs such as ancestor worship, the use of songs, drums and dancing in their religious rituals and the possession of the worshipper by the God that was summoned.

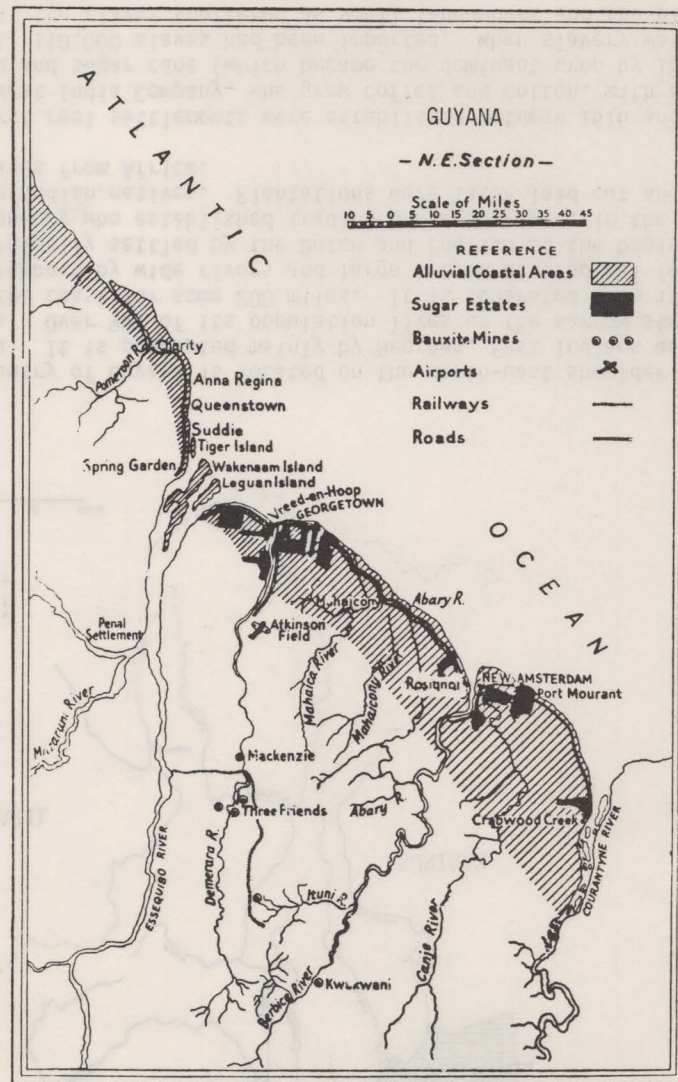
As one travels throughout Guyana one finds the African element still very strong and alive, especially in the more remote and rural villages away from Georgetown. The strongest examples of the Africans' traditional practices are found in the form of marriage and religious rituals.

"Queh Queh" which is unique to Guyana is a ritual performed on the occasion where a wedding is about to take place, for the purpose of instructing or preparing the bride and groom for the experience of marriage. Generally held in the home of the bride and groom, it takes place anywhere from three weeks up until the eve of the wedding.

Friends and well wishers come together to drink, dance and sing until the early hours of the morning. Specific songs, chants and dances are performed for this occasion. The Queh Queh dance, for example, is a sort of interpretive and suggestive dance depicting the expected sexual relations between the married couple. It is accompanied by song and the clapping of hands, foot work, waist movements and gyrations. The women take turns with the spouse in the center of the circle.

The supposed origin of the "Queh Queh" is believed to be the Ibo culture of West Africa and is best described by this excerpt from the book, The Negro Family in British Guiana by Raymond T. Smith:

An old man living in Stanleytown, near New Amsterdam, claimed to have special knowledge of the origin of Que-que dancing. He was estimated to be about 95 years old at the time of the study, and although I was unable to interview him personally before he died, a reliable informant obtained the following information. The old man was born at a village which is just a few miles from August Town, and he claims that Que-que dancing is a 'direct' Ibo custom which was kept up even during slavery times. In those days it was reserved as a special ceremony to be performed only when an undoubted virgin girl was to be married, preferably to a young man who was also known to be virtuous. The biggest Que-ques were kept for the daughters of headmen or 'drivers', individuals who appar-



ently had a great deal of authority, although slaves themselves, and commanded a good deal of respect in the slave community on the plantations. For a week before the marriage the girl had to stay inside the bedroom of her parents' house and must not be seen or go outside at all. The dance would be performed every night for a week or even two weeks before the marriage, and on the last night the ceremony known as 'buying the bride' could be attended only by the members of the two families, and no strangers should be present. This, explained the old man, was a very 'sacred' thing, and to be witnessed by the family members only. On the last night there would be feasting, but no rum-drinking. He was particularly insistent that rum-drinking has degraded the whole ceremony, and contended that in the past only pure clear rain water was drunk. The

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dance itself was the same kind of circle dance that survives today (which will be described presently) but it was formerly called 'Mayan' or to 'mash mayan'.

On the morning after the consummation of the marriage, the bridegroom came out of the bedroom and sang 'If you don't believe, come in come see', whereupon the members of both families would enter to inspect the blood on the sheet of the marriage bed, and present the new bride with gifts. On this day when they saw the new bride the visitors were enjoined to preserve sexual abstinence. During the first night of the marriage, guards would be posted around the house to prevent the young couple from being disturbed.



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One room in the house is cleared of all furniture except a few chairs or benches around the walls and at about 10 p.m., when the company has begun to assemble, the dancing starts inside the house. A circle of people, mostly older women, but quite often including one or two middle-aged men, begin to dance around following each other in a slow stamping dance. Normally one person stands in the middle of the circle and sings the words whilst the rest of the people respond with the chorus lines.

It is said that in the past an endeavour would be made to hold the two Que-ques in two houses close together, so that songs could be used in a kind of battle between the two families, each side criticizing the other and boasting of its own virtues. This does not appear to be a very important aspect of the Que-que today, though there are certainly songs which defend the good name of the bride-to-be. Practically all the songs have a highly erotic content, and a Que-que is an occasion for free reference to sex, and the more scandalous the songs are the more they are enjoyed. The liberal

quantities of rum which the head of the household is supposed to provide help to eliminate any restraint, and if the singers feel that they are not being given sufficient rum they can raise a song specially designed to 'shame' the host into giving them more.

Favourite songs are those referring to the female genitalia or boasting of the sexual prowess and aggressiveness of men. One or two songs emphasize the economic value of a woman's sexual attractiveness.

In Guyana, the traditional religious practices are generally expressed in two basic forms: "Cumfa" and "Come Tru."

As with most other religions the Africans' is based upon the premise that man has a physical or material body which inhabited or animated by a soul or spirit being non-material does not share the death of the body.

Within the sphere of ancestor worship an integral function of the ceremony is to contact the spirits of the deceased. When summoned these spirits have the power to temporarily displace the spirit of a living person and become the animating force of one's physical body.

This psychic phenomenon is known as "possession" during which time the actions and utterances of the possessed person are not the expression of the individual but are the manifestations, usually recognizable, of the spirit being summoned.

The services performed for the ancestral dead are not one of sentimentality but simply a means of tapping the resources of the deceased's valuable experience, intelligence and abilities. The action of possession provides the deceased soul with some way to function in lieu of the physical body that has perished. Other than being asked to grace the ceremony the spirits are summoned for advice, healing and assistance. The living do not serve the dead; it is the dead who are made to serve the living.





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BAND 5 Mama Ma Ahwe Day Mama Ma Ahwe Day Oho
Sung in the African dialect to bring in the African spirits. Calling to the mother of the earth. Side chorus bringing in spontaneous verses.

BAND 6 Achae Bolo
A Yoruba derivation, which is the worship of the water spirits. It is a serious practice, rumored to involve sacrifices.

Fairmaid, (Wata Mama, Mermaid, FEmaid) as legend goes are amphibious people who live in black water, mostly near the "koker" water gates that control the flow of water into the canals that flood the rice fields. They come out mostly at night.

Achae Bolo or "two dogs crossing the river," meaning a black FEmaid which is black water or creek spirit while the white water mermaid is an ocean spirit. These spirits are also contacted by the Call Drum and are used to predict events and aid in spiritual healing and advice.

BAND 7 Ebinday
An expression meaning that we don't have anything, or "nothing is there."

Singers: Caterine Skeet - Shak Shak or Rattle, Margo Johnson - Call Drummer, Barbara Pilgrim, Elder Alphonso Gray - Second Call Drum, Hubert Johnson - Cut Drum.

SIDE 2

Recorded at St. Matthews Apostolic Mission - Rossignol, Guyana
Singers: Charles Pilgrim - Drummer, Frederick Donald, Mistress Bently, Sybil Baker, Mother Baker - Mother of the Church, Mary Solomon - Shak Shak, Charlotte David.

Original was an informal recording session but as it progressed two people were "taken by the spirit."

BAND 1 Lead Us Heavenly Father, Lead Us - Anglican Hymn

BAND 2 Nation - Nation ah weh you Nation
Nation ah weh you nation?
Nation ah weh dem seh? (Chorus after each line)
Nation ah weh you nation?

BAND 3 Goo Night Eh
"Goo night eh, Goo night eh,
Awe come fu tell you goo night, eh
Generally sung as a welcoming song good night eh - sung at Queh-Queh ceremonies

BAND 4 Uti Tendi My Ma Nicki La
African song - meaning is obscure.

BAND 5 Ginga Roo
Hindu inspiration. The mission was located in an area predominately inhabited by East Indians. Music shows Hindu influence.

BAND 6 Tell Mairi, Didi Gone Away
During the recording of this song one of the women was "taken by the spirit" and began contorting and shaking violently.

BAND 7 Yar Away Achae Moro Ko
African song - when someone dies this song is sung as a farewell song telling them goodbye that they won't be seeing them again.

BAND 8 Cuma Fish
Na eat a fish, ma ma, na eat a fish, a cuma cuma fish,
ma ma na eat a fish.
Cuma fish is a skin fish, believed by some to bring bad luck if it is eaten. In this work or fun song a mother is being dissuaded by her daughter from eating the fish.

BAND 9 Walking & Talking Down Jericho Road
(Biblical influence - soft sound of rain beating on the tin roof.)

BAND 10 Chin Mongo
African song - meaning lost or obscure.



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OTHER RECORDS FE 4235 MUSIC OF THE HAUT OYAPOK. Oyampi and Emerillon Indian Tribes, French Guiana, South America. Recorded and annotated by David Blair Stiffler. **SIDE A—EMERILLON INDIANS.** All Emerillon songs sung by village headman, Captain Monpera. These songs are related to hunting and fishing. "Acha Ae," "Kono Wah Coupi Mae," "Oh Deto Me," "Mickero Pan To"-Children singing along, "Oh PooH Poh Ne," "Myari cha," "Tapi Jah," "Jema Maruha," "Uh Mae Ae"-Children in background, "Yah Hi Ah"-Chant, Bone Flute-Elder Oyampi playing at Camopi, Bone Flute-Young boy playing at Camopi. **SIDE B—OYAMPI INDIANS.** "Ola Missieu"-Recorded at Camopi, Creole Carnival song introduced by canoe pilots who make the St. Georges-Camopi-Trois Saut river run—Oyampi version of Carnival, "Vival"-Sung by Creole-Indian and Indian canoe pilots, serenading Oyampi village at Camopi, "Eka Eup Pah"-Sung by Oyampi boys. Initiation and festival music recorded at Trois Saut, "Mya Ai"-Recorded at Trois Saut, "Enga Toia-Le"-Recorded At Trois Saut, "Epi Mo Po U Pi Ya Ya Ya"-Recorded at Trois Saut, Metal Flute Melodic Tune "La-Kel" by Kwi-o-li. Recorded at Trois Saut, Metal Flute Animal and bird influences-Byh Kwi-o-li. Includes Descriptive Notes.

FE 4236 THE PALICOUR INDIANS OF THE ARCUCUA RIVER IN BRAZIL: Recorded by David Blair Stiffler. **SIDE ONE—**Yagni bata keh, lata ino tah, Nab ba tek (Frere Jacques), Je Sus, Bai cam be Aquis, Tain gah - elder Palicour, medicine man, Yo mah wa yo tainay - (wave on the Atlantic Ocean), Yay pah-ka toh nay, Sa-oul - the otter catches fish for food, Nam penya Gnay - building animal pens. **SIDE TWO—**Palicour-Galibi village on the Arucua River - Maria ka toh - young Galibi girl, Mainga Mainga, Nango Nango, Kanga manta, Kainding Gah oo, Kasa Manga, Kaya Toh num, Walk at night in the Palicour village of Tipoche. Descriptive notes.

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Recorded in July 1981 with a Sony TCD5M stereo recorder

By David Blair Stiffler

Mr. Stiffler is an artist living and working in New York City.

FE 4237 MUSIC OF THE MISKITO INDIANS OF HONDURAS & NICARAGUA. Recorded and annotated by David Blair Stiffler. **SIDE ONE—**"Tawalia di Pawalili"-Guermo "KIYAT," "Luniko Waikna"-Guermo "KIYAT," "Simian"-Guermo "KIYAT," "Communist Oulabi" Guermo "KIYAT," "Natinia Pliikisna"-Rex Cooper, Barley Daison, "Bal ta ki ta muni"-Rex Cooper, Barley Daison, "Sirpi Mairin"-Rex Cooper, Barley Daison. **SIDE TWO—**"Nanalika a mah Kowni"-Rex Cooper, Barley Daison, "Mna Kainan ra"-Henrici Anderson, Colin Alvarez, "Norvil Norvil Norvilita"-Henrici Anderson, Sebastion Wilson, "DuPali Padaling"-Henrici Anderson, Sebastion Wilson, "Dawan"-Maclauth, Papmo, Tellet, Enale Abe Triste, "Gloria A Dios me Libertad"-Maclauth, Papmo, Tellet, Enale Abe Triste, "Asla Dauki Ai Mawan Ra"-Maclauth, Papmo, Tellet, Enale Abe Triste. Descriptive notes.