Caribbean Songs & Games for Children
Puerto Rico - Trinidad - Jamaica - Haiti - The Bronx
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Recorded and Annotated by Edna Smith Edet
Descriptive Notes Are Inside Pocket

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FC 7856
West Indian Songs and Games for Children

Dr. Edna Smith Edet is a musician, educator, author and lecturer. She has had a long and varied career in the field.

She was a base player and arranger for the Sweethearts of Rhythm, V1 Burnside Band, Edna Smith Trio, and other professional organizations.

Dr. Edet was the Head of Music at the University of Nigeria where she did extensive research in West African music. She is a professor of music and coordinator of music at Medgar Evers College, City University of New York.

She has been a guest lecturer and workshop leader for many colleges and prestigious organizations. She has had numerous articles published in scholarly journals and magazines. She is the compiler and editor of Songs for Nigerian Children and The Griot Sings, Medgar Evers College Press.

The West Indian Archipelago stretches from the coast of Florida to South America in the Caribbean Sea. It consists of the Bahamas, the Greater Antilles (Cuba, Hispaniola, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico) and the lesser Antilles (Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, and the Leeward Islands.)

The racial composition of these islands differs because of historical factors. Haiti, for example, became independent from France in the Nineteenth Century. Consequently, there is a large population of African origin and a relatively small creole community. Trinidad is almost equally divided racially between the East Indian and African because these groups were imported to work the plantations and have largely kept their racial identities. The people of Puerto Rico, on the other hand, are a racial potpourri with few inhabitants having one racial strain.

There are also differences in languages and cultures in the Islands. The West Indies are thus a polyglot of languages, a mosaic of cultures and a racial melting pot.

In 1975 and 1976 I visited these islands under the sponsorship of the Research Foundation of the City University of New York to collect children's songs and games to be used in the New York City schools.

I visited Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Trinidad, and Haiti and recorded children in the playgrounds and schools, at the barbecue (drying yard) and in their homes. In addition, I recorded songs and games with adult informants to obtain materials which are not presently in use. The songs and games obtained in these field trips are included in my collection The Griot Sings Songs From The Black World. The materials for this recording have been selected from this collection.

The Music:

West Indian children's music is a combination of African and European music. The European diatonic scale is used though some tones may be omitted. The African call and response form is dominant except for school songs with European themes. Even these songs have been adapted to the islands by adding rhythmic elements and antiphonal singing. All of the songs, when performed in a play situation utilize hand clapping which is more akin to African music. The languages used in the songs are essentially European with Creole overtones. There are some exceptions. In Haiti, the language is French in the town and Creole in the bush. In Trinidad and Jamaica, school songs are sung in English while the moonlight games or ring ding are sung in broken English.
The games and songs may be taught in school, transmitted by older children during play or absorbed by exposure to adult play during moonlight nights and the nine nights of "set up." The latter songs are simplified by the children for their use. New words and concepts are added by successive generations of children which reflect the realities of their world.

Most of the children's games are performed in a ring. The most ubiquitous of the ring games are the "Show me your motion games." They are found in all the islands and are vehicles for demonstrating individual movements by solo performers which can be admired by the other participants.

Another popular game is the passing game. The children pass handkerchiefs, stones, shoes, and other objects around the ring while one child endeavors to find the object.

Another kind of game is the chasing game. In one type, a child runs around the ring with an object while another child chases him. In another variety, a child stands inside the ring while another child outside tries to touch him.

Counting down rhymes are used in conjunction with such activities as jumping rope and playing ball.

The children also have line games and dances. The actions in these games take place either in front of the line or between two lines with two or more children performing dance steps in turn.

These games have universal appeal. I have taught many different children these games and they seem to understand the rules and enter into the play regardless of their own ethnic origin.

I wish to thank the griots of the New World and the many children who dances and sang into my music box. My sincere acknowledgements and thanks go to the staffs of the following organizations for their kindness and assistance: National Cultural Council of Trinidad, University of Puerto Rico, Jamaican Music School, and P.S. 43 and I.S. 74 in the Bronx. Finally I wish to thank the City University of New York Research Foundation whose support made this collection possible.

Edna Smith Edet

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Side I
Band 1 - 5 recorded at St. Belamont's Home, Trinidad

GYPSY IN THE MOONLIGHT

Gypsy in the moonlight
Gypsy in the dew,
Gypsy never come back
Before the clock strike two.

Walk in gypsy walk in,
Walk right in I say.
Walk in to my parlour
To hear my banjo play.

I don't like nobody.
Nobody loves me.
All I want is
To come and dance with me.

Tra la la la la la
Tra la la la la la

The gypsy is outside the circle of children. During the second verse she enters the circle. She chooses a partner in the third chorus and the two dance together during the last chorus. The gypsy then joins the circle while the other child goes out to become the new gypsy.

Band 2A

IN A FINE CASTLE

Circle I
In a fine castle do you hear my sissy oh.
In a fine castle do you hear my sissy oh.

Circle II
We want one of them do you hear my sissy oh.
We want one of them do you hear my sissy oh.

I
Which one do you want do you hear my sissy oh?
Which one do you want do you hear my sissy oh?

II
We want do you hear my sissy oh.
We want do you hear my sissy oh.

I
What you going to give her do you hear my sissy oh?
What you going to give her do you hear my sissy oh?

II
We going to give her rotten frog do you hear my sissy oh.
We going to give her rotten frog do you hear my sissy oh.

I
That don't suit her do you hear my sissy oh
That don't suit her do you hear my sissy oh

II
We going to give her wedding dress do you hear my sissy oh.
We going to give her wedding dress do you hear my sissy oh.

I
Farewell go and take your wedding dress.
Farewell go and take your wedding dress.

The children stand in two circles. They sing the words as indicated in the directions. At the end of the chorus, the chosen child joins the second circle. This continues until all the children from the first circle have left.
Band 2B - JANE AND LOUISA - Trinidad

Jane and Louisia will soon come home
Soon come home, soon come home.
Jane and Louisia will soon come home
Into your beautiful garden.

My dear will you 'low me to pick a rose
Pick a rose, pick a rose.
My dear will you 'low me to pick a rose
Into your beautiful garden.

My dear will you 'low me to waitz with you,
Waltz with you, waltz with you.
My dear will you 'low me to waitz with you,
Into your beautiful garden.

Two children stand facing a line of children. The children in the line start singing the first chorus while the two children holding hands approach. When they reach the line of children, they separate and go to the ends of the line. They then sing the second chorus, plucking the roses from the children. They pick partners in the third chorus. These partners become the new Jane and Louisia.

Band 2C - THERE'S A BROWN GAL IN THE RING - West Indies

There's a brown girl in the ring. Tra la la la la
There's a brown girl in the ring. Tra la la la la
There's a brown girl in the ring. Tra la la la la
For she look like a sugar and a plum plum plus.

2. Girl come show me your motion.
3. Girl hug and kiss your partner.

This circular game is performed by a mixed group with one child in the center. The words of the song control the movements. "Young girl," "brown boy," etc. are also used.

Band 3A - SISFY IN THE BARN - Trinidad

Sisfy in the barn the barn de lerie
Sisfy in the cupboard the cupboard we'll see,
Oh by and by, I'm the one who
Just step back girl
Don't come near me
Say little Sisfy won't you marry me.

The children are in a circle with "Sisfy in the middle." She chooses a partner on "Oh barn." On "step back," she pushes the partner from her, points her finger and shakes her hip. They reconcile at the end and she leaves her partner (usually a boy) in the middle of the circle to start again.

Band 3B - BO BO BO CALINDA - Trinidad

Lively
Bo Bo Bo Calinda.
Bo Bo Bo Calinda.
Bo Bo Bo Calinda.
What you do my darling.

2. Right hand up. Bo Calinda.
3. Left hand up. Bo Calinda.
4. Both hands up. Bo Calinda.
5. Do si do. Bo Calinda.

This game is played in a circle with the other children imitating the movements indicated by the leader. It is also performed in two lines. On "Come on down," the last couple does a special turn.

Band 4 - I WENT TO A PARTY - West Indies

I went to a party. I went to a fair.
I saw with the curlers in her hair.
Oh twist in baby, twist in baby,
Twist in all the time.
And all the boys and all the girls
Were playing in this line.
Turn to the east, turn to the west,
Turn to the one we love the best.

One child is in the middle of the circle. This child follows the movements indicated by the words. The other children clap in the circle.

Band 5 - COMING DOWN WID A LEMONADE - Trinidad

Coming down wid a lemonade,
Coming down wid a lemonade,
Chi chi chi chi chi chi chi.

The girls stand in a circle. One girl stands in the middle of the circle. On "That girl can't do," she chooses her partner. If the partner cannot imitate her motions, the other girl goes into the middle. This is also danced in a line and seems to be a variant of "Coming down wid a Bunch of Roses."

Band 6-9 Recorded in P.S. 48, Bronx

Band 6 - JUMP SHAMADOR - Jamaica

Good morning to you daughter.
Good morning to you mother.
What is your intention?
I want to be a doctor.
You can't be a doctor.
I must be a doctor.
Well jump shamador my darling.
Jump shamador ny dear.
Jump shamador ny darling.
Jump shamador ny dear.
Jump shamador, jump shamador.
Jump shamador, jump shamador.

The mother walks around the ring picking daughters at random. The child gives the profession. The mother answers, emphasizing her objections by shaking her head and stomping her foot. Each child gets a chance to be "mother."
Band 7 - I LOS MY GLOVE - Trinidad

I los my glove on Saturday night and found it Sunday morning. Drop Peter drop. Boy Peter wouldn't drop. Boy drop drop drop.

The participants are in a ring facing inward with eyes closed. Peter has a glove or some other object. He walks outside the circle. On "Drop Peter drop," Peter drops the glove behind one of the participants. This person must catch Peter before he gets to his place or he will become the new Peter. In one version, the boy whips Peter if he catches him.

This game is also known in Jamaica. However, in this variant, the children pass the glove behind their backs until Peter finds it.

Band 8 - GO IN AND OUT DE WINDOW - Trinidad

Go in and out de window.
(In again) In and out de window.
(In again) See a rose again.

2. Then you stand before your partner.
3. Then you dip before your partner.
4. Then you skip before your partner.
5. Then you wheel and face your partner.

This is in the follow-the-leader genre. The leader goes in and out of the circle in the first chorus, chooses a partner on the second chorus, and thereafter performs the actions indicated by the words. This game is also known in Jamaica and in America. In one variant, two players are used. In another, each new child joins in until all children play.

Band 9 - SALLY GO ROUND THE MOON - Trinidad

Sally go round the moon
Sally go round the sun
Sally go round the chimney top
On a Sunday afternoon whoops

Put your right hand in
Put your right hand out
Shake it a little, a little
And turn yourself about

2. Left hand
3. Right foot
4. Left foot
5. Whole self in

SAN SERENIN

San serenin, a la buena,
Buena vida,
Hacen así, así las lavanderas
Así, así, así,
Así me gusta a mi.

2. San serenin, a la buena
A la buena, buena vida
Hacen así, así las planchadoras
Así, así, así,
Así me gusta a mi.

Translation:
To the good good life,
To the good good life.
This is the way they wash.
This is the way they wash.

To the good good life,
To the good good life.
This is the way they iron.
This is the way they iron.

The girls stand in a circle facing the middle. They clap hands on the first two lines and follow the words on the other two lines.

Band 2 Recorded at I.S. 74 - THE MERECUMBE

El juez le dijo al cura
El cura le dijo al juez.
Que donde esta ese ritmo
Carmen, del merecumbe.
Where shake it morena, shake it.
Shake it morena wo.
Que a donde esta ese ritmo caramba.
Del merecumbe.
Un paso alante y otro paratraves.
Y dando la vuelta y dando la vuelta
Quien se quedara.

Suggested English words:
The judge told the Padre
The Padre told the Judge
Do you know what is the rhythm of the Merucumbe.

Shake it my darling, shake it.
Shake it my darling Wo.
Where is the rhythm, my darling of the Merucumbe.

Step right out to the front.
Step right out to the back.
Then, turn right round and open your eyes.
To see who will be next.

The children stand in a circle facing the middle.
One child is in the middle. On "Shake it morena," the child shakes it and follows the words of the song. At the end she points to her successor.
Band 3

AMBOS A' DO

Ambos a dos matarire rire, rire
Ambos a dos matarire rire, ron.

Que quiere Ud? Matarire rire, rire
Que quiere Ud? Matarire rire, ron.

Yo quiero un paje matarire, rire, rire
Yo quiero un paje matarire, rire, ron.

Que clase de paje? Matarire rire, rire.
Que clase de paje? Matarire rire, ron.

Yo quiero a Norma matorare, rire, rire
Yo quiero a Norma matorare, rire ron.

Que oficio le pondremos? matorare, rire, rire
Que oficio le pondremos? matorare, rire, ron.

Le pondremos cantadora matorare, rire, rire
Le pondremos cantadora matorare, rire ron.

Ella dice que si le gusta matorare, rire, rire
Ella dice que si le gusta matorare, rire, ron.

Celebramos todos juntos matorare, rire, rire
Celebramos todos juntos matorare, rire ron.

Translation:

2. What do you want?
3. I want a page.
4. What type of page?
5. I want Norma.
6. What job will we give her?
7. We will make her a singer.
8. She says she likes it.
9. Let's celebrate all together.

The children stand in two lines facing each other. The leader stands in the middle. She chooses a page who selects an occupation. The lines approach each other and retreat during the chorus.

Band 4A - LA SEÑORITA - Puerto Rico

La Señorita X entrando en el baile
Que lo baile, que lo baile.
Y si no lo baila tendrá un castigo malo.
Pero malo, malo, malo.

Saque usted que lo quiero ver bailar.
Brinca bailando, por los aires
A la mona a la mona monita.

Translation:

La Señorita X is standing in the middle in the middle. She must do what we say or we'll punish her. We'll punish her.

Go and choose a partner from the other side. Now go on dancing through the air and the clouds. Yes the air and the clouds.

Turn her around, leave her alone.

There are two rows. The girl in the middle mashays from side to side. On "choose a partner," she takes one of the boys, dances with him, and leaves him in the middle.

Band 4B

LA CARBONNERITA

Dónde vas carbonnerita?
Dónde vas a hacer carbon?
A la buena, a la buena
A la vina, a la vina, del amor

2. Me dirás si eres casada,
a si tienes un amor.
A la buena, a la buena, a la vina, a la vina, a la vina, del amor.

3. Si eres una nina pobre,
Vamos juntos a la vina, a la vina, a la vina, del amor.

One girl is in the center of the circle. The other children sing the first verse. She answers. During the last verse, she chooses a partner who dances with her.

Band 5 - A-LA-LIMON - Puerto Rico

A-la-limon, a-la-limon
Que se rompio la fuente
A-la-limon, a-la-limon
Mandaria a comprar.
Uri, uri, ura la reina va a pasar.
La reina va a pasar.

2. A-la-limon, a-la-limon
Con que se hace el dinero
A-la-limon, a-la-limon
De cascaren de hueso.

3. A-la-limon, a-la-limon,
Pasan los caballeros.
A-la-limon, a-la-limon
Nosotros pasaremos.

Translation:

To the lemon tree, to the lemon tree,
The fountain is broken.
To the lemon tree, to the lemon tree.
We are going to fix it.

The boys form two lines facing each other. The two lines take turns singing the song and approaching each other.

Band 6 - JOHN CROW

John crow say he can't walk,
He can't walk he can't walk pon Sunday.
Think a lie me tell Kill your mudder cow.
Think a lie me tell Kill your mudder cow.

John crow say he can't walk,
He can't walk he can't walk pon Sunday.

2. John crow say he a righteous person
Can't walk can't walk pon Sunday.

3. John crow say he a rich man pickney
Can't walk can't walk pon Sunday.

John crow is the crow in Jamaica, scavenger of the island. He is also one of the characters of the John Canes dancers at Christmas time.
Band 7 - I COME TO SEE JANIE

I come to see Janie I come to see Janie.
I come to see Janie and how is she now?
She’s washing her clothes, washing her clothes.
She’s washing her clothes and cannot be seen.
Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, goodbye.
Goodbye, goodbye, I’ll come back again.
Mother,
2. She’s starching her clothes.
3. She’s ironing her clothes.
4. She’s sick.
5. She’s gone to the doctor.
6. She’s dead.
7. What shall we bury her in?
8. Red is for the constable. What shall we do?
9. Black is for the mourner. What shall we do?
10. White is for the dummy.
Children,
2. Goodbye etc.
3. Goodbye etc.
4. Goodbye etc.
5. Goodbye etc.
6. Goodbye etc.
7. Bury her in red and that will not do.
8. Bury her in black and that will not do.
9. Bury her in white and that will not do.

This game is performed in a line. Janie may hide nearby or walk behind the mother. The other children stand in a line facing the mother. They approach and retreat on “I’m coming to see Janie.” The mother follows the same motions on her response, “She’s washing her clothes,” etc. All of the children cry on “Jani is dead.” When the mother finishes singing “White is for the dummy,” Janie comes out of hiding and chases the other children until she catches a new Janie.

Band 8A - ZAMMI MAN MAN MAN

Zammi man man. (Oui roi)
Quinbe ti poulet. (Oui roi)
Ti poulet saute. (Oui roi)
Bali la basket. (Oui roi)
Quinbe li pour moin. (Oui roi)
Madam roi bessoin'. (Oui roi)
Pran'1, pran’1, pran’1. (Oui roi)

The children stand in a circle with one child in the middle and another child outside the circle. The child outside the circle tries to touch the “poulet” who is trying to get out. If she catches her, the other child takes her place and a new “poulet” is chosen.

Band 8B - TOI SI DORNE

Toi si bonne, toi si parfaite
Qui nous aime de ton amour
Manan, c’est aujourd’hui ta fête.
Pour tes enfants quel heureux jour.

This song is used to celebrate the mother’s birthday.

Band 8C - PETIT OLISEAU

Petit oiseau viens avec moi
Voir la cage si bien parée,
Les fruits que j’ai cueillis pour moi,
Les fleurs humides de la rose.

English words - Edna Edet
My little bird please come with me
To see the cage I’ve brought for you.
The fruits that I have brought for me,
The roses still wet from the dew.

Band 9 - FEUILLES YO

Feuilles yo!
Sauve la vie moin
Nan mine moin ye, oh!
Pitit moin malade
Moin court caille gangan
Si ou bon gangan
Oua sauve la vie moin,
Nan mine moin ye, oh!

Suggested English words:
Leaves oh!
Listen to my plea
In my misery oh!
For my child is sick
And I’m so afraid.
I ask the Good Lord
For help to save my child
In my misery oh!

The mother prays for her child’s life.

Band 10 - LUNDI MATIN

Lundi matin, le Roi, sa femme et le Petit Prince
Sont venus chez moi pour me merrer la pince.
Comme j’étais pas la, le Petit Prince a dit
Pouvez c’est ainsi nous reviendrons mardi.

Translation:
Monday morning, the King, his wife and the Little Prince
 Came to my house to shake my hands.
Since I was not there, the Little Prince said:
If that is so, we will come back Tuesday.

This song is repeated using all days of the week.
On Sunday morning it ends, "Pouvez c’est ainsi nous reviendrons plus." "If that is so, I will come back here more."

Band 11 - DO DO TITITIT MANMAN’L

Do do tititit manman’l.
Si il pas dodo crab la va mange’l.
Do do tititit manman’l.
Do do tititit manman’l.
Manman il pas la. L’aile la rivière.
Fapa li pas la. L’ail peche poison.
Do do tititit manman’l.
Do do tititit manman’l.
Djab la va mangle tititit manman’l.
Crab la va mangle tititit manman’l.