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CARIBBEAN



REVIEWS

HAITIAN RARA & DOMINICAN GAGA

CARIBBEAN REVELS

HAITIAN RARA AND DOMINICAN GAGA

Notes by Verna Gillis and Gage Averill

RARA

1. Notre Dame de 7 Doleurs 2:11
2. Vapeur 5:10
3. Carrefour de Fort 5:13
4. Cemetery at Bizoton 6:53
5. Tallon 9:37
6. Notre Dame de 7 Doleurs 13:35
7. Tallon 7:35

GAGA

8. Main Street of Haina 1:56
9. Lechuga 6:02
10. Andres Boca Chica 5:42
11. Elias Pina 1:44
12. Haina 2:49
13. Haina 2:49
14. Andres Boca Chica 3:04

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Dedicated to Brad 'Shbabaloo' Graves.

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Throughout the week before Easter, roads all over Haiti swell with bands of revelers, dancers, singers and percussionists, traveling from vodou temples to their villages. Rara and gaga are wildly festive sounds, featuring unusual percussion and wind instruments, and often bawdy lyrics. These remastered recordings from the streets, plazas and cemeteries of Haiti and the Dominican Republic are accompanied by extensive notes by Verna Gillis and Gage Averill.



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Notes by Verna Gillis and Gage Averill

In the week before Easter, roads all over Haiti swell with bands of revelers, dancers, singers, percussionists, and players of bamboo and tin trumpets followed by the ubiquitous vendors of *fresko* (shaved ice with sweet syrup flavoring) and *kleren* (cheap cane liquor that provides some of the stamina needed for gruelling parades under the hot Haitian sun). These bands are led by presidents, colonels, queens and other members of the complex *rara* band hierarchies. After preparatory rituals in the Vodou temples, they move from house to house and from one neighborhood to another collecting money and occasionally engaging in low-level conflict with other groups. This time of year, this type of group, and this type of music is known in Haiti as *rara*. Despite its seasonal association, *rara* can take place at any time of the year and animates political rallies, demonstrations, and celebrations of all types. As an important cultural expression of the Haitian peasants and lower classes (which make up approximately 90% of Haiti's population), *rara* has emerged as a potent symbol of Haitian identity and authenticity and as a means for mobilizing large numbers of people.

The lack of agreement by observers and researchers concerning the meaning of *rara* attests to the richness and the complexity of the event. Some have called it a "rural carnival," a peasant spin-off of the pre-Lenten urban carnival; others believe that *rara* predated carnival and that slaves practiced it in some form on the sugar plantations before independence. Some call it secular; others see it steeped in the symbols and beliefs of Christianity; more link it to Vodou and the secret societies. Some say it derives from African (especially Kongo) antecedents; others connect it (although rather fancifully) to European or pre-Columbian Indian sources. *Rara* songs can be obscene, satirical, political, or religious and it is often many or all of these at once. Sacred/secular, Vodouist/Christian, African/European, political/religious/obscene, playful/dangerous. . . *rara* incorporates all of these contrasts. It is always, however, exuberant and noisy. To *fe rara* (make *rara*) is synonymous in Haiti with "to make a big racket," and the word used for *rara*

by Haitians in the Dominican Republic, *gaga*, means "crazy" or "senile".

This collection of *rara* songs is meant to serve as an introduction to the sound of *rara*. *Rara* music (especially the ensembles of single-pitch bamboo or metal trumpets that accompany singing) is unlike anything else heard in the New World. The recordings were made by Verna Gillis between 1976 and 1978 in communities near the capital of Port-au-Prince, along the southern peninsula of Haiti, and in communities of Haitian cane cutters in the Dominican Republic. This collection includes short "performances" (all of these were recorded on site and none were staged for the purposes of the recording) as well as excerpts from longer pieces that may go on for hours at a time. The juxtaposition of the many recordings helps to demonstrate the freedom and variety with which *rara* bands orchestrate their pieces as well as the many variations and shifts that they introduce in the course of a given piece.

This is not a complete regional sampler of *rara* styles. Nor can recordings from the 1970s—a period when the Duvalier dictatorship held sway—be fully representative of current practice after the overthrow of the Duvaliers, a period of unremitting political struggle in which *rara* has had a prominent role and during which it has been in continual evolution. But the spirit of *rara*, its musical structure and organization, and its joyous empowerment of the Haitian lower classes are qualities of the event that have persisted over time.

HAITI

The Republic of Haiti occupies one-third of an island lying between Cuba and Puerto Rico in the West Indies, and covers an area of only 10,000 square miles. The Ciboney and Arwak Indians were its first recorded inhabitants and the name of the country comes from the Arawak word "Ayiti", meaning "mountainous land." In the 15th century, Carib Indians from South America invaded the island. In 1492, when Columbus landed on the island, he called it Española, later anglicized to Hispaniola.

Spain ceded the Haitian part of the island to France in the Treaty of

Ryswick of 1697 and the French renamed it Saint Domingue. As the sugar, coffee, and tobacco trades increased in the 17th century, the French colony prospered. With the near-eradication of the native population from disease and the ravages of forced mine labor, the French began to import a vast number of slaves to work in the mines and later to work on the large sugar plantations. The forced migration of black Africans grew from 2,000 in 1697, to an estimated 117,400 in 1739. By the end of the century, approximately 480,000 slaves worked the farms and plantations of the European colonists. A number of African peoples were represented, principally from the "slave coast" tribes (such as the Ketu, Allada, Mahi, Ibo, Anago from what is now known as Benin, Nigeria, and Togo), but also from the Bakongo and other related peoples from the Congo River region of what is now Zaire.

In 1791, Haitian slaves began a revolt that culminated in 1804 with the establishment of an independent nation in Haiti—the second independent republic in the world (after the United States of America), and the first black one. Both before and during the struggle, slaves and their leaders fused a syncretic religion that included elements from diverse African beliefs. They named it after a Fon word, *vodoo* or *voodoo* meaning "spirit." Early slave leaders like Makandal and Boukman exploited the potential of the new religion to inspire their followers and to give courage to the soldiers. The development of a unified religious and social structure among black immigrants was by all accounts critical to the success of the revolution.

Haitians incorporated elements of Christianity into Vodou as it developed in the New World under the impact of European customs and culture. The Catholic saints, for example, were identified in Haiti with African deities whose personalities or physical traits appeared similar. The spirits of Vodou are known as *lwa*, and they are believed to inhabit the world of Vodou devotees. Many originated in Africa (the Rada family of *lwa*) but many also came into being in the New World with the militaristic rev-

olution (the Petro *lwa*). The Rada *lwa* are generally more benevolent in nature and therefore their favor is sought and is a sign of good luck. The Petro *lwa*, on the other hand, count among their number several aggressively violent personalities.

Creole is the popular language of Haiti spoken by nearly all people, even the sectors of the elite who use French for official discourse (approximately 5-10% of the population is bi-lingual). French is used by most of the media and was formerly the only language taught in the schools. Creole and French are now both recognized as official languages in Haiti by the Haitian constitution. Creole vocabulary is drawn primarily from French with some African, Portuguese, and more recently English-derived words included as well. Creole syntax is most-closely related to West African linguistic precedents. The Creole orthography that we have used for these liner notes corresponds to that of the *Creole Dictionary* of the Creole Institute at Indiana University (1983).

RARA

The peak of *rara* takes place in Haiti from Holy Wednesday through Easter Sunday. Most *rara* activity occurs at night, usually beginning at about 9 p.m. and continues through early morning. The bands gather and set out on foot from the *ounfo* (Vodou temple) onto the streets where they attract their followers. On Good Friday, at Carrefour du Fort and Léogane, it has become traditional for *rara* bands all over the south to converge in displays of dancing and musical skill. Aside from this loose structure and several traditional practices described below, there is no set procedure or "script" for the *rara* celebrations. Bands include some songs, dances, and practices regularly; some inconsistently; and improvise other elements spontaneously.

It is not known precisely how the word *rara* came to be used to describe these events. In his book *Haiti Singing* (1939), Harold Courlander argued that the word may have come from a Yoruba adverb (*rara*) meaning "loudly" used to modify a verb (*he*) meaning "to make sound or noise" (p. 168). Another word used to refer to *rara* festivities may

reflect its origins as a peasant carnival-like celebration of the colonial era. This term is *lalwadi*, a possible Creolization of the French *la loi dit*, 'the law says,' referring to the Code Noir (Black Code) of France passed in 1658 by Louis XIV, which decreed Saturday night a free night for plantation slaves and gave them vacation days during Holy Week. When slaves had particular grievances, they would approach the main house during these free periods and sing songs of complaint. If the plantation owners attempted to forbid these weekly manifestations, so the theory goes, the slaves might have replied, "*laloua di!*"

SACRED AND SECULAR

Rara exhibits many secular features, but it is also intimately connected to the cosmology and ritual practices of Vodou; to Haitian secret societies that date back to the days of slavery; and to Catholicism. Some commentators have cited beliefs that the Christian saints, and even the Vodou *lwa*, are "sleeping" during *rara* week. However, most *rara* bands actively solicit the help of the *lwa*, especially the dangerous deities known as the Gedes, and there are some well-known Vodou ceremonies that take place during Easter week. Nearly all of the important *lwa* in *rara* are from the Petro family of Vodou and many are Gedes. They include: Gede Nibo, Baron Samdi, Ogo Balendjo, Ogo Feray, Gran Brijit, Ti-Jan Petro, Ezili Ze Rouj, Gran Bwa, and others. Commonly, *rara* bands "incorporate" during the celebrations for the Gedes that take place around the holiday known as *fèt demò* (festival of the dead, known in the U.S. as Halloween and All Souls Day).

In *The Dances of Haiti* (1947), Katherine Dunham discussed a kind of morality play that some *rara* enact: they carry an effigy of Judas Iscariot in the procession and burn the effigy on Sunday morning, reminiscent of the burning of the king figure (Vaval) in many forms of Carnival. The story of Christ's ascension has a strong resonance with many symbols of death and rebirth in *rara*, but it should be stressed that the practice of *rara* is highly diverse from region to region and from group to group and the incorporation of symbols from the Christian Easter story is not consistent in Haitian *rara*.

Ceremonies take place to consecrate the band and its instruments. *Vèvès* (symbols drawn on the ground with corn maize) are drawn for the *lwa* of the *rara* band. Prayers are said and songs are sung to ask the *lwa* for protection of the band as it moves through the secular (and therefore spiritually dangerous) space of the streets. Because *rara* takes place primarily on the roads, bands

most often invoke the *lwa* Baron Samdi, Lord of the Cemetery and of the crossroads, the Petro equivalent to Legba. The spiritual dangers inherent in taking *rara* out on the streets are matched by the physical dangers that derive from the intense competition between *rara* bands, which can erupt into inter-group violence. In recent years, certain bands known for violent behavior have been forbidden by the mayor of Léogane to enter the town during Easter week.

HIERARCHY

The *rara* band is typically organized by a *prezidan* (president). The band "belongs" to him: he owns the musical instruments, pays for the costumes, and has economic and organizational responsibility for the group. Female dancers (*renn*, or queens) follow the *majò jonk* (male dancers and baton twirlers) and are responsible for soliciting donations in the basket carried by the main queen. *Rara* bands perform for donations in front of private homes, at businesses, or on the road, stopping cars until they have exacted their "toll." Most of the money collected by the dancers goes to the *prezidan* to help defray costs of outfitting the band. The *kolonèl* (colonel) is the director of the *rara* band; he carries a whip (*fwèt*) and blows a whistle (*siflè*). In colonial times the whip was a symbol of power; in *rara* it has magical significance as well. As in some Petro rituals of Vodou, the whip is used to dispel bad spirits and purify the space that the band will be passing through. The whistle, or occasionally the *lambi* (conch shell trumpet), is also used to maintain order in the *rara* band as it progresses from one location to another.

DANCE, COSTUMES, AND THE MAJÒ JONK

There are two main kinds of *rara* dance: one (*raborday*) is considered highly suggestive or sexual, and features a pelvic undulation known as *gwiyo*. It can be performed alone, in a couple, or by a group. The other (*charyopye*, which literally means "weight on the foot") is a graceful dance performed by the *majò jonk* with a kind of halting motion. A *rara* band typically includes at least two baton-twirling *majò jonks*. Parenthetically, batons are used in dances in both Benin (formerly Dahomey) and the Congo River region.

The *majò jonk* frequently dresses in a brightly-sequined cape with sneakers, sunglasses, and multi-colored scarves tucked about his waist. In her article "Rara in Haiti" (1988), Dolores Yonker claimed that sunglasses are in honor of Baron Samdi (this was the same reason why Papa Doc's private militia, the Tonton Macoutes, wore sunglasses). The

colors of the scarves represent the colors of the *lwa* who guides the *rara*. *Rara* costumes, like those for carnival, are used for only one year. After that, the band burns them (or sells them) along with the group's identifying flag. Each *rara* band has its own identifying flag or *drapo* which is carried at the head of the band by the *pòt-drapo*. The *drapo* displays the name of the band and often the colors and name of its chief *lwa*. The *prezidan* instructs the flagbearer where to lead the group.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Single-note bamboo trumpets of varying lengths, called *vaksins*, are the most distinctive instrumental sound of *rara*. A node at the end of bamboo tube is pierced to form a mouthpiece and the tube is blown through and struck on its side with a stick to produce a rhythmic timeline called a *kata* (the *kata* can also be played on small iron beaters called *fè*). The individual pitches on the different trumpets are interlocked in short melodic-rhythmic patterns or "hockets." In addition to *rara*, *vaksin* ensembles can also accompany communal work brigades called *konbit*, but they are not employed in Vodou. Similar trumpets are used in the *broto* music of the Bambara people along the Niger River in West Africa and by the Banda people of Zaire. The *kònèt* is an instrument similar in function to the *vaksin* but made of hammered zinc ending in a flared horn.

Drummers play one-headed, hand beaten *petro* or *kongo* drums strapped to their bodies so that they can play them as the band marches. Other instruments used in *rara* are the *kès* (double-headed, stick-beaten drum, often with a snare-like device), *graj* (metal scrapers), *twom-pèt* (trumpet), *tcha-tcha* (maracas), flutes, saxophones, and various kinds of rattles also made from zinc such as the *tchancy*, a can filled with seed rattles. Many of the *kònèt*s, scrapers, rattles, and batons are made from recycled metal in the famous Marché de Fer (Iron Market), located downtown Port-au-Prince.

TEXTS

In general, *rara* songs contain satirical, obscene, or political subjects, but one also finds religious and romantic songs. It is common to compose songs about recent community events, especially when an individual has committed an act worthy of censure. The political, topical, and obscene lyrics rely on double entendre and metaphor to convey meaning.

GAGA IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Many Haitians reside in the Dominican Republic, drawn there by the sugar cane industry, and they have brought

rara with them. *Gaga* in the Dominican Republic resembles *rara* in Haiti but is less openly performed due to official discouragement of Vodou by the Dominican government. Researcher June Rosenberg (1977) has written about the initiation ceremonies in *gaga* on the first Saturday in Lent. At the initiation, the group lifts the owner or *dueño* in a seat. They draw *vèvès*, sacrifice animals, and prepare a *manje lwa* (meal for the *lwa*). The principal *lwa* possesses devotees at the initiation ceremony to seal the sacred promise made by the *dueño* to sponsor the *rara*.

Haitians who work in the Dominican Republic work under some of the cruelest conditions known in the modern world, conditions that a United Nations commission has compared to slavery. Haitian governments have for many years participated in this trade in workers and have received a large part of the workers' salaries in return for encouraging the practice. *Gaga* reinforces Haitian identity in the *bateys* (cane workers' barracks) in the Dominican Republic and fulfills a commitment to one's ancestors and the *lwa*. Even among Haitian descendants who no longer speak Creole, most songs are sung in Creole and new outfits and even instruments are imported from Haiti in order to make for a more impressive *rara*.

POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Haitian presidents have made a practice of sponsoring *rara* whenever it was politically expedient or whenever a big crowd was desirable. François "Papa Doc" Duvalier did this as did his high-living predecessor, General Magloire, but the practice has not ended with the exile of the Duvalier clan. In 1988, General Henri Namphy (the president at the time after a military coup) toured the country and hired pro-Army *rara* bands to play at his rallies and to carry signs such as "Anba KEP Viv Lame" ("Down with the Electoral Commission, Long Live the Army"). But the politically-charged atmosphere and topical subjects of *rara* are often turned against the political status quo, and these days, many large-scale political rallies in Haiti and among Haitians in the U.S. are accompanied by *rara*. The election of populist priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide (known as *Pè Titid*) as president in 1990 sparked a spontaneous outpouring of *rara* groups around the country waving green branches and singing Aristide's campaign *rara* songs.

Rara has had a long association with popular dance music as well. The group Jazz Des Jeunes, a leader in the Voodoo-jazz movement of the 1950s (a movement that mixed the big band *méringue* with traditional elements), were advocates of the African identity movement

known as *négritude*. They orchestrated a *rara* called "Cote Moune Yo?" ("Where are the People?") with an introduction featuring *vaksin*. The exiled Haitian cultural organizations in the U.S. during the 1970s that campaigned against the Duvalier dictatorship also exploited *rara* to express their commitment to peasants and to traditional Haitian culture. An excellent example from this movement is the *rara* lullaby called "Dodinen" (Rocking) from Atis Indepandan's album *Ki Sa Pou-n Fe? (What Can We Do?)*. In the late 1970s and 1980s, even some of the popular *konpa* bands (commercial dance music) experimented with fusions of *rara* and *konpa*. *Rara*-inspired arrangements were included on albums by a number of *konpa* bands including Mystik, System Band ("Sa Pi Red"), Tabou Combo (who reprised "Cote Moune Yo?"), and Mini All Stars ("Raraman"). The musicians who supported the ouster of Duvalier and the movement called *dechoukaj* (which struggled to uproot the influences of the dictatorship) used *rara* liberally in their revolutionary compositions (Fedia Laguerre, Farah Juste, Toto Necessite, Manno Charlemagne for example). In New York in the mid-1980s, two groups (Ayizan and Sakad) were formed to synthesize contemporary popular music with Vodou and *rara*.

On the heels of the 1986 rebellion against Duvalier came a musical movement based primarily on *rara* and Vodou. A *rara* song critical of the political elite won popular acclaim as the best carnival song in the 1989 carnival, and the group that sang it, Boukman Eksperyans, along with the groups Foula, Sanba-yo, Rara Machine and others, helped to spark a roots-oriented, populist commercial music. *Rara* has been at the center of the process of cultural renewal in this period. It is seen as a uniquely Haitian symbol—a celebratory, socially-engaged expression of group power by sectors of the population that have traditionally wielded neither political nor economic power. The exuberant ambience of *rara*—summed up in words that denote unrestrained emotion and display: *antyoutyout* (worked up, excited), *anraje* (enraged), *debode* (overflowing)—is a feature of Haitian social life that continues to resonate and carry meaning for Haitians from a wide spectrum of social classes.

Gage Averill & Verna Gillis—N.Y.C. 1990

NOTES TO THE RECORDINGS

Since most *Rara* songs do not have titles, the tracks are either named after the groups recorded on them or after the place in which they were recorded.

RARA

1. Notre Dame de 7 Doleurs.

Recorded in Bourg Champagne on April 8, 1977. *Prezidan* and *oungan* Louis Jacques. Instruments: 5 *vakin*, 4 *konèt*, 3 *fe*, 1 *tanbou*.

This is a short and spirited instrumental *rara* in which the instruments have staggered entrances. It begins with the *tanbou* accompanied by a *kata* played with sticks on the side of the *vaksins*. The *fe* comes in soon after, followed by the high-pitched *konèt* and finally by the blown *vaksins*. Note that the *fe* drops out and comes back in at will. In the latter part of the piece, the deepest *vaksins* can be heard in the densely interlocked hocket. The end of the piece is signalled by the drummer who uses a *kase* (break), a conventional rhythmic formula, to signal changes, beginnings, and endings.

2. Vapeur.

Recorded in Carrefour (a suburb to the west of the capital along Route 2 known for its bordellos, dance halls, and traffic jams) on April 2, 1977 at 1 a.m. in front of a house while the band was on the road, stopping and playing for money. *Prezidan*: Davilmar Vilma. Instruments: 1 *tanbou*, 5 *vaksin*, 1 *konèt*, 1 *tcha-tcha*, 1 *fe*, 1 *kès*, 1 *graj*.

This piece exhibits a remarkable amount of structural and textural diversity for *rara*. At the beginning of the recording is a rather typical *rara* instrumental which is interrupted by chords produced by the simultaneous sounding of all the *vaksins*. A chorus can be heard dimly over the chords and after a while the *vaksins* and *konèt* break into a hocketed pattern with a bamboo *kata* time-line. The mid-range *konèt* becomes a solo instrument, continuously varying its interaction with the *vaksin* hocket. Near the end of the recording, the *tanbou* can be heard on a "solo" of its own.

3. Carrefour de Fort.

Recorded at Carrefour de Fort (near Léogane) on April 8, 1977 at approximately 4 p.m. on the main street where all the groups congregate. Instruments: 4 *konèt*, 1 trumpet, 1 *tanbou petro*, 1 *fe*, 1 *graj*, 3 *vaksin*.

The very metallic percussion one hears at the beginning is produced by sticks playing against the side of the *konèts*, as they do against the *vaksins*, to produce a *kata* which is also played on a *fe*. This is

an example of a *rara* hocket used as a ground or base for a trumpet (playing a distinctly un-*rara* like melody related to a composed carnival *méringue*). Underneath the trumpet, the *konèts* sound like a ghostly chorus. The *konèt* hocket changes in the middle of the song and this new pattern can be heard most clearly when the trumpet drops out. Adding trumpets and saxophones (and whatever solo instruments are available) to a *rara* is a recent phenomena and is especially common when *rara* bands march in carnival.

4. Cemetery at Bizoton.

Recorded in the cemetery at Bizoton, a market district between Port-au-Prince and Carrefour on March 21, 1978 at approximately 12:30 a.m.. On this recording, one finds 4 *vaksin*, 1 *fe*, a whistle, a flute, 3 *konèt*, and *atanbou petro*.

This was recorded as the group was leaving the cemetery after the midnight ceremony. The cemetery is an intersection of sorts (between this world and the next), and, like the crossroads, is ruled by Baron Samdi. The song that the group sings at the beginning has the following lyrics:

Mwen tande yon bri dèyè kay-la
Mwen pa leve (x2)
Marijoze fin anraje,
Fann-nan ponpe o
Zozo kraz kabann-nan o

I heard a noise behind the house
I did not get up (x2)
Marie Jose became enraged
The woman jumped o
The penis broke the bed o

5. Tallon.

Recorded in Croix des Bouquets on March 23, 1978 inside the *ounfo* before the band went out on the road. *Prezidan* and *oungan*, Pierre Potau Thelemaque. Instruments: 1 saxophone, 1 trumpet, 1 *graj*, 5 *vaksi*, 1 *tanbou petro*, 5 *konèt*, 1 *tanbou*, 1 *fe*.

This music accompanies the dancing of the *majo jonk*. The saxophone plays an ostinato (repetitive melodic-rhythmic pattern) that would be quite at home in many of the two-chord popular dance tunes from either Dominican *merengue* or Haitian *konpa*. The trumpet joins the saxophone with its own ostinato, and the two, especially with the *vaksins* and *konèts*, sound strangely "out-of-tune" to ears used to functional harmony of the Euro-American tradition. The *vaksins* are, however, very well tuned to each other in the characteristic minor third intervals which, when four or more *vaksin* are present, create what would be known in western harmonic theory as diminished chords. This is a long example with a wonderful ebb and flow of

instrumental, tonal, and textural environments.

6. Notre Dame de 7 Doleurs.

Recorded in Bourg Champagne on March 24, 1978 at 9:30 a.m. inside the *ounfo* before the drawing of the *vèvs*. *Prezidan* and *oungan*, Louis Jacques. Instruments: 5 *vaksin*, 4 *konèt*, 3 *fe*; 1 *kès*.

The music recorded here accompanied the drawing of the *vèvs* for the following *lwes*: Ezili Dantò, Simbi Macaye, Gran Bwa, Legba Petro, Gran Chimen, and Baron Samdi. The *vaksins* in this example are particularly present and compelling. In the background, the chorus can be heard singing a montage of short sections from different songs.

7. Tallon.

Recorded in Croix des Bouquets on March 23, 1978. *Prezidan* and *oungan*, Pierre Potau Thelemaque. This is another instrumental selection from the *rara* band on Track 5. Instruments: 1 saxophone, 1 trumpet, 1 *graj*, 5 *vaksin*, 1 *tanbou petro*, 5 *konèt*, 1 *kès*, 1 *fe*.

GAGA

8. Main Street of Haina

Recorded in Haina (Dominican Republic) on April 16, 1976 at approximately 1 p.m. on the main street. Instruments: 5 *vaksin*, 1 *tanbou petro*, 1 *kès*, 1 *tcha-tcha*, 1 whistle.

This is a song to Danbala Wedo, a very important and powerful serpent deity in Haiti who is merged in the popular consciousness with the Christian St. Patrick. While the chorus sings only nonsense syllables, the lead singer intersperses repetitive lines between the choruses beginning with:

Mezanmi koule bweson, tande?

My friends, let's let the drinks flow, you hear?

When one says "koule bweson," the intention is to drink in excess. The lead singer varies lines and in some cases seems to intentionally distort the words. Behind the chorus, one can make out a light whistle accompaniment.

9. Lechuga

Recorded in Lechuga (Dominican Republic) on April 14, 1976 at approximately 1:30 a.m. as the band is moving from the road to a covered area where they stayed and played for several hours. Instruments: *tcha-tcha*, *tanbou petro*; whistle, *lanbi* (conch shell), *vaksin*.

There are two refrains sung by the group:

Rale yoyo-ou mete
(and)

Anba yoyo wo,

Pull your penis and put it in
(and)
Underneath the penis

The Creole slang word for penis is 'zozo'. The use of the word 'yoyo' here seems to be intentionally ambiguous, but its meaning would be understood by all.

10. Andres Boca Chica

Recorded in Andres Boca Chica on April 17, 1976 at approximately 3 p.m. while the band was on the road. Instruments: 1 *tanbou petro*, 1 *tanbou*, 4 *vaksin*, 1 whistle, *tcha-tcha*.

Vin wè, vin wè, koko Klodèt
Ala yon langet!
Fanm-sa-a bèl fanm

Come and see, come and see Klodet's
vagina.
What a clitoris!
This woman is a beautiful woman.

11. Elias Pina

Recorded in Elias Pina on April 17, 1977. Elias Pina is a border town and its Haitian population was prohibited by the Dominican government from bringing out a *gaga* band. This *gaga* song is not played on traditional Haitian instruments but on Dominican *palos*, two-headed, hand-beaten, laced drums. This group encompasses both Haitian and Dominican musical traditions.

Simbi minan, minan, minan, Simbi
Ayibobo!
Sa m fè la-a
pou lwa vle manje mwen, ayibobo?
Simbi, mina, mina, mina Simbi
Ayibobo!*

What did I do there
That the loa wants to eat me, ayi-
bobo?

* *Mina* is a word in *langaj*, encoded or nonsense words that form a liturgical language that only an Vodou initiate at a certain level can comprehend. *Ayibobo* is a liturgical exclamation of praise.

12. Haina

Recorded in Haina on April 16, 1977. Instruments: 5 *vaksin*, 1 *tanbou petro*, 1 *tanbou*, *tcha-tcha*, 1 whistle.

This is a frenetic example with a short call-and-response structure to the vocals.

13. Haina

Recorded in Haina on April 16, 1977. Instruments: 5 *vaksin*, 1 *tanbou petro*, 1 *tanbou*, *tcha-tcha*, 1 whistle, and *lanbi* (conch shell).

The major part of the chorus consists of the phrase:

Prezidan Balagè boule o!

The term *boule* (to "burn" or to "get by")

can be interpreted in many different ways because the imperative and the indicative forms of verbs in Creole are the same, and with both forms there are at least two possible interpretations. It could mean: "President Balaguer is burning," or "President Balaguer is doing alright," or "President Balaguer, burn!" or "President Balaguer, keep going!" President Joaquin Balaguer had been President of the Dominican Republic for 11 years when this example was recorded. Most likely, the song is another example of intentionally ambiguous meaning. It is impossible to know the exact meaning since the words are not placed in any additional context.

14. Andres Boca Chica

Recorded in Andres Boca Chica on April 17, 1977. Instruments: 1 *tanbou petro*, 1 *tanbou*, 4 *vaksin*, 1 whistle, 1 *kònet*, *tcha-tcha*.

Most of the song is sung to the syllable 'o' but there is a half-shouted verse:

Kabrit manje jaden,
Vwazin ap rele,
Tout moun ap rele

The goat ate the garden
The neighbors are crying
Everybody's crying.

The names of the people crying, because of the incident with the goat, punctuate the chorus. The exact meaning is unclear. During the middle of the song, we hear the *kònet* loudly punctuating the passage.

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Verna Gillis is an ethnomusicologist/producer/manager and has taught at Brooklyn College and Carnegie Mellon. In 1979 she founded Soundscape, a performance space in New York City. She has had her own live radio program (on WBAI) and produced recordings for a number of record and video labels. Her recordings on Folkways include: *Vodun-Rada rite for Erzulie* (FE 4491); *The Island of Quisqueya* (FE 4281); *The Island of Espanola* (FE 4282); *Cradle of the New World* (FE 4283); *The Dominican Republic, Songs from the North* (FE 4284); *Foday Music Soso-Kora Music from the Gambia* (FW 8510); *Music of the Dagomba from Ghana* (FE 4324); *Comanche Flute Music of Doc Tate* (FE 4328); *The Ashanti of Ghana* (FE 4240); David "Honeyboy" Edwards (FS 3539); "Are You Ready For Christmas?" Reverend Audrey Bronson and organist Becky Carlton (FTS 32425); *Traditional Women's Music from Ghana* (FE 4257); *Nicholas Guillen - Poet Laureate of Revolutionary Cuba* (FL 9941); *Music of Cuba* (FE 4064).

Gage Averill received his Ph.D. at the University of Washington and now teaches at Wesleyan University, in Middletown, Connecticut. His dissertation was entitled *Haitian Dance Band Music: The Political Economy of Exuberance*, and he has written a number of articles on Haitian music as well as authored a regular column for *The Beat*. He is active in festival, radio, and record production, and in 1990 served

on the Organization of American States Elector Observation Mission to Haiti.

Credits:

All music recorded in 1976, 1977 and 1978 by Verna Gillis, with the assistance of Ramon Perez. Annotated by Gage Averill, Verna Gillis and Michel Rolph Trouillot. Song translations by Michel Rolph Trouillot. Photographs by Dolores Yonker. Design by Joan Wolbier. Tape restoration by Smolian Sound. Mastered by Joe Gastwirt, Ocean View Digital, W. Los Angeles. Reissue supervision by Anthony Seeger and Matt Walters with the assistance of Chris Jerde.

Dedicated to Brad 'Shbabaloo' Graves.

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