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CARIBBEAN FOLK MUSIC, VOL. I

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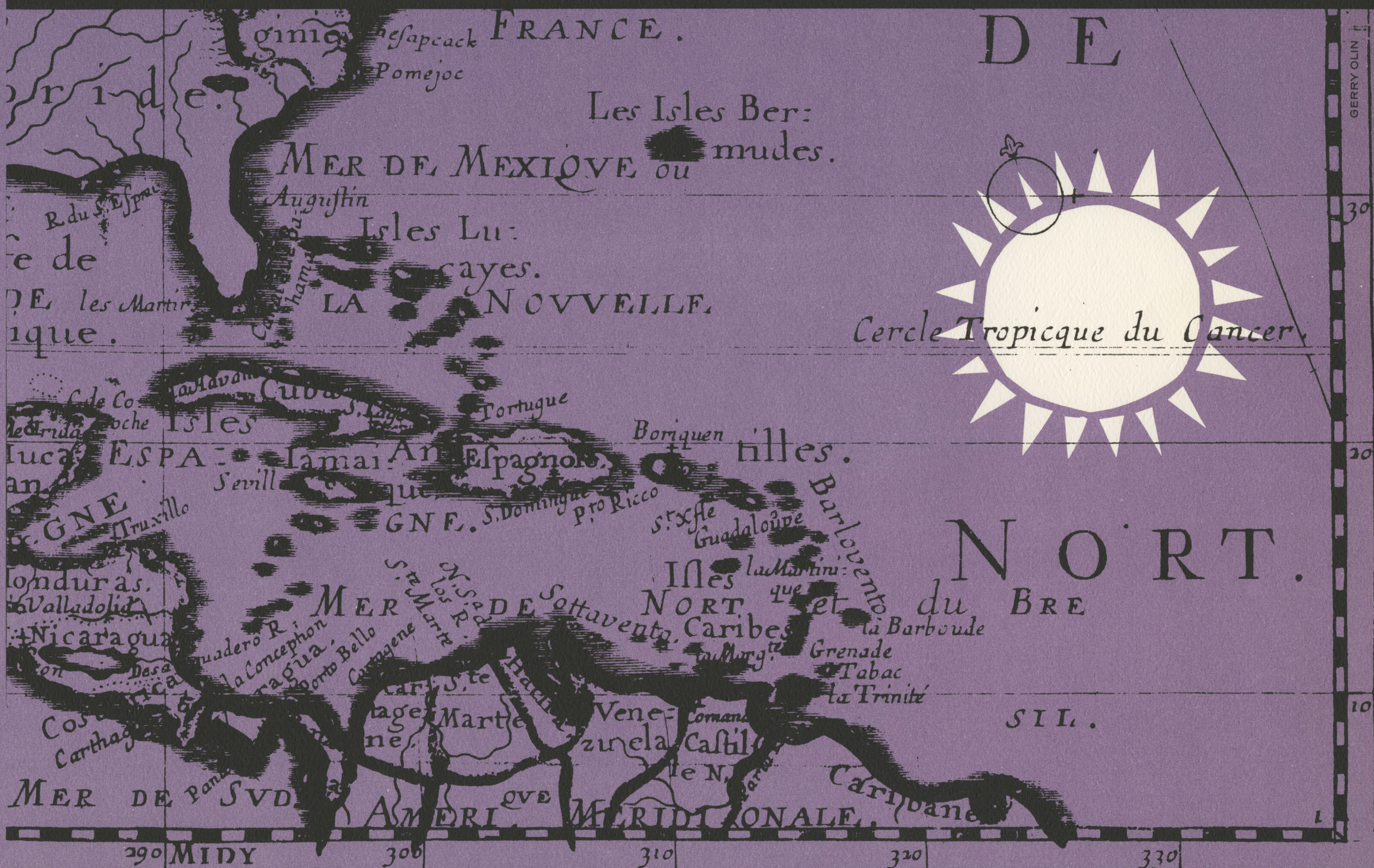
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CARIBBEAN FOLK MUSIC, VOL. I

FOLKWAYS FE 4533

CARIBBEAN



FOLK MUSIC

COMPILED BY HAROLD COURLANDER

VOLUME ONE

ETHNIC FOLKWAYS LIBRARY FE4533

Caribbean Folk Music

Compiled and with Notes by Harold Courlander

SIDE 1, Band 1: TRULLA DE NAVIDAD
(Christmas Rush),
PUERTO RICO.

This is a Villancico, or Christmas song, played with guitars, marracas and güiro and sung by a leader and chorus. Spanish influence is predominant, and is especially clear in the melodic line of the solo vocal part. The villancico, like the Puerto Rican aguinaldo, has been popularly adapted for social dancing. The refrain sung by the chorus here goes;

Someone hasn't come
With this Christmas crowd.
Perhaps next year
He'll get nothing at all.

Later, the soloist sings:

Joyfully we come,
My beloved friends,
Singing to wish you
A Happy New Year.

Oh noble sirs, hasten
To hold up the lamp,
And you will see
That the New Year comes.

Go to the kitchen now
And light up the fire.
Prepare a fine hen
For this occasion.

(From a collection of recordings made by William S. Marlens. Notes on this piece from an analysis by Gilbert Chase.)

SIDE 1, Band 2: BAQUINÉ, PUERTO RICO.

A baquiné is a gathering held on the occasion of a wake or "nine-night" (when last prayers are said for the deceased). In Haiti, this semi-festive gathering is called the gage, while in the English-speaking islands of the West Indies it is the "nine-night" (ninth night after a death).

Although it is a part of a cycle of death rites, the baquiné (or the gage or nine-night) is

generally gay. It is felt that the soul of the departed person must be sent on its way happily. There is much singing, often led by an elder of the community or a professional employed for this purpose, and sometimes there are special games for the children. In Haiti during a gage gathering there may be drumming and dancing of a specific kind, usually called Juba or Martinique.

This baquiné song, the words of which are not easy to hear, is sung by an elder of the community, with a chorus joining in. The song is interspersed with comments by the leader, who endeavors to create a spirit of jollity for the gathering, in accordance with tradition. The baquiné is for a small child, referred to as el angelito, the little angel. The narrator begins by saying, "We must sing to the child. We must dance for the child, we must make it happy. Whom shall we get, then, to sing and dance for the child? Let us get Manuel Peñalosa. Where is that fellow? Ah, here he comes, there he is. Let him come and hear the latest, 'The Tale of the Vagabond.'" The singing begins at this point, and the song continues for a long stretch, with the leader breaking in to make more entertaining comments.

(Recorded by Ricardo E. Alegria.)

SIDE 1, Band 3: ARADA DANCE,
CARRIACOU.

The Arada (or Rada) dance belongs to religious rites of the Dahomey Cult in the West Indies. Dahomean religious survivals are found in most of the French-speaking islands of the Caribbean, especially in Haiti, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Carriacou. During the days of the slave trade, a large number of Africans were brought to the French colonies from the region of Dahomey, and religious rites known in that African region survived under various names. They are sometimes known as rites Dahomé, but are commonly called Arada after an important Dahomean town, Allada, which was a center of religious worship. In some West Indian islands Arada activities are separate and

distinct, though elsewhere they are merged with rituals and dances of other cults. Instruments used in this recording are three drums and a gourd rattle.

(Recorded by Andrew C. Pearse, from Folkways record FE 4411, "The Big Drum Dance of Carriacou.")

SIDE 1, Band 4: KUMINA DANCE,
JAMAICA.

African religious practices have survived not only in the French-speaking islands but in virtually all the other islands as well, in some cases (as in the English-speaking areas) taking on a particular local coloration. In Jamaica African-style music and dancing has survived to various degrees in connection with cult life. A number of Christian sects on the island have preserved elements of African worship and dance in somewhat disguised form. In addition, there are the co-called "country" dances and activities. The term does not refer to the rural countryside, but is a synonym for "nation," and signifies membership in a group claiming descent from, or affiliation with, an African community.

The Kumina rituals are held for mourning, healing, thanksgiving, and to invoke assistance of various kinds. Implicit evidence points to Kumina's relationship to the Congo rather than to West Africa. Many words in the Kumina vocabulary, for example, are of Bantu (Congo) origin.

In this Kumina dance, singing is accompanied by two drums.

(Recorded by Edward Seaga, from Ethnic Folkways Library record FE 4453, "Folk Music of Jamaica.")

SIDE 1, Band 5: HEEL AND TOE POLKA,
THE BAHAMAS.

Percussion devices in the West Indies are often supplemented by scrapers, which appear in a variety of forms. In some of the islands, perforated sheet metal is scraped with a nail. In the Spanish-speaking areas of the Caribbean especially, notched or serrated gourds and calabashes are used to provide scraping sounds. Elsewhere notched sticks (having both West African and American Indian precedents) are found. Indeed, the washboard used by United States Negro street musicians comes out of the same tradition. An unusual variant is the saw used as a scraper, as in this piece from the Bahamas.

(Recorded by Marshall Stearns, from Ethnic Folkways Library record FE 4440, "Religious Songs and Drums In the Bahamas.")

SIDE 1, Band 6: SO THEM BAD MINDED,
SAN ANDRÉS.

This is a Calypso tune with typical instrumental accompaniment. The Calypso style, which first came to outside attention through the efforts of Trinidadian singers, appears to be a very generalized one common to a large number of the West Indian islands, primarily the English-speaking areas. Calypso style is rooted in folk songs which antedate what we now refer to as Calypso, and in recent years it has infiltrated other musical forms in the Caribbean. Elderly informants from Trinidad testify that the "original" Calypso on that island, at least, was not sung in English at all, but in the Creole language. As long as Calypso songs were sung primarily in Creole, knowledge of them was limited. In Trinidad itself, they were regarded as music coming from the wrong side of the tracks. But when Calypso began to appear in English it was soon taken up and popularized.

Like our own blues, Calypso is a genre of complaint, protest, recrimination and ridicule song. Both stem from the same African tradition, and although their musical forms are quite distinct, in word content they have much in common.

This piece is a comment on gossips who find something wrong with everyone they see.

In every home that you can find
There are people who have bad mind.
In every home that you can find
There are people that have bad mind.

Chorus:

Certain bad mind in a certain line,
Saying criticise the people who pass.
Certain bad mind in a certain line,
Saying criticise the people who pass.

You meek and you looking thin,
They say consumption in your skin.
You meek and you looking thin,
They say consumption in your skin.

(CHORUS)

You rosy and you big and fat,
They say dropsy in your skin.
You rosy and you big and fat,
They say dropsy in your skin.

(CHORUS)

You get up and go to church,
Instead of gospel you going to grind.
You get up and go to church,
Instead of gospel you going to grind.

(CHORUS)

You kneel in your home to pray,
They say a hypocrite you did play.
You kneel in your home to pray,
They say a hypocrite you did play.

(CHORUS)

(Recorded in San Andrés by Thomas J. Price,
Jr., from Folkways record FW 8811,
"Caribbean Rhythms.")

SIDE II, Band 1: STICKMAN, SAN ANDRÉS.

A Calypso piece with a rapid tempo, characterized by ridicule and humor. Note that Creole words creep into the English text of the refrain. While the story in the song is highly dramatic and sounds almost as though it were an invention, it is probable that it is based on an actual event, and is a true song of allusion. As in most songs of allusion, only the highlights of the episode are given. It would appear that a preacher attempted to rob a "stickman" (stickup man?), this turnabout situation launching a "big confusion."

There was a big confusion,
A certain preacher nigh rob a stickman.
There was a big confusion,
A certain preacher nigh rob a stickman.
And when the question nigh rob pop up,
The stickman decide to kill the preacher.
The preacher say let him come let him come,
I have no fear,
I'm going to beat him, set on my way.
And they shouted who-o-o-o-soever
Say what the preacher' sermon,
Preacher beat his try and the stickman
Three hand jumping like a red beef boiling
in pot

Chorus:

Singing Billy Dunne waille-o!
Billy Dunne ba moin par' commère! *
Singing Billy Dunne waille-o!
Billy Dunne ba moin par' commère!

(A) few people gather,
Turn (to the) police to settle the matter.
Before one policeman reach,
The stickman in the preacher' skin like a
leech.

The preacher came inside like he crazy,
Came back running with the stickman' money.
Stickman say yeah, let him go.
So I let that parson go free and everybody
Join this melody.

(CHORUS)

What's the cause of frightening,
I thought this stickman was going to kill the
parson.

I turn and I tell Mabel
Nothing in this world stronger than the Devil.
The parson know he distraught that stickman
And blaze the gown off him back.
And they shouted who-o-o-o-soever
Hear where the preacher' sermon.
Preacher beat his try and the stickman,
Three hand jumping like tiger running around
the yard.

*Ba moin par' commère is Creole for "give me my friend's share."

(Recorded in San Andrés by Thomas J. Price, Jr., from Folkways record FW 8811, "Caribbean Rhythms.")

SIDE II, Band 2: OLD CALYPSO, TRINIDAD.

This piece is actually a medley of old Calypso songs. It begins with the statement that some people don't like modern Calypso, and then launches into old songs that are no longer heard in the city, where the new have taken over. Many of the old Calypso songs, as noted above, are in the Creole language rather than English. It is possible to detect in the singing of this piece a more rugged style, closer to basic "folk" sources. Even so, the instrumentation is not vastly different from, though perhaps not as slick as, the accompaniments to modern Calypso. Clearly heard are the guiro scraper, the guitar, and the deep-toned finger drum.

(Recorded by Walter and Lisa Lekis, from Folkways record FW 6840, "Caribbean Dances.")

SIDE II, Band 3: BÈLÈ DANCE SONG, TRINIDAD.

The Bèlè or Belair Dance, in various forms, is known in many Caribbean islands, including Haiti. This song of the Bele Dance is probably an introduction to the dance proper, an invitation to "roll your Bèlè drum." The only instrument heard is the traditional gourd rattle in the hand of the singing leader.

(Recorded by Melville J. Herskovits, from Ethnic Folkways Library record FE 4500, "Negro Folk Music of Africa and America.")

SIDE II, Band 4: SEVEN STEP, ST. THOMAS.

Played on guiros (calabash scrapers), flute, guitar and maraccas (gourd rattles), this piece is reminiscent of ballroom dances of earlier days in the West Indies. It has a measured pace and is European in character, though the instrumental combination and its effects are unmistakably West Indian, or at least Latin American, in their conception. This type of music is for dancing of the more restrained and even sedate kind, though it has a freshness and élan difficult to suppress.

(Recorded by Walter and Lisa Lekis, from

Folkways record FW 6840, "Caribbean Rhythms.")

SIDE II, Band 5: BAMBOULA DANCE, ST. THOMAS.

The Bamboula Dance has been referred to in early literature on the West Indies, and is known to have been a popular form of slave entertainment in the eighteenth century. It has been reported not only from the Virgin Islands, but from Haiti, Martinique, Guadeloupe and other areas of the Caribbean, as well as from Louisiana on the North American mainland. Communication between these areas, held at one time or another by France, was close. Slaves were taken back and forth from one to another of the islands, and to and from French plantations in Louisiana. Therefore, the cultural patterns found in them, including the Creole language and the songs and dances, have a special unity in the Caribbean.

The Bamboula Dance had certain unique characteristics wherever it was found. It was a secular dance, but semi-ritualistic. For example, it was danced, like the Juba, on the occasion of a "nine-night" or "last prayers," when the soul of a deceased person was sent festively on its way. (See Side I, Band 2, Baquiné.) As in the Juba, a single drum was used. It was laid on the ground, with the drummer sitting astride it and using his heel as a damp on the drumhead. A second player would beat sticks on the body of the drum, behind the drummer.

This latter-day version of the Bamboula from the Virgin Islands is unique in regard to the musicians, who are women. Most drumming in the West Indies is a male prerogative. This exception is probably explained by the fact that the troupe is gathered for carnival activities.

The words of the song are largely a repetition, with variations, of the following phrases:

É-hé, Bobo!
Pa'lé Bobo!

(É-hé, Bobo!
Speak Bobo!)

(Recorded by Tram Coombs.)

SIDE II, Band 6: LAPLI TOMBÉ
(The Rain Falls),
ST. THOMAS, V.I.

This is a troupe of local professional musicians

playing its version of a polka. The general character of the music is European despite West Indian instrumentation which includes guitar, scraper, rattles, percussion and -- a typically -- an acordion.

(Recorded by Tram Coombs.)

SIDE II, Band 7: DOWN INTO THE VILLAGE
SAMMY RIMER, TORTOLA,
V.I.

A local Virgin Islands popular piece played by a "scratch band." Instruments: guitar, calabash scraper, gourd rattles.

(Recorded by Tram Coombs.)

SIDE III, Band 1: ONE BRIGHT SUMMER
MORNING, TORTOLA, V.I.

Along with the musical traditions of Spain, France, Denmark, and the Netherlands, there has been preserved in the Virgin Islands some old ballads and songs of English origin. This piece is a variant of a well-known English ballad. The theme is common in English balladry, as are some of the stock phrases and imagery that appear here, such as "She was wrapped up in flannel" and "Six jolly fellas to carry my coffin." Sung by Mrs. Viola Penn.

One bright summer morning
As I were awalking,
One bright summer morning
As I were awalk',
Whom should I meet there
But a fair darling damsel,
She was wrapped up in flannel,
As cold as could be,
She was wrapped up in flannel,
As cold as could be.

Oh come dearest mother
And sit down beside me,
Oh come dearest mother
And pity my cry,
For my poor heart is breaking,
My poor head is bending,
For I'm deep in salvation,
And surely I must die,
For I'm deep in salvation,
And surely I must die.

Do send for the young man
That first introduced me,
Do send for the young man
That put me in shame,
Do send for the doctor
Although it is too late,
For I am a young girl
Adoggin' my pride,
For I am a young girl
Adoggin' my pride.

Six jolly young fellas
To carry my coffin,
Six jolly young ladies
To walk by my side,
With a bunch of green roses
To place on my coffin,
That the people might smell me
While passing along.

(Recorded by Tram Coombs.)

SIDE III, Band 2: SONG TO CHANGO, CUBA.

The home of what is commonly known as

"Afro-Cuban" music, Cuba has been deeply affected by both the Spanish and the African musical traditions. Both traditions are to be found in almost pure form in various Cuban communities, and elsewhere they have merged into popular hybrid forms. African music, along with surviving African religious beliefs, is associated with New World African cult life. Some cults derive their inspiration from the Congo, some from the Arada people of Dahomey, and some from the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria and Dahomey. In addition, traditions of the Calabar Coast people are responsible for the existence of a widespread fraternal order called Abakwa or Carabali.

This selection is a song from the repertoire of the Lucumi cult, which is based on Yoruba religious concepts. It is sung to Chango, the Yoruba deity of lightning, war, and the forge.

(Recorded by Harold Courlander, from Ethnic Folkways Library record FE 4410, "Cult Music of Cuba.")

SIDE III, Band 3: BALILÈ
(Give Him Room), HAITI.

In pre-Easter season in Haiti, the countryside is teeming with village and urban musical groups that wander about playing to crowds in the streets and on the roads. This is Rara season, a traditional festival that appears to date from colonial times, but particularly from the early days of independence. During Mardi Gras, the bands converge on the cities and merge with the modern floats and revellers. The group heard in this selection is a "citified" band, consisting of trumpets, rattles and drums, with a major domo injecting his whistle into the music as though it were a legitimate instrument. During the carnival one troupe follows another rapidly, the city "sophisticated" performers sandwiched between groups of villagers and mountaineers. The title of this piece, "Give Him Room," probably is a reference to the main dancer, and the need for giving him room to perform..

(Recorded by Marshall Stearns, from Ethnic Folkways Library record FE 4432, "Songs and Dances of Haiti.")

SIDE III, Band 4: FIGNOLÉ, HAITI.

More Rara music from Haiti, this one is country-style (compare with the previous piece), featuring a large chorus with drums

providing accompaniment. As bands of this kind weave through the streets, spectators join with the crowd following the dancers and drummers, and mobs of several hundred are often encountered. They sing and dance with the bands as though they were charter members. Participants sometimes are men, women and children coming home from the markets, and women with heavy loads on their heads are often seen among the others.

This song is in honor of a former political figure of Haiti, Daniel Fignolé. At the time the song was sung, he was a popular local hero about whom numerous legends and tales were told. A few years later he became president for something under three weeks and then found a sanctuary in New York from a difficult political situation.

(Recorded by Marshall Stearns, from Ethnic Folkways Library record FE 4432, "Songs and Dances of Haiti.")

SIDE III, Band 5: NOUS ALLONS DODO
(We Are Going to Sleep),
HAITI.

A romantic Haitian song, characteristically Caribbean, but revealing French melodic influences.

The refrain, "Nous Allons Dodo," literally means "We are going to sleep," but idiomatically has the meaning of a party or celebration.

(Recorded by Harold Courlander, from Folkways record FW 6808, "Calypso and Meringues.")

SIDE III, Band 6: UN SOIR
(One Evening), HAITI.

The Meringue of Haiti is generally regarded in that country as the "national" music, common to the élite and the peasantry alike. While this is undoubtedly the case, there are in fact many different kinds of Meringues, some more adaptable to percussion-type instrumentation of the country people, others to sophisticated night club settings. They include the Meringue Coundjaille (fast and driving), the Slow Meringue, the Jazz Meringue (hybridized, as the name suggests, with jazz), the Ballroom Meringue, and the Concert Meringue. While Haiti claims the Meringue for her own, so do the people of the neighboring Dominican Republic, who call it Merengue. An attentive ear can distinguish the difference between the Meringue and the Merengue at once, however, the latter having a character more Spanish than French or French-African.

This piece, played by Fabre Duroseau on an upright piano, is an example of the Concert Meringue.

(Recorded by Harold Courlander, from Folkways record FW 6837, "Haitian Piano.")

SIDE IV, Band 1: AFEDUANI, BLACK CARIBS OF HONDURAS.

The name Black Caribs was given to a hybrid people who emerged as an ethnic group in the Caribbean in the late seventeenth century. Around the year 1661, two ships carrying slaves bound for the American mainland were wrecked off the island of St. Vincent. The slaves, freed by this circumstance, made their way ashore, and by strength of numbers they took over control of the island from the Indians living there. The African men took Indian wives, and the process of race blending began. The Black Caribs, as they were subsequently known, developed a curious culture in some respects. Their drumming and singing, for example, had the character of African tradition, although at times the singing, particularly of the women, retained something of the Indian style. The dance steps, particularly of the women, were reminiscent of Arawak and Carib dancing. And to this day the women have a language of their own which is the remnant of the speech of their Indian ancestors.

The Black Caribs were eventually moved by the British to the coastal areas of Honduras, on the Central American mainland, where they live today.

This song, sung by women, accompanies a dance performed at Christmas time and at special celebrations. The song is about someone who is frightened, and to whom another person has come to give consolation. Instruments, drums and rattles.

(Recorded by Peter Kite Smith, from Ethnic Folkways Library record FE 4435, "The Black Caribs of Honduras.")

SIDE IV, Band 2: SERENADE, BLACK CARIBS OF HONDURAS.

This piece is about a girl of the community who at first was good to a man and then turned against him. Instruments, drums and rattles.

(Recorded by Peter Kite Smith, from Ethnic Folkways Library record FE 4435, "The Black Caribs of Honduras.")

SIDE IV, Band 3: BA ANANSI (Brother Anansi), SURINAM.

Anansi is the spider trickster of the Ashanti people of Ghana, once called the Gold Coast. Many of the slaves brought to the New World from Africa came from the Ashanti nation, and much Ashanti lore has survived

in the West Indies and nearby coastal communities. Many of the tales told to children retain Anansi as the chief hero or villain, and occasionally songs are sung about him. This song about Anansi probably comes from one of the tales in which he is featured.

(Recorded by Lisa Lekis, from "Caribbean Festival.")

SIDE IV, Band 4: MAZURKA, MARTINIQUE.

Here we have an old-style ballroom dance out of European tradition, transposed into West Indian style, and infiltrated with jazz influences. The result is a form that we recognize as the Beguine.

(Recorded by Walter and Lisa Lekis, from Folkways record FW 6840, "Caribbean Rhythms.")

SIDE IV, Band 5: VALS GUADALOUPIENNE, GUADALOUPE.

The Guadeloupe style of waltz is regarded as a traditional local development, though it is akin to styles heard on the South American mainland, featuring the piano.

(Recorded by Walter and Lisa Lekis, from Folkways record FW 6840, "Caribbean Rhythm.")

SIDE IV, Band 6: AURA WALTZ, CURACAO.

Orchestra, featuring piano and guiro.

(Recorded by Walter and Lisa Lekis, from Folkways record FW 6840, "Caribbean Rhythms.")

SIDE IV Band 7: CORRIDO DE PANCHO VILLA, MEXICO.

The character of the music and other traditions of the Caribbean have unquestionably been colored by the mainland. Although Mexico seems far away from Haiti, Cuba, and the other islands, its entire eastern shore borders on the Caribbean, and its influences, though subtle, have been present. No music is more instantly recognizable as Mexican than the Corrido -- a story or an allusion to a story in song. Spanish in its origins, the Corrido is today uniquely Mexican. This selection, though graced with the name of Pancho Villa, makes only passing reference to the political leader and "bandit," and concentrates on allusions to the pleasures of illicit love.

Translation:

The little cow and the bull
Have gone off into the hills. (2)

Panch Villa might know where,
For he hides well anywhere. (2)

Ey, ey, ey-y-y-y.

Along the edge of the sierra
Comes a falcon flying. (2)

Any hen that I don't carry off
I leave behind, cackling. (2)

Ey, ey, ey-y-y-y.

The cow was red
And the heifer dun. (2)

I began to wonder
What color the bull might be. (2)

Ey, ey, ey-y-y-y.

Etc.

The song then ends with the comment:

There's no tastier dish
Than another man's wife.

There's no finer tidbit
Even if one's own is nice.

GENERAL EDITOR, HAROLD COURLANDER
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