

Folk Music of Jamaica

Recorded by Edward Seaga / Ethnic Folkways Library FE 4453

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

SIDE I

Bands 1-3: KUMINA "COUNTRY" SONGS
With drums
Band 4: KUMINA "BALLO"
Drums and scraper
Bands 5-6: WORK SONGS
Bands 7-8: RING PLAY

SIDE II

Band 1: ZION "CHORUS"
With drum, tambourine, clapping
Bands 2-3: ZION "BANDS CHORUS" & "BLOWING"
Band 4: ZION "CHORUS"
Band 5: ZION "GROANING"
Band 6: PUKKUMINA PRAYER
With rattles
Band 7: PUKKUMINA "CHORUS"
Band 8: PUKKUMINA, 3 CYMBALS
Band 9: PUKKUMINA CYMBAL

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FOLK MUSIC OF JAMAICA¹

Introduction and Notes By Edward Seaga

Followers of spirit cults in Jamaica conceive a dual religious system comprising "spiritual" and "temporal" groups. "Spiritual" groups are those which believe that the individual can be "possessed" by supernatural powers, while "temporal" groups are those which oppose this belief.

Some examples of religious bodies classified by followers of these cults as "temporal" are the Anglican, Methodist, Moravian, Presbyterian and Seventh Day Adventist Churches. On the other hand, "spiritual" groups are said to include Pentecostal Holiness, Shilo Apostolic Faith, Bible Church of God, First Glorious Temple of the Church of God in Christ, City Mission, International Four Square, Jamaican Baptist Free Church (Bedward), Mizpah Faith Healing Society and the spirit cults themselves.

Spirit cults differentiate between themselves and these other "spiritual" groups, however on a basis of belief in the power of the dead to "possess" the living. The followers of these cults subscribe to this belief but followers of other "spiritual" bodies dogmatise that only Christian (Divine and Satanic) powers can so influence the living.

In Jamaica, spirit cults are of two types -- "Christianised" and "Afro". The latter type of spirit cult has a non-Christian pantheon of Gods and

¹ This album includes both secular and religious music. All selections were collected in the process of a two year study of religious cults in Jamaica. The recordings were all made during the natural proceedings of festivities held by the participants for their own purposes. All photographs in this pamphlet were taken by the writer.

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² The customary spelling of this work has always been: POCOMANIA. However, I have altered the spelling to suit the phonetics of the word as it is pronounced by cult members and their associates themselves. There appears to be no evidence to establish this term as being of Spanish origin as the customary spelling indicates.

I have termed them collectively "Afro" only because they claim for themselves African origin, and not because of any similarity between the beliefs and practices of these groups and African religious cults. The "Christianized" cult groups are those which accept Christian divinities in their pantheons and certain other beliefs and practices of Christianity.

This album contains selections from both types of spirit cults, the "Afro" group being represented by the Kumina cult, and the "Christianized" by the two Revival cults -- Zion-way Baptist and Pukkumina.²

Rites are held regularly in all these cults to contact the spirits in general, or in particular for any of many reasons. Most popular of these reasons are, in general terms: soliciting aid in social, economic, or medical problems; fulfilling mourning obligations; exorcising or propitiating offensive spirits; and offering thanks for aid rendered.

Such rites vary from the simple to the grandiose. At times, a simple invocation is considered sufficient, while on the other occasions the invocation must be supported by a table spread with various items reputed to have power over the spirits, such as candles, certain pharmaceutical compounds and particular edibles and beverages. This latter type of rite, generally referred to by cultists as a "table" or "duty", is very popular among the Revival cults but rarely held by Kumina.

Revival "table" ceremonies last from one to three days and feature possession dancing, singing and sometimes the sacrifice of an animal for a feast. Kumina rites generally do not exceed a night and a day in duration; they also feature possession dancing, singing, and sacrifices.

Music is almost continuous in these ceremonies. Revival cult followers classify their music in the following types:

(1) HYMNS: Christian songs, usually selected from the Sankey hymnal.³ They are sung vociferously and usually without the aid of texts. Among the most popular hymns are: "Lo! He comes in clouds descending", "How sweet the word my God, my King", and "While shepherds watch their flocks by night".

Hymns are often sung to the accompaniment of clapping of hands and stamping of feet. This is known as "beating de hymn" and is used to "liven up de spirit".

(2) CHORUSES: These are songs consisting of a single verse, generally of four lines. The verse

³ A hymnal of compositions by Ira D. Sankey a 19th Century American Revivalist.



LEFT:
PUKKUMINA
SERVICE--"LABORING".
WOMAN WITH BLACK
HAT, CENTER
IS THE CYMBAL

BELOW:
PUKKUMINA SHEPHERD
(MALE LEADER)

is repeated as many times as desired. Most choruses are very melodious and rhythmic. They are usually sung to the accompaniment of drums, the clapping of hands, or other forms of behaviour producing rhythmic beats.

(3) CYMBALS: These are improvised melodies with lyrics which are predominantly based on nonsense syllables called "language" or "unknown tongues". This type of song is said to be a conversation between the spirits and the singer, and is sung only in solo. Cymbals are peculiar to Pukkumina.

(4) BANDS CHORUSES: These are melodies sung usually to nonsense syllables. They differ from cymbals in that they are sung by the group rather than in solo, and the tunes are not usually improvised. As in the case of cymbals, the "bands chor", as it is called, is said to be a spiritual conversation. It is rarely heard in Pukkumina but quite popular in Zion.

(5) BLOWING TUNES: In Pukkumina, blowing tunes are specific melodies standardly used to invoke the spirits or bid them farewell. The lyrics of these tunes are a mixture of "language" and English. In Zion, "blowing tunes" are general "spiritual conversations" and have all the characteristics of cymbals, that is, they are improvised melodies sung largely in "language". In both cults only one performer can "blow" at a time.

The Pukkumina cult does not use musical instruments. Zion uses drums: a small one generally of 9"-12" diameter called by some the "kettle" drum, and a



larger one often two feet in diameter called the "base" drum. Both types are usually made from kegs and are headed with goat skin at both ends. They are hung from the shoulders and played with sticks.

Zion also uses metal triangles, tambourines, and "shakers" (dried calabash gourds containing pebbles and fixed to a stick-handle).

The group that I have called the Afro cults, classify their music differently. Specifically, Kumina followers use the following classification:

(1) BAILO⁴: Songs sung in English.

(2) "COUNTRY": Songs sung in "language" or "country" as it is known in this cult. Unlike the "unknown tongues" of Revival cults, the "country" of Kumina has a large vocabulary of words which Kumina followers claim to be of African origin, chiefly the Congo language. Indeed, from a sample of forty-eight words of "country" submitted to the Institute of African and Oriental Studies, London, by the writer, forty-one were identified as Congo. I list below a few selections of those identified in this way:

ENGLISH	KUMINA "COUNTRY" & CONGO
God	Nzambi
Man (old)	Nbuta munta
Woman (old)	Yaaya
Woman (young)	Ndumba
Baby	Muana
Bread	Mbolo
Knife	Mbeelee
Meat	Mbizi
Rum	Malavu
Come here	Wiza
Earth	Ntoto
Money	Mbongo

The "country" is said to be taught by the spirits only to those whom they possess.

Bailo are usually sung at the beginning of rituals and at other times when there is little spirit possession present. "Country" songs are usually reserved to entertain the possessing spirits when present.

Kumina rites are most frequently held for mourning, tombing, or healing, but can also be held for other purposes, such as thanksgiving or to solicit supernatural aid in litigation, or for obtaining a job or lover, and so on.

⁴ At present, I have no evidence as to the derivation of this term, and the spelling employed is merely phonetic and not intended to suggest a derivation from the Spanish or French.

The main instruments used in Kumina are two types of drums: the Kbandu (Congo mbandu), and the "Playing Cast". The former has a lower tone which is achieved either by making his drum a bit larger than the Playing Cast or by "heeling" it during play, that is, resting the heel against the drum-head.

These drums are made from small kegs or certain varieties of wood, primarily coconut. They are headed on one side only and always by goat-skin. The skin is attached to the drum by nails driven through a band which goes around the drum-head.

Both the Kbandu and Playing Cast are almost always less than one foot in diameter and two feet in length. The drummer sits astride the drum and plays it with the palms of his hands. The Kbandu keeps a steady beat while the Playing Cast adopts the particular rhythm used to charm a specific spirit, since all spirits are not charmed by the same rhythm. Usually four drums are used at the bigger rites. Two of these are Kbandu while the other two are Playing Casts. At any one time, however, there is likely to be only one Playing Cast in operation, the other being used as a Kbandu by heeling the drumhead. The reason for this is that the steady Kbandu beat is easily followed by a drummer while the poly-rhythms of the Playing Cast drummer would conflict with those of a second such drummer unless one was able to duplicate the other accurately, a difficult feat. Hence, the two Playing Cast drummers in a group of four usually play as such in turns, and maintain a Kbandu beat at other times.

Other Kumina instruments include the Shakka which is a small tin sheet with nail-punched holes over



which a small strip of metal is scraped to a rhythm; gourds with stones which are shaken to provide a rhythmic beat; and sometimes metal triangles which are sounded by metal rods. Occasionally, a small stick about the diameter of a brush handle and less than eight inches in length is used to beat on the side of the drum behind the drummer. The player of this instrument, which is known as the "catta 'tick" (catta stick), sits astride the rear portion of the drum.

The secular music included in this album comprises work ("digging") songs and Ring Play tunes.

These work songs are sung during manual labour in road construction work and agricultural field preparation. The synchronized striking of the digging implements (generally pick-axes) form a background rhythm. The solo singer does not join in the labor; the laborers, however, join in the song by singing the chorus or "bobbin" as it is called. A field "digging" is usually a full day of impulsive merriment attended by hundreds of friends, neighbours, and other invited guests, whether workers or otherwise. The women prepare a feast and much rum is distributed by an appointed male who is called the "Quarter Master".

Ring Play is the term used to designate local ring games. They are played by children and adults usually in the rural areas of Jamaica. They are not reserved for festive occasions, but in such instances they are often played at "nine-nights" (wakes). Otherwise any small gathering might play these games impromptu. Rural children favor them especially on weekend moonlight nights. These games include such standard European party games as "Bull in

the Pen" or "Follow the Leader", with certain modifications.

SIDE I, Bands 1-3: KUMINA "COUNTRY" SONGS.

I was informed that these songs were being sung in the Congo language or "country" as it is called, but no translations could be provided. "Country" songs are used to invoke and entertain spirits. Specific songs and drum rhythms are usually associated with specific spirits and used as invocations. These songs are used repeatedly; they are not improvised on the spot as is the case of Revival cymbals and blowing tunes. Two drums were in accompaniment at this ceremony, a Kbandu and a Playing Cast.

SIDE I, Band 4: KUMINA BAILO. The Bailo as distinct from "country" songs, is sung in English and used mostly at the beginning of ceremonies before the spirits begin to arrive in numbers. This specific selection is sung when spirits or members of the Maroon cult are taking part. The lyrics do not have any specific reference to activities of the ceremony. Rather, this is merely a song about an incident in Maroon life and hence it is considered appropriate to use it in the presence of Maroon spirits or followers. The first verse of the lyrics, is often repeated in the song and is as follows:

"Whai oh, Maroon gone oh,
Fare thee well oh, Maroon gone oh,
Maroon gone a Bungo town to go look 'pon de dead,
When him gone poor me one lef' ya, oh."

Most Bailo lyrics have no reference whatever to

LEFT:
A ZION HEALER

RIGHT:
PUKKUMINA-INDIAN
DANCE--THE
FIGURE IN THE
ROBES IS THE
"MOTHER"



ritual activities e.g. "What you was ah do when de bed bruk down." Possession dancing often occurs during Bailo singing, but it is not usually as deep as that which occurs during "country" singing. The latter type of possession is called Myal. A scraper can be heard quite clearly in this selection together with the drums.

SIDE I, Bands 5-6: WORK SONGS. These songs are rapidly fading from Jamaican life. This recording was actually taken while the foundation of a house was under construction next to the writer's home. A diesel powered drill had been used to bore and crack obstructing rocks, but at a certain portion of the ground the rock formation proved too soft to be cracked by this machine, and consequently, laborers with pick axes were utilized. The operator of the diesel drill then initiated the singing and soon after, the writer made his way across his fence with recording equipment and two bottles of rum. The latter is highly appreciated during all forms of "digging sport" whether in the field or construction work and the effects can be readily appreciated in Band 5. The leader poured the first drink of rum partly over his machine and partly on the ground. He described this as a "usual practice" and could give no other reason. Some of the other singers poured a little in the center of their heads and/or over their axes before drinking. Pouring it on the head is said to be good for health.

Paraney gal, finger dem,
Finger dem de young gal, finger dem,
Paraneeeeeeeee,
Finger dem de young gal, finger dem,
Up a hillside,

Finger dem,
In a gully,
Finger dem.

SIDE I, Bands 7-8: RING PLAY. These selections were recorded in an interval before the commencement of a Kumina ceremony, while waiting for some of the main participants to arrive. Kumina followers are authorities on Ring Play, as these games are most frequently played in the rural areas where Kumina people reside.

In the game of the first selection (Band 7) the men link hand-to-hand in a line facing a similar line of women. The singer directs the men to advance towards the women ("Walk in dere") but cautions them not to allow their bodies to actually touch ("for if you touch it den you pay de fine"). The males therefore, advance until they almost touch the females' bodies. They then recede about five yards and await a similar advance by the line of women. This continues in alternation until the participants become tired of the game. Band 8 features a game similar to the European "Follow the Leader". The participants form a ring around the singer who chooses one participant at a time to enter the enclosure. The chosen individual is then supposed to follow all the actions of the singer who directs him:

"Hey Maroma,
You do so Maroma"

The actions to be imitated are such as to amuse onlookers.

PUKKUMINA-INDIAN
SERVICE--
POSSESSED GIRL



SIDE II, Band 1: ZION "CHORUS". This selection is typical of the many beautiful choruses sung by revival cults. It was recorded at the beginning of a "table" ceremony which was spread by three female members of the group who were commemorating their recent Baptism. Drumming, tambourine playing and hand clapping accompany the singing in this selection.

SIDE II, Bands 2-3: ZION "BANDS CHORUS" AND BLOWING". One girl leads this chorus while several others sing a background accompaniment. The rhythm is provided by the "possessed" followers who as a characteristic of their possession behavior, inhale and exhale loudly and in unison. This heavy rapid breathing is known as "groaning". "Bands choruses" are sung intermittently throughout the ceremonies after preliminaries such as praying, hymn singing, bible reading, and speech making are completed. The leader can be clearly heard in Band 3 as he "blows", that is, delivers the spiritual message, and finally breaks into a hymn. The messages are usually biblical chapters or such general statements as "peace and love", or "death and judgement."

Noticeably there is no instrument accompaniment during "groaning"; it is argued that such accompaniment would make it impossible to hear the "groaning".

SIDE II, Band 4: ZION CHORUS. A popular chorus with the lyrics:

"I hear, oh, I hear,
I hear archangels blow"

It is sung here by the leader of the group in this instance. As the lyrics indicate, it is most appropriate when divine spirits are in contact with the group to "reveal" messages.

SIDE II, Band 5: ZION "GROANING". The "groaning" in this selection is characteristic of Zion groups, and is known as "drilling". The leader directs the "drilling" from a central point in a circle formed by the other participants. He can be heard, in this instance, shouting encouragement ("Come Zion") to the others.

When the "drilling" is properly synchronized, it is said that the spirits at this time reveal their messages to the leader.

SIDE II, Band 6: PUKKUMINA PRAYER. This is sung in a mixture of English and nonsense syllables although cultists maintain that the latter contains "Indian" words (see below) a matter which has not as yet been investigated. This prayer is used by particular Pukkumina cultists who claim to be influenced by East Indian spirits. They therefore sing and speak in a tongue which they claim to be

"Indian". In their possession dancing, style of dress, food preference, etc., they also imitate the practices of East Indian residents in Jamaica. This prayer is sung to the accompaniment of rattles. The singer translated its contents to me as "just a ordinary prayer wid de usual things".

SIDE II, Band 7: PUKKUMINA CHORUS.

"Yerry me, me Nana, yerry me,
Countryman ah dig hold for fe bury me".

This song is usually used during possession dancing. Notice that in Pukkumina, as distinct from Zion, the rhythm of the "groans" does not vary. It is always standard 1-2 beat. At the end of this selection, one of the singers leads off into a hymn. This smooth transition from one selection of music to another is typical among Revival cults.

SIDE II, Band 8: PUKKUMINA, 3 CYMBALS. In this selection an "Indian" is cymballing possessed dancers who are dancing "Indian" style to the accompaniment of handclaps, rather than "groaning", the former being a characteristic type of accompaniment in local East Indian ceremonies. One of the possessed dancers interrupts the opening singer to cymbal her own spirit with a different melody. The first singer then returns with a third cymbal, on completion of her interlude. Cymbals, although they are said to be conversations with spirits, are not translated with specific references. Usually, followers make observations such as "the cymballer in telling de spirits to help the groaners in their journey through the spirit world and guard them from other obstructive spirits."

SIDE II, Band 9: PUKKUMINA CYMBAL. The cymballer here is "calling 60" that is, speaking with the spirits who ruled during the 1860's when Jamaica was swept by a fanatical interest in Revivalism.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY EDWARD SEAGA
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