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Errata

FW31309 - Mr. Gavitt: Calypsos of Costa Rica

On the cover art, the artist's name appears incorrectly as "Walter Gerguson Gavitt". The correct name is "Walter Ferguson Gavitt" or just "Walter Ferguson".

COMPILED AND ANNOTATED BY MICHAEL WILLIAMS

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FTS 31309

Mr. Gavitt

Calypso of Costa Rica

COCOA PLANTATION CALYPSO SONGS SUNG IN ENGLISH



COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

M
1685
C618
G283
M678
1982

MUSIC LP

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FTS 31309



WALTER GERGUSON GAVITT

| | |
|---------------------------|------|
| ME TEACHER NEVER LIKED ME | 3:16 |
| LANDLADY | 3:05 |
| CALALOO | 2:50 |
| LOVE UP YOUR TEACHER | 3:15 |
| MONILIA (YOU COME TO STAY | 3:33 |
| BOCAS | 2:10 |
| WICKED MONILIA | 3:02 |
| CAROLINE | 3:58 |
| LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR | 3:10 |
| WICKED WOMAN | 4:04 |
| FAREWELL TO THE U S A | 2:56 |
| CARNIVAL | 2:03 |

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43 W. 61st ST., N.Y.C., 10023 N.Y., U.S.A.

Cover painting: by Lavares, 1979 "A Colheita e os
Pisadores do Cacau" MOSES ASCH COLLECTION

Mr. Gavitt

Galypso of Costa Rica

COMPILED AND ANNOTATED BY MICHAEL WILLIAMS

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FTS 31309

Mr. Gavitt Calypso of Costa Rica

The road from the capital city of San José down to Limón twists and winds across the meseta central, the rugged plateau which straddles Costa Rica. Rolling green slopes of sugar cane give way to foggy gorges where the road threads its way down to sunlit lowlands. The air is thick along the broad Caribbean littoral; the remaining patches of aboriginal forest grow one hundred feet tall. Here the road is a paved channel between dense walls of cane and bananas gone wild. And with each passing stretch the faces grow steadily darker.

Bananas wrote the history of Limón province, which is culturally distinct from the rest of Costa Rica. The United Fruit Company developed a vast industry here in the early part of the century, building a railroad and clearing acre after swampy acre for the new plantations. Workers were hired by the carload, to lay the track and harvest the fruit. Most of them had roots in Jamaica and the West Indies, with African features and a lilting caribbean English as their native language.

South from Limón is the Talamanca Coast. The pavement ends and the road becomes a tropical obstacle course with potholes, mudpits, and blind curves leading to one-lane bridges over shallow lagoons. Ruined cacao plantations are netted over with carpets of blue morning glories. The dangling nests of the oropendula birds hang from the taller trees. Steam rises from the grass around palm-thatch wood framed houses, delicately supported on stilts. Horses graze underneath. Beyond the Rio Estrella, this road has been open for less than a decade, following the bed of the defunct banana train. Villages like Cahuita, Mr. Gavitt's home, were more easily accessible by sea than by land.

Walter Ferguson Gavitt was born around 1915 in Jamaicatown, a district of Limón, before moving to Cahuita as a child. The boy would hang around the bar in the store of Mr. Habib, an Arab merchant. An old guitar rested on the bar, and when Mr. Habib wasn't around, Walter taught himself to play it, writing his first song at the age of six. The shopkeeper's bad humor softened when he heard the boy's talent, and the customers enjoyed it. Before long, Walter was in demand, often slipping out of bed late in the evening to play for the men down the street.

As a young man he worked on the banana train, and sang in local clubs now and then. He'd heard of Lord Raji the "calypsonian," the best in Limón they said. Raji was thought to come from Panama. Mr. Gavitt met him unloading a train at the Rio Estrella. It surprised him to find a great calypsonian carrying bananas. Moreover, Raji turned out to be a childhood friend from Jamaicatown, who challenged him to a contest in Limon.

Calypso is a lyric competition. One man sings a phrase, challenging the other to rhyme it with something meaningful, spectacular, funny. Mr. Gavitt won that night, because nobody could rhyme like the calypsonian from Cahuita.

As the banana industry declined, the coastal people had planted their own land with cacao, a perennial high-yield crop that required little care. But in recent decades the local economy has been devastated by the arrival of "monilia," a wind-born fungus that has reduced the harvest of cocoa beans to almost nothing. Today the Talamanca Coast, with its abandoned houses and blighted orchards, has an atmosphere of decay. The new enterprises, of tourism and oil exploration, have done little to relieve the general poverty of the area.

By Mr. Gavitt's own count he has written hundreds of songs. He makes a meager living from his cacao farm; with constant care and attention it will still produce some healthy pods.

Calypso survives sporadically today in Limón and Bocas Del Toro (Panama), especially around Carnával time, in the spring. Elsewhere on the mainland, the calypso culture is gone, driven out by radios and jukeboxes broadcasting Latin pop music. The young men sing the radio songs. Only the old remember how people once entertained each other with home-grown lyrics.

A TECHNICAL NOTE:

Recording was done at night to ensure minimal background noise. The sound of insects was unavoidable, chiefly at around 7.1 khz. Equipment which could suppress this noise without a major sacrifice in sound quality is not available to me.

All lyrics have been transcribed without attempts to duplicate the singer's dialect or inflection. Common English or Spanish spelling is used in all cases, including nonsense syllables. Repetitions of lyrics have been avoided for brevity.

Words and music copyright 1981 by Walter Ferguson.

ME TEACHER NEVER LIKED ME

Me teacher never liked me
The fellow said I am a block headed mule
No time at all that we could agree
He said I am a dunce and a bloody fool
One day I got down and start to sing
And I notice the teacher looking at me
He must admitted that I am a king
He want me to show he 'bout the melody
I sat down and start to sing
And I notice the children all in a glee
They come around and they form a ring
I was singing arriba bump mi cuba li
Arriba bump mi cuba li, dice
Arriba riba riba riba riba bump bump
Pero no, mi cuba li dice
I decided to make a stop
And I notice the children all in a glee
And the teacher began to clap
And they begged me to show 'bout the melody
They start to treat me with sympathy
And I notice the children looking at me
They start to call me behind the hair
They call me the king of the melody

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LANDLADY

I going to take you to the government
You are a wicked landlady
I'm going report you to the government
You are a wicked landlady
Just because I don't pay my rent
You take a notice you going to kill me

Landlady, landlady, want to send me to the shut eye country
Landlady, landlady oh, you want to kill me

Many a day I paid in advance
That's the time you laughing with me
But when I fail you get in a trance
You take a notice you going to kill me
(refrain)

Walking with your dagger into your hand
You got me filled with timidity
You got a gun into your hip run
You say you going to send me to the cemetery
(refrain)

Not even the house you will not repair
Water running like in the sea
I don't want to interfere until for all yes,
You going to kill me
(refrain)

Note: "Shut eye country" is Jamaican slang for death.

CALALOO

Everybody got his own opinion
Some may be right and some you do not understand
Calaloo, everybody love calaloo I say everybody love
You eat it in the morning, you eat it in the day
And you eat it when you feel like you could break away
I say calaloo, everybody love

You eat it in the morning, you eat it in the night
And you eat it when you feel like you could lose your sight
I say calaloo, everybody love calaloo I say
You turtle dove

I know a woman she name was Lou,
She wake up one morning all black and blue
And she call to her sister, her name was Sue
Beg her to cook up some calaloo

Good for you belly
Good for your back
Tighten every joint that is getting slack
I say calaloo, everybody love calaloo
Calaloo, calaloo

Everybody got his own opinion
Some may be right and some may be wrong
But calaloo, everybody love calaloo
I say, you turtle dove, give me calaloo
It is the best thing you ever cooked

Note: Calaloo is a wild green, gathered by local people, much as
"poke salad" is gathered in the southern U.S.A.

LOVE UP YOUR TEACHER

Me mother sent me to school
To learn to read, to write, and to spell
You must obey all your teacher's rules
And if you do that you'll be prospering very well
And she bawl out "Love up your teacher"
You mustn't rough up your teacher
Tell you night and day
That's the only way to be loving your teacher

The very first day I went to school
I saw the teacher right at the door
He was sitting upon a stool
And the fellow was making a big uproar, singing
"Boy, what's your name
And I holler I don't got no name
Singin' don't got no name and don't got no fame
Ask me again I will tell you the same

I notice that the teacher looking at me
Asked the children where I am from
I told him that I came from good family
And he started to jump like a village rum
Singing, boy what's your name...(etc.)

I notice the teacher was getting cross
I was frightened, I started to fret
He said "I want you know that I am the boss
I wonder if you learn your alphabet"

And I shout out
"A B C, the bum can be
Cat in the corner he cannot see,
Yes the teacher resembles a big monkey
Bum belly bum belly one two three"
Now is the time that I had to run
And the teacher was coming at me
The children say he's not making fun
For I got no right to call him monkey
'Cause I shouted "A B C ...(etc.)"

Now I had to go home to my mother
I look into her face I was struck with fear
They told her everything I did my teacher
And she beat me till she beat off my underwear
'Cause I bawled out, "A B C...(etc.)"

MONILIA

Monilia you've come to stay
And all you bring is hungry belly (Refrain)
You say you no going away
Till you bring me down to poverty

I know a woman she name Irene
She had a mighty family
Monilia plague the gal until she walk and lean
She had to sell out all she property
Refrain

Ladies and gents come listen to me
I want you all to understand
Monilia is a power from a high degree
And it comes to kill off every man
Refrain

Who never read the Bible
I say they read it now contentedly
Get down on they knees and they start to pray
Beg their master for sympathy
Refrain

BOCAS

Well the young gal say she do not want me no more
I discover she start to dash me things out the door
She going to a a. foreign land
She going to look for an obeah man

I going buy a pass (refrain)
I packing up me things and go to Bocas

Where I tell you say the young gal declare
She do not want me no more
She tell she friends dem
Segundo too bloody poor
She want to get she money
She only live in a misery
(refrain)

Where I tell you say the young gal declare
She do not want me no more
Then I notice she start to pitch me clothes out the door
She want me to understand
She will not support a calypsonian
(refrain)

Note: "Bocas" is Bocas Del Toro (Panama) where many people of Talamanca have friends and relatives. "Obeah" is Afro-caribbean witchcraft. "Segundo" is a stage name occasionally used by Mr. Gavitt.

WICKED MONILIA

You ever hear of the monilia
Traveling all the way from Africa
Visiting all the land
It never stop until it reach the calypsonian

Singin' oh the wicked monilia, troublin' (puzzlin') monilia
What it is at all, what de people got to bawl, the wicked monilia

When monilia begun to roam
Everybody feel like they was at home
Now dey find its an enemy
Everybody living in misery,
Singin' oh...(refrain)

A lady complain about she daughter
She claim monilia was killin' she
I mix up some Aldrin and chase water
The gal make a rapid recovery
(refrain)

Monilia por aca', monilia por alla'
Monilia come away down from Africa
Yes I want you to understand
You come here to kill the calypsonian
(refrain)

CAROLINE

Caroline, Caroline I got the public to stand by me
I'll treat you loving and I'll treat you kind (refrain)
Even while you're working necromancy

When Carol first came to me, she was quiet as a lamb
Soon as we joined in matrimony
I wonder where the devil the wretch come from

Carol start to give me she lot o' chat
She then she send me naked and I most hungry
Burn up me pans and tear up me hat
She says she's going to put me out de country
Singin' (refrain)

In the middle of the night I hold up me head
Carol got a machete into she hand
She was standing straight in the bed
She said she going slay the calypsonian
(refrain)

Carol take a note she not going to cook
She says she going to teach me to wash me clothes
Gets up every morning reading bad book
If I only talk Carol bust me nose
(refrain)

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

Love your neighbor, love him night and day
Love your neighbor, it is not me its just what the bible say

Hear Raji what the Bible says to me
Love your neighbor eternally
Treat your neighbor tender and true
It's the greatest thing you should ever do
(refrain)

When me neighbors we get in a spree
The Bible hears and criticize me
All were once rich and now are poor
And dey trying to run me way from their door
(refrain)

I give me neighbor something to wear
I give me neighbor something to eat
What I get from me neighbor dear
Is the finest pushing into the street
(refrain)

Me neighbor chat 'bout our poverty
They don't know how I bear the hungry belly
Dey only treat me with sympathy
Stealin, me from de cemetery
(refrain)

Note: Mr. Gavitt is a Jehova's Witness.

WICKED WOMAN

I going to call me neighbor to see
What this wicked woman is doing to me

Because when I talk she says you do lie
I bringin' up me neighbor to testify
Cause when I bawl she says you lie
I will be calling on me neighbor to testify

refrain

Night and day she live in the bar
Fanning up she head like a movie star
Night and day she live in the bar
Fanning up she belly like a guitar star
(refrain)

In the night I got to sleep on the floor
And in the day I got to eat quiet behind the door
Imagine an outstanding calypsonian
She give me the food in a sardine pan
(refrain)

She alone spends my salary
I never get a chance to spend my money
(refrain)

Any time I talk 'bout my salary
She says she going to set she lawyer on me
(refrain)

She give pants only once a year
No shirt at all, needs I underwear
(refrain)

FAREWELL TO THE U S A

Visited the U.S.A. and I was happy to see
Happiness that I received from all my family
I am sorry, but I cannot stay
I will be leaving from the U.S.A.

REFRAIN

Farewell to the U.S.A.
My friends and my family

REFRAIN

Never forgot that friendly congregation
Happiness was above my estimation

REFRAIN

Farewell to the U.S.A.
My friends and my family

REFRAIN

Visited the U.S.A. and I was sorry to see
Happiness that I received from all my family
I am sorry, but I cannot stay
I will be leaving soon from the U.S.A.

Farewell to the U.S.A.
My friends and my family

REFRAIN

CARNIVAL DAY

Everybody running to the Carnival I say, neighbor,
Everybody running to the street on Carnival day, neighbor
Old and the young, the great and the small
Everybody running to the carnival
Everybody running to the carnival I say

(refrain)

Twist-eye Marianne
She was along with a policeman
She made me to understand
She wanted to take a calypsonian
(refrain)

One shot Willie and he mother-in-law Mae-Mae
See them pushing through the crowd on Carnival Day, neighbor
Nothing to eat and nothing to wear
But the Carnival, they are bound to be there
(refrain)

Note: Calypso is revived annually during Carnival, which corresponds to
Mardi Gras, in places like Limón and Bocas Del Toro (Panama).

LITHO IN U.S.A. 