

Peter Manuel

with Michael Largey



Third Edition

Caribbean Currents

CARIBBEAN MUSIC FROM
RUMBA TO REGGAE

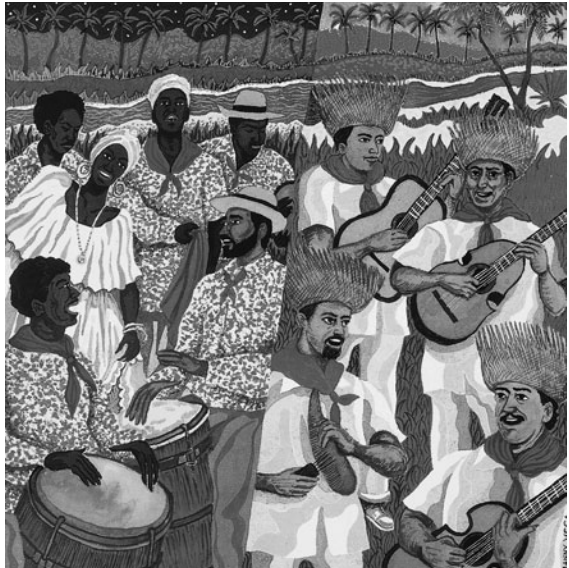
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MUSIC
FROM
RUMBA TO
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Peter Manuel
with Michael Largey

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- To my students

who have always been my best teachers

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Note on the Accompanying Online Videos

WHILE THIS BOOK does not have a dedicated supplementary website, video clips of several of the relevant music genres are available on Peter Manuel's YouTube and Vimeo channels. Although they may not all be of the highest cinematic quality, they represent many of the genres discussed in this book and, in some cases, portray livelier and more spirited performances than might be seen in professionally produced video documentaries. These videos, made by Manuel over the years since the mid-1980s, are posted as follows:

“Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, late 1980s”

<https://youtu.be/xWfpstcTqNk>
and <https://vimeo.com/141268542>

“Bomba in Loíza, 1993”

<https://youtu.be/YsxBTx9NaLU>
and <https://vimeo.com/141268800>

“Fiesta of Santiago Apostol, Loíza, Puerto Rico, 1993”

<https://youtu.be/oXlpO5uT0hI>
and <https://vimeo.com/141267769>

“Carabiné (Dominican folk dance)”

<https://youtu.be/seIaI9oBovY>
and <https://vimeo.com/141267678>

“Sarandunga in La Vereda, Dominican Republic, 2006”

<https://youtu.be/4s-rVrWYjzc>
and <https://vimeo.com/141269775>

“Fiesta of La Señora de la Virgen de Regla, in Baní, Dom. Rep., 2006”

<https://youtu.be/oPt33BsWy6s>
and <https://vimeo.com/141267973>

“Rara group in Santo Domingo”

<https://youtu.be/QnaHRTzy6nI>
and <https://vimeo.com/141267416>

“Parang group, Trinidad”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gduGrw6bzak>
and <https://vimeo.com/141271651>

“Orisha ceremony (Shango), Trinidad, 2010”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6AUzVdNqIo>
and <https://vimeo.com/141271772>

Endnotes reference these videos, providing the URL and the title (e.g., “Bomba in Loíza, 1993”). Generally, the reader can easily locate the video from within YouTube or Vimeo by searching the indicated name. Descriptive information is presented along with the video clips, cohering with and supplementing material in this book. Many additional clips of some (but not all) of these genres can also be found on YouTube.

In Chapter 9, reference is made to my fifty-five-minute video documentary *Tassa Thunder: Folk Music from India to the Caribbean*, which is also posted on YouTube and Vimeo, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jLu0dXWslc> and <https://vimeo.com/89400663>, respectively.

Preface to the Third Edition

THE FIRST EDITION of this book originally arose out of a simple necessity that I encountered in trying to assemble readings for my overflowing Caribbean music classes. The amount of English-language academic literature on Caribbean music is growing, but most of it is, in one way or another, unsuitable for the general reader or for college students. Journalistic articles and websites on the region's pop music also abound, but they are scattered among innumerable sources and represent nearly as many perspectives and topics. Clearly, a need has existed for a readable guide to Caribbean music oriented toward a broad audience.

A more fundamental need, of course, is for greater knowledge of Caribbean music and culture in general, both in the United States and in the Caribbean itself. Caribbean immigrant communities now constitute significant and dynamic segments of North American society, making up, for example, well over a third of the population of New York City and more than half of the population of Miami. Urban neighborhoods throb to the pulse of Caribbean music, and Caribbean stores and products have become familiar and colorful elements of urban America's cosmopolitan landscape. Their impact now extends to hinterland areas such as central Pennsylvania, where a typical diner or pizzeria may offer "*mangu domincono [sic]*"—the Dominican plantain dish *mangú dominicano*. As the U.S. government and economy continue to dominate the Caribbean, the two regions have become more closely intertwined than ever.

This book is oriented toward a few distinct yet overlapping sets of readers. One group includes the music lover who has taken a fancy to some kind

of Caribbean music and wants to know more about the background of that style and about the region's music as a whole. Another set includes the student of Caribbean society or of pan-American society in general, who seeks an introduction to this most dynamic aspect of our hemisphere's culture. Last, but not least, is the set of readers of Caribbean descent, increasing numbers of whom now populate college classes. Many such students love the music of their culture and take pride in their ethnic identity but know woefully little about their musical heritage beyond the current hit parade. Ignorance of other local Caribbean cultures is even more prevalent, inhibiting the formation of pan-regional alliances and contributing to the persistence of rivalries and stereotypes. North American universities are only beginning to rectify this situation. Even in a Caribbean cauldron such as New York City, very few colleges have made an effort to recognize the music cultures of their immigrant populations, whether because of a Euro-American ethnocentric disdain or a lack of qualified teachers and suitable course materials.

Caribbean Currents has attempted to address this need, by providing a readable and informative overview of Caribbean music for the student and general reader. Although this book contains much new information, especially on recent developments that are only beginning to be documented in print, it does not pretend to be an original scholarly monograph. Similarly, it does not attempt to be a comprehensive reference book on Caribbean music, which would demand a volume several times the size of this one. Instead, it is, by choice, a book with a circumscribed scope. For one thing, I have adopted a relatively narrow conception of the "Caribbean Basin," excluding, for example, the musics of coastal Venezuela, Central America, and Mexico, however interesting they may be. Further, even within such limits, instead of attempting to include all possible genres and subcategories, I have endeavored to highlight the most important and representative aspects of each music culture rather than attempting to include all possible genres and subcategories. As a result, a considerable range of subjects, from Cuban *changüí* to Jamaican *benta* music, is not fully covered herein. To the Cubanophile interested in her island's *arará* drumming, for example, I offer my apologies—and a set of recommended readings. But, as the title promises, rumba and reggae, among many other genres, are definitely present, and they are given much more thorough treatment than would be possible in a sketchy survey that attempted to touch on every category.

Production of a third edition of this book seemed appropriate for several reasons. The first edition, printed in 1995, clearly served its purpose, as it sold well among both college students and lay readers and received the Annual Best Book Prize from the Caribbean Studies Association. However, the

decade after 1995 saw a number of significant developments in Caribbean music, from the flowering of reggaeton and timba to the mainstreaming of Dominican bachata, not to mention the emergence of an entire new generation of performers. The sheer volume of accessible information on Caribbean music also increased dramatically, both on the Internet and in publications by Gage Averill, Robin Moore, Norman Stolzoff, Ned Sublette, Chris Washburne, and others. The second edition, produced in 2006, reflected many of these developments and contained various revisions and additions. Among these were some charcoal renderings of photos, drawn by me and intended less to highlight my artistic talent, which is in any case unimpressive, than to avoid copyright complications.

Given the rapidity with which Caribbean music evolves and new information about it appears, the 2006 edition, too, found itself in need of updating. To that end, I am pleased to be able to present this third edition, for which Michael Largey wrote Chapter 6 and I wrote (and take sole responsibility for) the remainder. This new edition incorporates much information from recent publications, such as those by Geoffrey Baker, Donna Hope, Sydney Hutchinson, and Robin Moore, as well as from the vast amount of material on the Internet. More importantly, it covers significant recent developments, including the ongoing reggaeton and bachata boom, the expansion of music videos, the impact of the Internet, the restructuring of the music industry, and the ongoing colorful perversities of the Jamaican dancehall scene. It also discusses dance styles in much greater depth than the earlier editions. In general, it is also laden with miscellaneous new material and reworkings of the old, reflecting my ongoing education in the field.

In writing this edition I have drawn heavily from the earlier work of such writers as Leonardo Acosta, Alejo Carpentier, Juan Flores, Donald Hill, Argeliers León, Gordon Lewis, Fernando Ortiz, John Storm Roberts, and Gordon Rohlehr, and—among the more current generations of writers (in addition to those mentioned above)—Paul Austerlitz, Hal Barton, Orlando Fiol, David Garcia, Frank Korom, Benjamin Lapidus, Deborah Pacini, Stephen Steumpfle, and Amanda Villepastour, to name but a few. Particularly useful and inspiring in writing the Jamaica chapter was the monumental work of Kenneth Bilby, who contributed to the earlier editions of this book. Journal articles by Enrique Fernandez, Daisane McClaine, Gene Scaramuzzo, and others have also been helpful, and I am indebted to these authors not only for the information they provided but also for more than one felicitous turn of phrase that I have borrowed.

More specific thanks are due to the many individuals and institutions that have assisted me in completing this volume. Delfín Pérez and Chris

Washburne were invaluable Latin music gurus. Regarding the researching of Indo-Caribbean music, I must mention Narsaloo Ramaya, Ajeet Praimsingh, Kries Ramkhelawan, Rudy Sasenarine, Moean Mohammad, Mukesh Rago, and Mungal Patesar. I have also been fortunate to have at hand another set of excellent informants in the more than one thousand Caribbean students who have taken my classes at John Jay College and who have been of invaluable help in keeping me in touch with current developments and in providing their perspectives on music. I have also learned much from my current and former students at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, especially Manuela Arciniegas, Ryan Bazinet, Javier Diaz, Johnny Frias, Stephanie Jackson, Angelina Tallaj, Janice Mahinka, and others already mentioned.

For their help in collecting photographs for the volume, thanks are due to John Amira, the Ethnic Folk Arts Center, Sydney Hutchinson, Sandra Levinson of the Center for Cuban Studies, Chantal Regnault, Roberta Singer of City Lore, and Lois Wilcken. Donald Hill guided me through the treacherous world of copyright permissions. I also thank Sophia Manuel for trying to teach me how to draw with charcoal, Liliana for keeping me up on current developments in the club scene, and Beth for letting me neglect domestic duties to undertake Caribbean research trips (which mostly consisted of various sorts of “liming”). On behalf of Michael Largey, gratitude is also extended to Gage Averill, Lolo Beaubrun, Allison Berg, Dominique Cyrille, Laura Donnelly, Julian Gerstin, and Jocelyne Guilbault. Finally, I thank Susan Deeks and Joan Vidal for the fine copyediting.

The Caribbean at a Glance

*(Country, Capital, Estimated
2015 Country Population)*

The Dutch Caribbean

(formerly the Netherlands Caribbean)

Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, St. Eustatius, St. Maarten: pop.
315,000

The English-Speaking Caribbean

Anguilla (United Kingdom): The Valley; pop. 13,500

Antigua and Barbuda: St. John; pop. 68,320

Bahamas: Nassau; pop. 322,000

Barbados: Bridgetown; pop. 278,000

British Virgin Islands (United Kingdom): Road Town; pop. 28,000

Cayman Islands: George Town; pop. 57,000

Dominica: Roseau; pop. 72,000 (English and French Creole spoken)

Grenada: St. George; pop. 110,000

Guyana: Georgetown; pop. 735,000 (30 percent African, 47 percent East
Indian, 9 percent Amerindian, 14 percent mixed)

Jamaica: Kingston; pop. 2,980,000

Montserrat (United Kingdom): pop. 4,900

St. Kitts–Nevis: Basseterre; pop. 46,000

St. Lucia: Castries; pop. 174,000 (English and French Creole spoken)

St. Vincent and the Grenadines: Kingstown; pop. 103,000



Caribbean. (Map by the Center for Cartographic Research and Spatial Analysis, Michigan State University.)

Atlantic Ocean



Trinidad and Tobago: Port of Spain; pop. 1,224,000 (34 percent Afro-Trinidadian, 35 percent Indo-Trinidadian, 23 percent mixed, 8 percent other)

Turks and Caicos Islands (United Kingdom): Grand Turk; pop. 32,000

U.S. Virgin Islands (St. Croix, St. John, St. Thomas): Charlotte Amalie; pop. 107,000

The French Caribbean

Guadeloupe (France): Basse-Terre; pop. 404,000

Haiti: Port-au-Prince; pop. 10,000,000

Martinique (France): Fort-de-France; pop. 386,000

The Spanish Caribbean

Cuba: Havana; pop. 11,210,000

Dominican Republic: Santo Domingo; pop. 9,500,000

Puerto Rico (United States): San Juan; pop. 3,548,000

Caribbean Currents

Introduction

The Caribbean Crucible

THE GLOBAL IMPACT of Caribbean music constitutes something of an enigma in world culture. How could music styles of such global popularity and influence be fashioned by a population that makes up well under 1 percent of the world's peoples, scattered in an archipelago, and quite lacking in economic and political power? How is it that reggae, emanating from small and impoverished Jamaica, can resound and be actively cultivated everywhere from Hawaii to Malawi? Why should it be Cuba that produces the style that comes to dominate much of African urban music in the mid-twentieth century? Or, to go further back in time, what made the Caribbean Basin so dynamic that its Afro-Latin music and dance forms such as the *sarabanda* and *chacóna* could take Spain by storm in the decades around 1600 and go on to enliven Baroque music and dance in Western Europe?

This book may not definitively answer these questions, although a few hypotheses are indeed suggested. On a metaphorical level, the Caribbean has been likened to a fuse that connects the Old Worlds—Europe and especially Africa—to the New World, and with so much energy and intensity passing through it, that fuse gets very, very hot, with a heat that generates music of extraordinary expressivity. Perhaps somewhat more tangibly, the Caribbean, like certain other parts of the New World, constituted a site where those two dynamic Old World music cultures met and interacted in ways that were unique to that region and its sociohistorical conditions. Much of the richness of these original music cultures was lost in crossing the Atlantic, but much was retained. In the crucible of the Caribbean—with its particular

combination of white political power and black demographic power, and of insular isolation and maritime cross-fertilization—these musical elements simmered, effervesced, and eventually bubbled over, enriching the world around with the unique vitality of the mambo and the merengue.

There are other senses in which Caribbean vernacular musics evolved as quintessentially suited to modernity and global appeal. Some have argued that the cultural encounter enabled African-derived musics to replenish the warm sensuality that centuries of Christianity had repressed in Europe, making Caribbean and Afro-American musics ideally suited to a distinctively *modern* aesthetic and social worldview at last liberated from such inhibitions. Other scholars, as I suggest later, have contended that the uniquely modern and expressive power of Caribbean musics has derived from their inherently innovative, open, and creole nature, as the product of people at once liberated from Old World traditions but able to draw on them, and having a heightened self-consciousness as being part of mainstream Western culture and, at the same time, on its margins.

Some of the vitality of Caribbean music seems to derive from its importance within Caribbean society and the sheer amount of attention and creative energy it commands. Caribbeans are well aware of the international prominence of their music, and they accord it a preeminent symbolic status at home. It is not merely that in Cuba a reggaeton singer can earn thousands of dollars a month while a doctor earns only \$20, or that legions of young Jamaican men dream of being dancehall deejays, with a Benz, a gold chain, and a “truckload of girls.” Jamaicans are well aware that artists like Bob Marley and Vybz Kartel are famous throughout much of the world—certainly more so than their political leaders. We can also well imagine the incommensurate renown enjoyed by Kevin Little in St. Vincent (population 100,000), or by Rihanna in Barbados when they generate mega-hits such as “Turn Me On” and “Diamonds,” respectively—with the latter approaching a billion hits on YouTube. Likewise, in Trinidad calypso not only spreads news; it *is* the news, with politicians, journalists, and other public figures endlessly debating and denouncing the latest songs. Indeed, when Muslim militant thug Abu Bakr attempted to seize power in a 1990 coup, one of his first (and last) acts was to set up an all-calypso radio station. Music, in a word, is the most visible, popular, and dynamic aspect of Caribbean expressive culture.

As styles like reggae and Cuban dance music achieve international popularity, they become part of the world’s cultural history, as well as that of the Caribbean. Ultimately, Caribbean music can scarcely be compartmentalized as a local, regional entity when some 6 million people of Caribbean descent populate the cities of North America and Great Britain, and when the world

is united as never before by the mass media and international capital. In a global village where Sri Lankan schoolboys sing Bob Marley tunes, Hawaiian cowboys sing Puerto Rican *aguinaldos*, Congolese bands play mambos, and reggaeton hits routinely garner hundreds of millions of YouTube views, Caribbean music has truly become world music and, in its own way, world history, as well.

The Amerindian Heritage

The prehistory of Caribbean music begins with the culture of the region's first inhabitants, the Amerindians, whose fifteenth-century population historians have estimated, not very helpfully, at somewhere between 250,000 and 6 million. The currently favored guess is about half a million, with the largest concentration on the island now called Hispaniola. The Ciboneys of Cuba had been in the region the longest but became outnumbered by other groups, especially the more advanced Taino Arawaks and, in the Lesser Antilles, the supposedly warlike Caribs. Because of the presence of these Indians, it may be better to speak not of a "discovery" of the region by Europeans but of the encounter of two cultures, although the actual period of intense cultural interaction lasted little more than a century, by which time most Indians had perished. Nevertheless, any historical account of Caribbean music and culture must commence with the practices of the Amerindians, as described by the Spanish.

Indigenous Caribbean music centered on a socioreligious ceremony sometimes called *areito*, in which as many as a thousand participants danced in concentric circles around a group of musicians. The musicians sang mythological chants in call-and-response style, playing rattles (later called *maracas*), gourd scrapers (*güiros*), and slit drums called *mayohuacán*. The slit drums were hollowed logs with H-shaped tongues cut into them. Although most scholars think the Indians of the Caribbean originally came from what is now Venezuela, the use of slit drums suggests some affinity with Aztecs and other Mexican Indian groups, who played similar instruments called *teponaztli*.

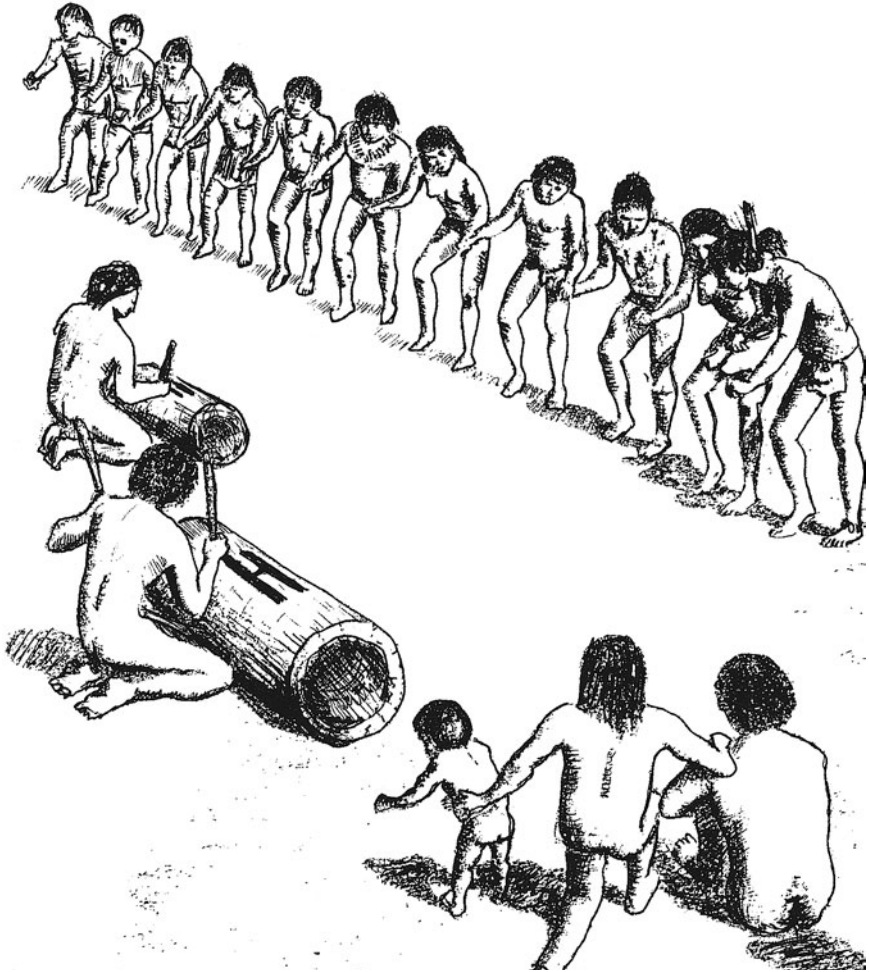
The Spaniards, far from bringing progress and civilization to their Caribbean subjects, enslaved and effectively exterminated them. The Indians were forced to work in mines while Spanish pigs ran wild and overran their crops. Those who did not perish from starvation, disease, or forced labor were killed outright or committed mass suicide. Christopher Columbus himself set the tenor, presiding over the death of a third of the population of Hispaniola during his sixteen-month governorship (1496–97). By 1600,

the Caribbean Indian populations had dwindled into isolated communities. DNA tests have revealed that large percentages of Dominicans and Puerto Ricans have partial Amerindian ancestry, but Native American culture and music have largely passed into oblivion. Today Amerindians and their language survive in only a few villages in Dominica and, more substantially, in the form of the African-intermixed “Black Caribs,” or Garifuna, of Honduras and Belize, whence they were exiled from St. Vincent by the British. To fill the need for labor, the colonists had to turn to slaves from Africa; as Trinidad’s Prime Minister Eric Williams put it, the Europeans used Negroes they stole from Africa to work the land they stole from the Indians.

To a certain extent, early colonial-era culture emerged as a mixture of European, African, and Amerindian traditions. The still popular Cuban cult of the *Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre*, for instance, mixes elements of the worship of the Taino god Atabey, the Yoruba deity Oshún, and the European Virgin of Illescas. On the whole, however, little remains of Indian culture except for place names, foods, and words like “hammock,” “manatee,” “yucca,” “hurricane,” and “tobacco”—the last surviving as the Indians’ parting gift (or retributive curse) to the world. But while Indian culture and music are largely lost, the Indian past has continued to be invoked as a

Taino dancers in Hispaniola, as portrayed by the seventeenth-century artist R. P. Labat.





Taino dancers as imagined, perhaps more accurately, by a modern artist.

(Adapted by Peter Manuel from O. J. Cardoso and M. García, *Los Indocubanos* [Havana: Editorial Gente Nueva, 1982].)

symbol for various purposes. Still celebrated in Cuba are the names of the Arawak princess Anacaona and the chieftain Hatuey for their valiant struggle against the Spaniards. Puerto Ricans still use the Taino name for their island, Borikén, as a symbol of independence, which lives on as a memory and a goal.

In other contexts, a mythical Indian heritage has often been asserted as a way to deny the reality of the region's African heritage. Thus, obscurantist folklorists such as Cuba's Eduardo Sánchez de Fuentes have tried to

argue—in a musical equivalent of the flat earth theory—that his country’s music derived mostly from an admixture of Hispanic elements with those of the Tainos, rather than of the Yorubas and Bantus. Even some blacks and mulattos have tried to deny their own ancestry, perhaps claiming to be “dark-skinned Indians” (*indios oscuros*, in Dominican parlance). But since the Amerindian heritage has played little role in post-Columbian music, we must look elsewhere for the roots of most Caribbean music—specifically, in the musical cultures of Europe and Africa.

The African Heritage

The Caribbean is host to a variety of ethnic groups, including East Indians, Chinese, Syrians, and Caucasian Europeans. However, throughout the region, descendants of the 4 or 5 million enslaved Africans brought by the colonists are a common denominator. In islands such as Haiti, they constitute nearly the entire population, while even in the more Caucasian Puerto Rico, black communities have exerted a musical influence quite incommensurate with their demographic size. Moreover, just as Afro-American musics and their derivatives, such as rock, came to pervade world culture in the twentieth century, so have the African-derived elements in Caribbean music provided much of what has distinguished it and made it internationally famous.

Afro-Caribbeans, like Caribbean people as a whole, have traditionally been divided not only by insular geography but also by language and the political fragmentation of colonialism. At the same time, however, they have shared the general experiences of slavery, the cultural uprooting it entailed, and the direct roles of creating a set of new, creolized cultures. For the past two centuries, scholars (and pseudo-scholars) have argued about the degree to which black communities in the Caribbean and the United States have been able to retain elements of their traditional African cultural roots. A traditional white view had been that Africa had little particular culture to begin with, and that the slaves had lost touch with that, as well. Anthropologist Melville Herskovits challenged this conception in *The Myth of the Negro Past* (1941), and in his wake scholars have devoted many volumes to documenting the existence of African-derived elements in modern Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean cultures. Such writing has also criticized the tendency to regard slaves as passive victims of circumstance, instead stressing the ways in which slaves and free blacks fashioned their own culture—“the world the slaves made,” as the subtitle reads in Eugene Genovese’s brilliant *Roll, Jordan,*

Roll (1974). In recent decades, scholars have continued to learn more about the persistence of cultural and, especially, musical traits from Africa in the Caribbean, even as the slavery period becomes more remote. Further, within the Caribbean itself, the degree to which diverse black communities were able to retain African traditions has varied considerably from place to place.

Regional variation notwithstanding, there are many specific features of Caribbean music that can be traced directly to Africa. Such correlations are particularly evident in religious musics, which throughout the world tend to be more conservative than secular musics and to preserve archaic features. Thus, in music associated with Afro-Caribbean religions like Cuban Santería and Trinidad Orisha worship, one finds song texts in West African languages and several actual songs that are still sung in Africa. Some music traditions can be regarded as “neo-African” in the sense that they reflect little Euro-American influence, although they may have changed and evolved in the Caribbean in ways that make them different from anything in Africa. Much research remains to be done in tracing the direct music correlations between Africa and the Caribbean, and the links are increasingly obscured as traditions die out or change on both sides of the Atlantic. In particular, in Africa both Christianity—whether imposed by European colonial rulers or by modern evangelists—and fundamentalist Islam have eroded many of the local religious practices and associated musics that in the colonial period provided the sources for New World entities such as Santería.

Some of the most conspicuous sorts of Africanisms evident in Caribbean music consist more of general principles than specific elements. Slave communities usually combined people from different African regions and ethnic groups, whose musical traditions tended to blend accordingly. Interaction with European musics further diluted the original African practices, as did the decline of input from Africa after the slave trade stopped. Moreover, Afro-Caribbean musicians have always applied their own creativity to their art, so that the music has tended to take on its own life, departing from its original, transplanted forms. Given these conditions and the diversity of sub-Saharan music itself, it is often better to speak of general than of particular elements of African music that survived the infamous Middle Passage and the cultural repression of the slave period.

During the colonial era, as now, sub-Saharan Africa was home to hundreds of ethnic groups with different languages and social structures, ranging from simple hunter-gatherer Pygmy clans to more elaborate societies like the Yoruba, with substantial towns, trade networks, and specialized occupation groups. Although African music is similarly diverse, it is possible

to speak of a set of general features that are common throughout most of the continent (excluding the culturally Arab and Berber north) and that continue to pervade Afro-Caribbean and Afro-American musics.

One sociomusical characteristic of much African music is *collective participation*, a feature typical of many classless societies that lack occupational distinctions between performers and consumers. Soloists and specialists do play roles in Africa, but it is extremely common for all or most members of a rural community to participate actively in musical events, whether by singing, clapping, dancing, or playing instruments. This convention accompanies a conception of musical talent as something innate, albeit in different degrees, in everyone, rather than being the property only of specialists. Likewise, collective participation, starting as early as the baby bound to its dancing mother's back (or, for that matter, sloshing about in her womb), tends to promote the cultivation and development of musical talent to a greater degree than in more stratified societies. The persistence of communal music making in the New World has naturally been dependent on social structure as a whole, but it has been perpetuated by the fact that most Afro-Caribbeans have tended to occupy the same social classes—that is, the lower ones.

In the realm of more distinctly musical features, the most often noted feature of African music is its *emphasis on rhythm*. African music is rich in melody, timbral variety, and even two- and three-part harmony, but rhythm is often the most important aesthetic parameter, distinguishing songs and genres and commanding the focus of the performers' and listeners' attention. Accordingly, the rhythms of African and Afro-Caribbean traditional music are often formidably complex in ways that lack counterparts in Western folk or common-practice classical music. Much of the rhythmic interest and complexity derives from the interaction of regular pulses (whether silent or audible) and offbeat accents. This feature is often described as “syncopation,” but that term is vague and problematic, as is, indeed, the notion of a single, regular pulse in the multiple, distinct layers of much African ensemble music.

When two or more regular pulse patterns are combined, the result is what musicologists call polyrhythm or polymeter, which is a common kind of West and Central African rhythmic organization. Polyrhythm is most characteristically performed by an ensemble, in which a “cell” consisting of twelve beats is divided by different instrumental patterns into groups of twos and threes (a division not so possible with the four- or eight-beat meters that pervade most contemporary North American and Caribbean pop music). Often a “time line” played on an iron bell provides a referential pattern.

Playing a Polyrhythm

The schematic example in Musical Example 1 shows a simplified polyrhythm, using the so-called standard time line, that is common throughout West and Central Africa, as well as in neo-African religious musics in Cuba, Haiti, and Brazil. For those who do not read Western notation, the equivalents are given both in staff and in what is called TUBS (time-unit boxes) notation, in which each box represents a regular pulse unit (of which there are twelve, in this case). You can try tapping twelve regular beats with your left hand and tapping the time line with your right, repeating the pattern without pause. The next step is to add the subsidiary parts, one of which divides the twelve beats into groups of twos and the other into groups of threes. Once you get the feel of the time line, try tapping that with one hand and tapping the twos with the other. (This can be challenging for musicians as well as for nonmusicians.) Then try combining the time line with the threes (which is even harder for most people). We do not yet have a polyrhythm. But if you get a friend to help out, you can put together the time line, the twos, and the threes, and the result is a polyrhythm, in which duple and triple pulses, or meters, are combined with the time line. In a typical West African or similar Afro-Caribbean ensemble, the accompanying drum parts would be more interesting than simple reiterations of two- or three-beat pulses. For example, in the Ghanaian *agbadza* rhythm, which uses the standard timeline, the *kidi* drum establishes the duple pulse with the following rhythm, alternating muted (“x”) with open (“X”) strokes: xXXXxxxXXXxx. A few more distinct, interlocking accompanying parts—played on drums and shakers—complete the composite *agbadza* rhythm, which would then be supplemented by singing and dancing. The dancing itself might stress either the duple or the triple pulse, or in some cases, one’s feet are moving to one pulse and one’s shoulders to the other. The result is uniquely expressive and rewarding for listeners and performers. From the aesthetic point of view, the individual polyrhythmic cell is interesting enough that one does not mind hearing it repeated again and again, especially when combined with a varying vocal part or with improvisation by a master drummer.

The image shows three musical staves and three rows of TUBS notation. The top three staves are in 12/8 time. The first staff, 'Bell (time-line)', has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat, with a 12/8 time signature. It contains a sequence of notes: quarter, quarter, eighth, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, eighth, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter. The second staff, 'Drum A (two's)', has a treble clef and a 12/8 time signature, with notes every two beats. The third staff, 'Drum B (three's)', has a treble clef and a 12/8 time signature, with notes every three beats. Below the staves are three rows of TUBS notation, each consisting of 12 boxes. The first row, 'Bell (time-line)', has dots in boxes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12. The second row, 'Drum A (two's)', has dots in boxes 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11. The third row, 'Drum B (three's)', has dots in boxes 1, 4, 7, 10.

Musical Example 1: A basic polyrhythm.

Another widespread feature of African music is vocal *call and response*, which is well suited to communal performance in general. It is also found in many types of Afro-Caribbean music. A related characteristic is the technique of building a piece on *repetition*, especially of a short musical cell, or ostinato. Variety can be provided by altering the pattern or by combining it with another feature, such as a narrative text, responsorial singing, or a drum solo. This way of structuring pieces pervades Afro-American as well as Afro-Caribbean music, including countless rock, R&B, and rap songs based on a repeated riff, especially in the accompaniment parts. Pieces using this format are open-ended, additive entities, loosely expandable or compressible in accordance with the desires of the performers, the audience, or the occasion. This sort of structure contrasts with that of most European-derived music—from sonatas to Frank Sinatra ballads—in which a song or piece has a finite, symmetrical structure, such as the thirty-two-bar AABA form typical of American popular song.

The legacy of African dance in the Caribbean has been almost as strong as that of music. As with music, it is difficult to generalize about dance styles in regions as diverse as West and Central Africa, and even comparable neo-African dances in the Caribbean, such as Puerto Rican bomba and Cuban rumba, seem to have relatively little in common in terms of specific moves. Moreover, as with music, there is practically no documentation of African dancing during the slavery period, and caution must be exercised in attempting to speculate about African dance of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by looking at current traditional dances in that continent.

Nevertheless, certain safe assumptions can be made about the African choreographic practices that the slaves brought to the Caribbean. An initial feature is the sheer popularity and centrality of dancing in traditional African cultures, in contrast to much of colonial-era Europe, where dancing was denounced by the church as immoral. Another conspicuous feature of African traditional dance is the general absence of couple dancing. Dance events in traditional African contexts have emphasized community solidarity rather than individuals or couples; hence, they typically have been structured as collective line dances, circle dances, or formats in which individuals take turns dancing in front of drummers as others stand around them and sing—a common format that has persisted in Afro-Caribbean dances like rumba, bomba, and *gwoka*. Much traditional African dancing has also featured hip movement, which, according to one theory, represented a celebration of fertility and sensuality appropriate to a perilous and pestilential environment marked by high infant mortality. However, Africans and their Caribbean descendants had their own notions of what constituted

indecent, and while Europeans tended to regard neo-African dancing as lewd, several accounts attest to Afro-Caribbeans regarding as vulgar the European custom of couple dancing while touching.

Patterns of Musical Retention

The sort of classic polyrhythm shown in Musical Example 1, although common in Afro-Cuban and Haitian religious music, is unusual in most Caribbean creole and popular music forms. These generally use simpler, duple-metered rhythms, although they are often animated by syncopations and cross-rhythms influenced, however indirectly, by older polyrhythmic forms. The degree to which neo-African traits like polyrhythms are retained in contemporary musics depends on various factors and raises broad questions about the relative ability and desire of Afro-Caribbean communities in different regions to maintain cultural autonomy over the generations. Why, for example, are polyrhythms and neo-African musics so common in Haiti, with its population of only 10 million, when such features have long since disappeared from the music of the much larger Afro-American population of the United States, which now numbers more than 40 million? Why are such musics so strong in Cuba, with its large white population, and far less common in overwhelmingly black Jamaica? Why do we find certain African-derived features in one part of the Caribbean and other features elsewhere?

Many factors are involved in answering such questions, which have engaged the interest of scholars for decades. We can start with the last question, which in some respects is the simplest. Although most slave communities combined people of diverse ethnic origins, in certain regions slaves from one distinct area of Africa predominated. For example, in the early 1800s, the collapse of the great Yoruba (Oyo) kingdom led to that people's subjugation by the Dahomey and other rival groups, who sold many Yoruba as slaves to the Europeans. The British, however, had withdrawn from the slave trade by this time; as a result, the tens of thousands of captured Yoruba went primarily to Iberian-ruled Cuba and Brazil, whose imports continued through the 1860s. Accordingly, Yoruba-derived music and religion are much more prominent in those countries than in the former British colonies or in Haiti, whose slave imports ended with the Haitian Revolution in the 1790s. In this same way, the cultural heritages of Akan and Congolese slaves, from the Gold Coast and Central Africa, respectively, are more influential in Jamaica.

A more problematic issue is whether the different policies and attitudes of individual colonial powers allowed for different degrees of African cultural retention. This question overlaps with a hypothesis, first argued in the

1940s by historian Frank Tannenbaum, that slavery in the Roman Catholic colonies—especially those of Spain and Portugal—was milder than in the British and Dutch colonies. This “Tannenbaum thesis” has been rehashed and re-bashed by subsequent scholars. Critics have pointed out that there are several criteria by which the severity of slavery should be measured. In terms of diet, longevity, and reproduction rates, for example, the North American slaves seem to have fared considerably better than Caribbean and Brazilian ones. In other respects, however, practices and attitudes in the Iberian and, to some extent, the French colonies may have favored greater degrees of cultural autonomy for blacks. For one thing, it was much easier for slaves in Spanish colonies to buy their own freedom (in a practice called manumission) than it was in North America, and slave owners were much more likely to free their mulatto children. By the early 1800s, the large communities of free blacks in Cuba and elsewhere were able to form socioreligious clubs (*cabildos*) and maintain considerable cultural independence, including traditional musical practices.

Of greater relevance to the study of music than matters of diet and the like is the argument that the Iberian and French colonists may have been culturally more tolerant of neo-African practices than were the northern European slave owners. Counter-Reformation Iberian Catholicism, with its elements of saint worship, ritual, and folk beliefs, blended more easily with African religions than did Enlightenment-oriented and inflexible Protestantism. The early Spanish and Portuguese colonists, unlike the bourgeois, more economically advanced English, were in some ways premodern, pre-capitalist peoples who, however racist in their own way, seem to have recognized Africans as human beings with their own culture. Unlike the inbred, blue-eyed, ethnically isolated English, the olive-complected southern Europeans had a certain Mediterranean cosmopolitan nature bred from centuries of contact with diverse Arabs, Jews, Gypsies, and Africans—according to this hypothesis.¹

Such arguments might partially explain, for instance, why in the United States neo-African drumming was effectively outlawed everywhere except in New Orleans, where, because of the city’s distinctively French Caribbean cultural orientation, it was tolerated until 1845. This thesis might also help explain why neo-African music and religion are so widespread in Cuba and so marginal in the British Caribbean, and why most Protestant missionaries in Haiti today, unlike local Catholic priests, demand that their congregations abandon all their traditional, African-influenced musical practices.

However, there are other factors that may better explain the different degrees of African retentions in the New World. One of these concerns the

difference between plantation colonies like Jamaica, whose pre-emancipation populations consisted primarily of slaves, and settler colonies like Cuba, which had a more diverse balance of whites, free blacks and mulattos, and slaves. In Jamaica, slaves, who constituted about 90 percent of the population in 1800, were subject to rigid cultural repression and could exert little cultural influence on local whites. In contrast, sugar plantations came relatively late to Cuba and had to adapt themselves to the already well formed and more lenient creole culture with its substantial free black population (20 percent in 1774). The communities of free Afro-Cubans played important roles in preserving neo-African culture, including musical practices based in the *cabildos*. *Santería*, for example, derives less from the assorted African traditions that managed to survive in rural plantations than from the formalized practices that coalesced in the *cabildos* of Havana and Matanzas in the late 1800s.

Perhaps the most important factor involved in the different degrees of African retentions is the time that has elapsed in the various areas of the Caribbean since the end of slave imports. In the British colonies, importation of slaves ended in 1807, and by the 1870s, there were very few African-born slaves in the United States. Hence, it was natural for neo-African practices in British colonial areas to weaken during the subsequent long period of isolation from Africa. Cuba, by contrast, continued to receive slaves—and fresh infusions of African culture—as late as 1873 (and even after that, a handful of freed blacks were able to visit their West African homelands and return to Cuba with artifacts and replenished knowledge). Most Cuban blacks are descendants of slaves brought in the 1800s, and quite a few know the specific ethnic ancestry of some of their forebears. Similarly, the only neo-African religion in Trinidad, Shango, or Orisha worship, survives as the legacy not of the slave period but of Yoruba indentured servants who arrived in the mid-1800s. (Haitian slave imports also ended early, in the 1790s, but at the time of the Haitian Revolution most slaves were African-born, and the subsequent absence of Europeans allowed neo-African culture to flourish unimpeded.) Thus, the cultural attitudes of the colonists, although not insignificant, were only one among many factors influencing the nature and degree of African retentions in the New World.

The European Heritage

The other primary ingredient in the formation of Caribbean music consists of the diverse forms of music introduced by the European colonists—primarily the Spanish, British, and French. These forms included not only the

well-documented classical music of the era but also, more importantly, the various folk and popular songs and dances of contemporary Europe. Thus, more influential than the rarefied music of Bach and Beethoven were the sailors' chanteys, church hymns, military marches, and, especially, social dances like the quadrille and contradance. The contradance (country dance, *contredanse*, *contradanza*), after originating in England in the 1600s, came to be energetically cultivated throughout Europe by both elites and the emerging bourgeoisie, replacing open-couple dances like the dainty minuet and the once scandalous *zarabanda*. Along with the related quadrille and other "set" (i.e., suite) dances, it was exported to the Caribbean in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, where it spawned all manner of local incarnations.

In terms of choreography, the contradance variants were initially line dances, with men and women arrayed in "longways" format, as in a Virginia-reel square dance. As this format blended easily with compatible African dance traditions, Caribbean contradance incarnations came to be accompanied by a wide variety of music styles, from the thunderous neo-African drumming of Haitian-Cuban *tumba francesa* to folksy West Indian reels played by ad hoc ensembles of fiddles, banjos, and fifes. In the mid-nineteenth century, ballroom-style couple dancing gradually became popular, following the trend established by the waltz in Europe. As performed over the generations by Caribbeans of diverse races, the accompanying music styles eventually became creolized and came to incorporate typical syncopations and other distinctly local features, whether in the bouncy Cuban *danzón* or the elegant, Chopinesque piano pieces of Puerto Rican composer Manuel Tavárez.

Several of these European musical genres shared some of the aforementioned features associated with African music. Indeed, scholars have commented on the considerable degree of compatibility between African and European musics. Two- and three-part vocal harmony occurs in African as well as in European traditional music, while Protestant hymns used call-and-response "lining out" compatible with African practices. The French and Spanish, like many African communities, also had traditions of seasonal carnivals with festive music. Further, most European folk musics, like African music, consisted of orally transmitted traditions rather than written ones. Perhaps as a result of such precedents, oral poetry—especially as sung—has long played a much more prominent role in Caribbean culture than in more "developed" countries like the United States, where poetry is cultivated by only college English majors and a few literati. Caribbean people still take great interest in amateur versification, whether in the form of calypso, Jamaican dancehall, or Spanish *décimas*. Indeed, Caribbean popular

culture in general is primarily oral rather than written. For that matter, the same can be said of Caribbean politics, with its prominence of gifted orators, from Eric Williams to Fidel Castro.

The nature and extent of European influence have varied in accordance with several factors, some of which have already been mentioned—for example, the distinction between culturally repressive plantation colonies, where large slave populations were managed by handfuls of white entrepreneurs, and settler colonies, which attracted substantial numbers of European immigrants. In the settler category, with some qualifications, would fall Cuba and Puerto Rico, which received hundreds of thousands of European immigrants. These settlers (primarily but not only Spanish) brought a rich spectrum of European musics with them and, over the generations, played crucial roles in developing distinctive creole cultures in their new homelands. The British colonies, in contrast, attracted relatively few settlers. Most of those who came were what historian Gordon Lewis pithily described as “scum”—that is, social derelicts and mountebanks out to make a quick killing in the tropics. For their part, the British upper-class owners and managers were generally absentees who came for limited periods, remaining attached to England, where they invested their earnings and sent their children to be educated. The contrast between the two sorts of colonies could be seen in their cities: Colonial Havana was an opulent and beautiful metropolis with fine cathedrals, mansions, and promenades, whereas the British Caribbean ports consisted of dreary warehouses surrounded by shantytowns, with a few bleak barns passing as the “great houses” of the rich. Similarly, because the British colonial elites made little attempt to develop their own art forms, it may be said that the musical heritages transmitted by the Spanish to Cuba and Puerto Rico were considerably richer than whatever the British bequeathed to their colonies.

In general, the European heritage brought to the Caribbean included instruments, chordal harmony, sectional formal structures (rather than the reliance on cellular ostinatos), concepts of ensemble orchestration and arrangement, the practice of notating music, and a vast repertoire of written and orally transmitted music. New World Africans, while retaining many types of African drums, generally adopted the stringed and wind instruments played by Europeans. The Spanish musical heritage was particularly distinctive and influential. One might expect this heritage to include flamenco, the most famous kind of Spanish music, but flamenco, a product primarily of urban Andalusian gypsies and lumpen lowlifes, did not emerge until the latter 1800s, and there is no evidence that it was transmitted to the Caribbean in the colonial period. More influential were verse forms like the

ten-line *décima* and the narrative *romance*; the fondness for triple meter, which persists in some Hispanic-derived folk forms; and chord progressions such as the familiar Andalusian A^{min}–G–F–E. The trajectory of the *décima* is especially curious: A minor verse form in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain, it came to be widely cultivated as a song text in diverse forms in Latin America but essentially fizzled out in peninsular Spain itself.

Creolization

A Haitian Vodou chant that presumably dates from the slavery period runs, “Se Kreyòl nou ye, pa genyen Ginen ankò”—We are creoles, who no longer have Africa. The transition from being an African—or a European—to being a Caribbean is a key process in the formation of Caribbean culture and music, embodied in the term “creolization,” which connotes the development of a distinctive new culture out of the prolonged encounter of two or more other cultures. The process is also described as “syncretism,” although “creolization” is particularly appropriate in the Americas, and especially in the Caribbean, due to the long usage of the term “creole” there and its ability to suggest some of the complex sociocultural issues also involved in the process.² In linguistic terms, a pidgin language is one evolved through the blending of two or more prior languages, especially of peoples who meet on territory that is the original homeland of neither. This language is termed a creole when it becomes a native tongue to later generations, who may forget or lose contact with the original languages. This process is more than, say, the mixing of blue and yellow to make green, since people are active, creative agents, not inert chemicals, and the new human product, whether a language or a musical style, takes on a life of its own.

Creolization—as extended more broadly to musical and cultural processes rather than just to language—also tends to involve a certain self-awareness, well evident in the Haitian verse quoted earlier. More subtly, Caribbean creole cultures, rather than being backwaters of the Western world, are in some ways quintessentially modern, with their self-conscious hybridity and often dramatic sense of rupture with the inherited, unquestioned traditions from the past. Further, the Caribbean people’s traditional consciousness, of being at once part of and separate from the Euro-American mainstream, and their ability to combine premodern African and New World features, have accounted for much of the extraordinary expressive power of Caribbean arts, especially music.

Caribbean creolization has primarily involved the encounter between descendants of Africans (mostly from West Africa and the Congo) and Euro-

peans (mostly Spanish, British, and French). Other groups, such as the East Indians, the Chinese, and the Dutch, have also played roles, some of which we consider later. There have been various stages and subsidiary developments in the creolization process. One can speak of an initial stage in which new forms of both neo-African and European-derived musics began to develop in the Caribbean. Cuban rumba can be regarded as such a genre, evolving partly through the interaction of slaves from different African regions. European influence is obvious in many melodies and the use of the Spanish language, but in other respects the rumba is essentially neo-African. However, whereas Santería music is to some extent a transplanted and restructured Yoruba entity, the rumba is not a transplant but a distinctly Cuban creation. Likewise, the nineteenth-century Puerto Rican piano danzas of Manuel Tavárez reflect only the subtlest suggestions of Afro-Caribbean influence, and in terms of style the *danza* can be regarded as essentially European-derived. It is not, however, a European genre but a Puerto Rican one and has been celebrated as a symbol of Puerto Rican nationalism. Both the *danza* and the rumba, in a very preliminary sort of way, are creole entities.

A more definitive sort of creolization occurs when African- and European-derived musical styles and elements combine in more overt and balanced ways. In many cases, this creative mixing started among the Afro-Caribbean lower classes, whose products, such as the Cuban *son* and Dominican merengue, were generally denounced by Eurocentric elites (whether white, black, or mulatto). In the typical pattern, these lower-class, syncretic forms gradually percolate upward, acquiring more musical sophistication and eventually coming to be enjoyed by the upper classes. When all classes and races of a given population come to embrace local syncretic genres—whether merengue, reggae, calypso, the *son*, or the Puerto Rican plena—as nationalistic symbols, then one can truly speak of a creole national musical culture.

The evolution and acceptance of creole musics in the Caribbean have thus been closely bound up with nationalism and elite recognition of the Afro-Caribbean heritage. Cuban nationalists, for example, prized the local *contradanza* partly because it was their own, creole invention rather than an archaic product of despised Spain; part of what distinguished the *contradanza* was the use, whether diluted or overt, of recognizably Afro-Caribbean syncopations. With the emergence of the Cuban *danzón* in the late 1800s, the Afro-Caribbean element became more unmistakable and, accordingly, more controversial. The *danzón*, with its felicitous combination of genteel melodies, sophisticated ensemble writing, and jaunty rhythms, quickly gained popularity in elite and petty bourgeois circles. To the modern ear, the genre may sound tame and quaint, but many negrophobic purists, because

of the music's bouncy Afro-Caribbean rhythm, denounced it as barbaric, grotesque, and somehow foreign. Other obscurantists tried to legitimize it by falsely attributing its distinctive rhythm to Taino influence.

In the Spanish and French Caribbean, the Afro-Cubanismo and Négritude movements of the 1930s and '40s did much to discredit such foolishness and to force Eurocentric elites to acknowledge and accept the African heritage in their national cultures. The later scholarship of Cuban ethnologist Fernando Ortiz, the writings of Puerto Rican essayist Tomás Blanco, and the poetry of Aimé Césaire, Nicolás Guillén, and Luis Palés Matos played important roles in this movement and in many cases explicitly celebrated the role of Afro-Caribbean music in national culture. In subsequent years, the attainment of political power by black and mulatto leaders further legitimized Afro-Caribbean culture. Afro-Caribbean music and musicians have played active roles in redefining their national senses of identity.

It should be kept in mind that musical creolization in the Caribbean was a complex process that did not "just happen." Instead, it was inextricably conditioned by the power dynamics of the social groups involved. Historically, creolization depended on an attitude of cultural openness and flexibility, on the parts of both dominant whites and subaltern people of color. The plantation owner's house, with its socially intermediate stratum of domestic slaves, would constitute one site for cultural interaction. Another would be the military band, in which musicians of diverse races and backgrounds would learn to play clarinet, cornet, and other instruments to perform marches and contradances at both military and civilian events. Port towns such as Havana would be particularly active sites of cross-fertilization, with their lively interactions of local and visiting musicians of various races and regions.

Receptivity to new musical ideas could also be instilled from above, as when colonial policies dictated a rupture with the past, whether through prohibitions or persuasion. The British were especially effective at getting their slaves to adopt a colonial mentality that regarded everything African as backward. Hence, after describing the African-style dancing to the gumbay drum, a visitor to Jamaica in 1823 remarked, "In a few years it is probable that the rude music here described will be altogether exploded among the creole [local-born] negroes, who show a decided preference of European music."³ While such a rejection or repression of a musical tradition can cause a kind of deculturation or cultural impoverishment, it can also stimulate new creation, typically in a creolized form. The St. Lucian poet and Nobel laureate Derek Walcott has written eloquently both of the tragedy of such cultural loss and of the brilliant creativity that it subsequently inspired: "In

time the slave surrendered to amnesia. That amnesia is the true history of the New World.”⁴ Hence, as one Trinidadian told me, “I’m glad that the British banned our traditional drumming, because it inspired us to invent the steel pan.”

In the twentieth century, urbanization, emigration, the mass media, and the internationalization of capital brought new dimensions to musical syncretism in the Caribbean. Gone are the days of isolated peasant communities cultivating their traditional creole songs in ignorance of the wider musical world. Flipping the radio dial anywhere in the Lesser Antilles, one can pick up everything from salsa, soca, *zouk*, and reggae to East Indian film songs—not to mention rap and R&B. And of course, the Internet has taken musical globalization to an exponentially greater level of intensity. As radio signals and digital content crisscross the sea, musical trends spread and proliferate in weeks, not decades, and geographic, linguistic, and international boundaries seem to melt into cyberspace. In metropolitan hubs such as New York, Toronto, and London, immigrants mingle with one another and with longtime locals, developing intricate multiple senses of identity reflected in the most eclectic musical tastes. Meanwhile, musical styles and influences cross-pollinate and multiply, spawning every conceivable sort of fusion, from bachatas in English to merengues in Hindi. As creolization reaches a new level and the internal and external musical borders of the region dissolve, any book that attempts to take stock of the contemporary music scene is doomed to rapid obsolescence. But snapshots have their own utility, and the authors of this book have done their best to cover the present as well as the past, starting with the largest and most influential island of all.

Further Reading

For general reading on the Caribbean, see Gordon Lewis, *The Growth of the Modern West Indies* (New York: Monthly Review, 1968), and Franklin Knight, *The Caribbean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). A good study of creolization is Richard Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997). Other useful pan-regional sources include Susanna Sloat, ed., *Caribbean Dance from Abakuá to Zouk* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002); Susanna Sloat, ed., *Making Caribbean Dance: Continuity and Creativity in Island Cultures* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010); and Peter Manuel, ed., *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009).

An Evening in Havana, 2014

IT IS A SULTRY SATURDAY in Cuba's capital, well into the third decade of the "special period" precipitated by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the inability of Cuba's creaky communist economy to keep the island afloat. Since my previous visits in earlier decades, much has stayed the same, though some changes are evident. Havana remains, to my eye, possibly the most beautiful city in the Americas, with its broad avenues and stately colonial-era edifices. There are more tourists—Canadians, Europeans, Venezuelans, and even Americans—and many more restaurants and hotels to serve them. There are still few vehicles on the streets, which makes for a peaceful atmosphere but also indicates the dismal state of public transport of any sort. Indeed, each day of my visit I seem to end up walking several miles just to get wherever I'm going. Amazingly, the 1950s DeSotos and Thunderbirds are still chugging along, miraculously kept running by Cuban ingenuity and a local cottage industry producing spare parts for otherwise extinct vehicles.

I chat with Carlos, the owner of an Edsel parked on the street, telling him, uselessly, that he could sell the car for good money in the United States if it weren't for the ongoing trade embargo imposed by Washington. Normally I avoid talking politics in Cuba, but he is an elderly Afro-Cuban who speaks volubly about the bad old days before the Revolution when he wouldn't be allowed to enter the nice restaurants or swim at the nearby beach. But now there is a whole younger generation of people, raised during the special period, who are less interested in socialist ideals than in being

part of modern, cosmopolitan Latino youth culture. Carlos sneers as our conversation is drowned out by a passing car whose booming stereo pumps out the current music of choice: reggaeton.

I myself have come to Cuba to hear things I can't find so easily in New York, so I make my way to the uniquely charming old city, parts of which have been nicely restored, while others are full of collapsed buildings whose rubble spills out into the streets. Several of the open-air restaurants feature old-timey Buena Vista-type *son* groups that have been the tourists' favorite ever since Ry Cooder's eponymous film and record of the late 1990s. At the Plaza de Armas, a large brass band is playing a potpourri of European light classical pieces and nineteenth-century Cuban *contradanzas*, enlivened by rowdy creole rhythms played on the timpani. The tubas are as battered as the T-Birds, but the playing is sweet and professional.

For the evening, the younger members of my group are heading off to some of the spiffy dance clubs that have sprung up in recent years, with deejays offering reggaeton, timba, and American hits to tourists and the new breed of Cubans who can somehow afford it. I will pass that option up, as well as the joyously kitsch cabarets at the Tropicana and the Havana Libre Hotel, which I've seen before. Fortunately, I receive an invitation to attend a *bembé*—a sort of dance party connected to the Afro-Cuban religion Santería. These are semiprivate affairs, so this invitation is not to be passed up. Our Cuban friend soon arrives to take us in his car to Matanzas, a nearby town famous for its Afro-Cuban traditions. It is dark when we reach our destination, a nondescript, one-story private home in a black neighborhood. We enter the house, in which one room is dominated by a majestic Santería altar; blood and feathers scattered in front of the altar suggest that either a chicken sacrifice or a violent pillow fight has recently taken place.

We pass through to the backyard where the *bembé* is already in progress. About fifty people are crowded into the yard, and the atmosphere is festive. Roughly half of those present, mostly women, are either singing a refrain in call and response with a lead vocalist or dancing in a roughly circular fashion. Drowning out their voices are the instruments—three drums that look like oversized congas, two cowbells, and a tambourine. I soon deduce that the person to watch is the lead drummer, who is improvising, beating the drum with a stick in his right hand and the palm of his left. I am mesmerized by his playing, in which he repeatedly starts a basic pattern, twists it around in different syncopations, and then abandons it for another, while different duple and triple pulses in the polyrhythmic accompaniment come in and out of focus. Finally, his playing reaches a crescendo as he works up to a frenetic acrobatic passage. It seems as if electricity sweeps through the yard as people

whoop and cheer, and two women dancing in front of me stiffen and collapse into the arms of their neighbors, their eyes glazing over. They are acting as if possessed—and indeed, they have been possessed by Elegba, the Santería god of crossroads. The music stops and their friends, laughing, guide them into the house, where they pass the next few hours in a trance, awakening later to remember nothing.

The Cuban Crucible

The array of musical events happening on any given weekend in Havana is representative of the extraordinary richness and diversity of Cuban musical culture. In the nineteenth century, the Cuban habanera charmed European audiences and famously worked its way into Georges Bizet's opera *Carmen*. In the mid-twentieth century, Cuban dance music dominated urban Africa, and it has continued to flourish in all of the Spanish-speaking countries of the Caribbean Basin, providing the backbone for salsa. Within the Caribbean itself, Cuba's influence is perhaps not surprising, as it is the largest island. But its remarkable musical richness seems to derive from other factors, including the way that African and European musics have been able to mix and enrich each other.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, Cuba's population has consisted of relatively even proportions of whites, blacks, and mulattos. By the 1600s, the native Taino and Ciboney Indians had effectively perished, along with their language, culture, and music, including the areito dances. Over the subsequent centuries of Spanish rule, Cuba, unlike most of the British West Indies, received large numbers of European settlers (mostly from Spain, including the Canary Islands). These colonists brought with them a wealth of European music, from opera and classical music to Spanish folksongs.

At the same time, conditions favored the dynamic flourishing of neo-African music in Cuba. For one thing, even though the nineteenth-century plantation bosses worked most slaves to death within ten years of their arrival, over the generations slave owners also allowed many to buy their own freedom, and they tended to free the mulatto offspring of the children they sired with slaves. As a result, by the early eighteenth century Cuban towns hosted large communities of free blacks and mulattos. These, together with urban slaves, were allowed to celebrate various sorts of musical and religious festivities, especially in the *cabildos* (mutual-aid societies). The Spanish authorities and Catholic church generally tolerated the *cabildos*, partly because they tended to divide the blacks along ethnic and religious lines, thereby lessening the chance of unified slave revolts. Most rural slaves, despite brutal

work schedules, were also allowed to sing, drum, and dance as they wished on their days off, and many were even permitted to leave their plantations to attend fiestas. Moreover, while the importation of slaves to the United States and the British colonies had dwindled by 1800, most Cuban slaves (especially the Yoruba) were brought in the subsequent sixty years, so that neo-African musical traditions continued to be invigorated by fresh infusions of captives. Under such conditions, both traditional African and European music were able to flourish in Cuba, at the same time being creatively combined and reworked by musicians into a variety of syncretic styles in a process dubbed “transculturation” by ethnologist Fernando Ortiz (1881–1969). Ortiz astutely characterized the Cuban cultural mix not as a melting pot, or a salad bowl, but as a simmering *ajiacó* stew, with different levels in which diverse ingredients variously dissolved and mixed or, alternatively, retained their form.

African-Derived Musics

The enslaved Africans brought to Cuba came from a variety of regions and ethnic groups. The larger of these were able to maintain many of their musical and religious traditions, especially in the realm of musics associated with religious ceremonies. One of the two largest ethnic groups among the slaves was the Yoruba, most of whom were brought in the nineteenth century to central and western Cuba from what is now Nigeria. In Africa, the Yoruba (as they came to be called in the late nineteenth century) had a highly developed culture, with large towns, social classes, trade networks, and sophisticated and formalized musical and religious traditions. While much of Yoruba culture—including language, kinship systems, and social structure in general—was lost in slavery, the Cuban Yoruba (traditionally called *lucumí*) were able to maintain or reinvent a considerable amount of their traditional music and religion—especially in the *cabildos* of Havana and nearby Matanzas.

The Yoruba-derived religion in Cuba is called Santería, or Regla de Ocha. Santería is a syncretic religion in the sense that traditional regional Yoruba elements have not only fused with each other but also acquired a thin veneer of Roman Catholicism to form a new, coherent set of beliefs and practices. The West African set of local and regional deities, or orishas, was consolidated into an Afro-Cuban pantheon and became further identified with Catholic saints—for example, Changó (Shango) with Saint Barbara, and Ogún with Saint Peter. Each orisha is associated with particular colors, myths, herbs, dances, songs, and natural phenomena (e.g., Changó with thunder)—beliefs that blended easily with Counter-Reformation Spanish folk Catholicism,

with its emphasis on medieval rituals, idols, and relics. The orishas, somewhat like Greek and Roman gods, are more like enlarged human beings than embodiments of saintly perfection; the arrogant Changó, for example, inadvertently destroyed his own palace with lightning. Nevertheless, Santería devotees, most (but by no means all) of whom are black or mulatto, believe that the orishas are powerful presences who can be of great assistance if they are regularly honored. Worship, which is oriented toward worldly aid rather than spiritual salvation in the afterlife, centers in ceremonies in which participants sing, dance, and in some cases undergo possession trance, as in the *bembé* described earlier.

The *bembé* is one kind of Santería event, with its own kind of drum ensemble and rather festive character. Cubans describe it as a sort of “party for the orishas.” The more typical Santería function is a *toque de santo*, which uses different music and has a somewhat more serious character. A *toque* usually takes place at a devotee’s home or perhaps in the basement of an apartment building. The occasion may be the anniversary of someone’s initiation, an orisha’s sacred day, or an honoring of the spirits in thanks for or in anticipation of support. The first part of the ceremony (called *oru del igbodú*, or “ceremony in the orisha’s room”) starts in the afternoon, when the musicians, with a few guests watching, play a sequence of drum invocations before the homemade altar (which may itself be a remarkable work of art). The musical ensemble usually consists of a lead singer (the *apkwón*) accompanied by three hourglass-shaped *batá* drums, resembling traditional Yoruba drums of the same name. In *batá* music, there is little improvised jamming as in *bembé* drumming; instead, the drummers play a set of largely pre-composed rhythmic patterns consisting of a complex series of composite ostinatos, interlocking “conversations” between drums, and transition passages. Several drum patterns are associated with particular orishas, and parts of the patterns, in West African “talking-drum” tradition, imitate the speech inflections of old Yoruba praise poems, which themselves are now largely forgotten.

As more guests arrive, the musicians perform another sequence of songs (the *oru cantado*), led by the *apkwón*, who, like the drummers, is a paid professional and should have a strong voice, a wide repertoire of songs, and a good sense for guiding the event as a whole. Perhaps after a break, more guests arrive, and the main ceremony (or *güemilere*) begins in earnest, as the *apkwón* leads the ensemble and participants in performing various songs invoking the orishas.¹ Men and women dance collectively in the styles associated with the orisha being addressed—whether the coquettish Oshún, the macho, bossy Changó, the elderly and stiff Obatalá, or the dignified and



Batá drum trio. (Photograph by Peter Manuel.)

Yemayá dancing (dancer: Melvis Santa). (Photograph by Peter Manuel.)



matronly Yemayá—adapting their movements to the lyrics and rhythms of the songs. The songs are in Yoruba, praising or even insulting the deities to encourage them to “descend” and possess the appropriate participants. The lead vocalist’s job is to get people to sing and dance and, ultimately, to help induce spirit possession, whose onset involves a dramatic and powerful transformation in an individual’s demeanor.

When possession does occur, the drumming stops, and the possessed individual—now regarded as the orisha incarnate—is treated with reverence and may be dressed in appropriate garments (e.g., a crown and red vest for Changó) and is often asked for advice or blessings. Some possessions are certainly faked, but most would constitute, at the least, some sort of altered state of consciousness, which from an empirical perspective is a conditioned reflex response in some ways akin to hypnosis. Certainly possessions are learned behavior. For example, an initiate whose patron saint is Changó learns to be possessed only during songs to that spirit, and he or she also gradually learns how to behave when possessed—for example, in Changó’s imperious and blustery manner. One person’s “Changó” could differ from another’s depending on such aptitude; thus, for instance, one Cuban told me, “My mother’s Changó was very powerful; people would always come for advice or blessings when he came.” Initiates do not necessarily enjoy possession, as they don’t consciously experience it, and after eventually falling asleep in a chair they may wake up tired and sore and not remembering a thing. In a sense, allowing oneself to be possessed (or “mounted”) is a sort of public service to the community. As one drummer remarked, “Sometimes at a *toque* no one will get mounted, and other times they’re dropping like flies!”

While most North Americans have never heard of Santería, they have heard something of Haitian Vodou (voodoo), which in many respects is quite similar. Due in part to racist stereotypes of Haiti, Vodou has a negative image abroad, and one can find references even in academic literature to “wild and drunken voodoo orgies.” But there is nothing particularly wild about either Santería or Vodou. Actually, *batá* music and the dancing it accompanies have a rather stately and restrained character. Drunkenness and lewd behavior are generally inappropriate at such functions, and there is no erotic couple dancing. Instead, the dancers execute their traditional steps in a loosely collective fashion.

Santería, of course, is not everyone’s cup of tea, and most educated Cubans (especially whites) tend to regard it as backward and part of the lumpen underworld. Nevertheless, Santería remains extremely widespread among lower-class Cubans, and the Revolutionary government has given up trying to discourage it (especially because good money is made from

Tropical religion in the barrio: one of New York City's many *botánicas*. (Photograph by Peter Manuel.)

visiting devotees who come to “make saint,” or be initiated). Furthermore, the important role of Afro-Cuban culture in national identity in general has long been widely acknowledged, especially in the wake of the intellectual Afro-Cubanismo movement of the 1930s, led in Cuba by Fernando Ortiz, the poet Nicolás Guillén, and others. Meanwhile, since the mid-twentieth century Santería has flourished in Mexico City, in Venezuela, and in Latino



communities in the United States, especially in New York City and Miami, each of which hosts thousands of adherents. Many of the American practitioners are from Puerto Rican or other Latino backgrounds; some are Afro-Americans trying to get in touch with their African heritage. In New York and other cities, there are dozens of stores called *botánicas* that sell herbal medicine, statuettes, booklets, talismans, and other articles related to Santería and folk Catholicism.² There are also substantial cohorts of skilled drummers and lead singers who perform regularly at ceremonies.

Santería is not the only Afro-Cuban religion. A group of slaves roughly equal in number to the Yoruba were brought earlier from the Congo River region southeast of Nigeria. The Congolese were Bantu-speaking hunter-gatherers and agriculturalists whose society and culture were in some ways less formalized than those of the Yoruba. Nevertheless, the Congolese contribution to Afro-Cuban culture is probably as substantial as that of the Yoruba, although it may be more influential in the realm of secular music. The Congolese-derived religion in Cuba is generically called Palo (not to be confused with Dominican *palo* drumming), and its practitioners are called *paleros*. Palo centers on worship of ancestors and anthropomorphic spirits, who (as in Santería) are honored in ceremonies with music and dance. The Palo drums, songs, and rhythms are distinct from those of Santería. Instead

of *batá* drums, *paleros* generally use the familiar conga drum, whose name reflects its ethnic origin. Unlike Santería songs in Yoruba, Palo songs are mostly in Spanish with some Bantu words, reflecting the fact that most Congolese slaves arrived earlier in Cuba than did the Yoruba. The Palo rhythms are simpler and fewer than those of Santería, and the dances are more vigorous and exuberant; one might say that they look a bit “wild,” but they involve considerable skill, with seemingly every body part moving independently. Palo is also more secretive and has a stronger emphasis on nature, healing, communication with the deceased ancestors, and what could be called black magic. Like Santería, Palo flourishes in New York City and elsewhere. There, and in Cuba, Palo ritual and musical practices can mix with those of Espiritismo, deriving from nineteenth-century American “Spiritism,” which, though originally laden with quackery, took on its own life and meaning in the Spanish Caribbean.

Another distinctive Afro-Cuban music and dance tradition is that associated with the Abakuá brotherhoods, whose founders came from the West African Calabar region of coastal islands and swamps, where secret societies traditionally took the place of centralized government. In Cuba, their descendants and others formed all-male societies, based mostly in Havana and Matanzas, especially among dockworkers. Abakuá is a secretive, Masonic-like brotherhood rather than a religion per se, but in ceremonies, Abakuá



members perform music and dance that re-enact events from their mythological history. Although repressed in the past, Abakuá societies still flourish, and their remarkable dances are often performed in processions and folkloric contexts. The most characteristic figure is the *diablito* (or *ireme*), who nervously darts about with a whisk broom, dressed in a hooded costume, which closely resembles those still used by dancers in the parallel secret societies in Calabar today. Almost any move one makes in the *diablito* costume looks

Abakuá *diablito* dancer. (Adapted by Peter Manuel from a drawing by Víctor Patricio de Landaluze.)

expressive, but the suave and earnest *diablito* dance goes well beyond that and achieves a unique power. As with Santería and Palo, several words derived from Calabari culture have entered Cuban and Caribbean Spanish—especially the common term *chévere*, which means “cool” or “great.” (A few other such words are *monina*, or “buddy,” and *kikiribú*, which translates roughly as “That’s the end of that.”) Two other African-derived sects are the Dahomeyan *arará* and the Yoruba sub-group *iyésá*, whose songs and dances survive in *cabildos* in Matanzas.

Scholars have yet to connect many of the historical dots linking Afro-Cuban traditions with counterparts and sources in Africa. Such connections are naturally obscured by the changes that have taken place both in Cuba and in Africa. For example, Santería music represents a sort of consolidation and reassembling of different Yoruba traditions. Thus, if one goes to Nigeria today and looks for Yemayá rhythms played on the *batá* drums, one won’t find them, since the *batá* is not used to worship Yemayá in that country. In fact, *batá* drumming there, along with many other traditional religious and musical practices, is dying out due to hostility from evangelical Christianity and fundamentalist Islam and a lack of state support. By contrast, in Cuba and its diaspora communities, in spite of so many problems, such traditions, in however streamlined a form, have survived quite well, with academic interest, state support, media representation, and the ongoing accretion of new practitioners, whether in Havana or Los Angeles. Even as the period of slave importation recedes into the past, new connections are being reformed. Conferences have been arranged between Cuban and Nigerian *babalaos* (priests), and ethnographer Ivor Miller established visits between Cuban Abakuá members and long-lost Ekpe cousins from Calabar. In 2013–14 an Australian scholar traced the previously unidentifiable songs sung in the Cuban town of Perico to an isolated village in Sierra Leone. She managed to take four Cubans there for a historic reunion. Said one of them, “When I opened my mouth to sing, they just stood there staring; and then it was like an explosion; they started to sing the responses and dance with me.” Another, describing himself as finally “at peace,” said, “At last I know where I come from, and I’ve come back.”³

Rumba

By far the most famous and influential Afro-Cuban secular music and dance genre is rumba. The word “rumba” has long been used rather loosely in the realm of commercial dance music and salsa. In proper terms, however, rumba denotes a traditional genre in which one or two dancers are accompanied by

an ensemble consisting of three congas, two pairs of tapped sticks, and a lead singer and chorus. In the absence of any European melodic or chordal instruments, rumba sounds very African, and it may derive from secular dances cultivated by the Congolese slaves in Cuba. But unlike Santería music, rumba is a distinctly Cuban creation, not a retention or re-creation of an old African genre. Rumba seems to have emerged in the mid-1800s as an entertainment genre performed at parties, mostly in urban, lower-class black neighborhoods. The most popular kind of rumba is the *guaguancó* (“wah-wahng-co”), which is distinguished by its particular rhythm and dance styles. (The basic *guaguancó* pattern is shown in Musical Example 2.) In the *guaguancó*, an ostinato (repeating pattern) is played by either one or two drummers on two differently tuned congas (better referred to as *tumbadoras*); another player taps an interlocking pattern with hard sticks (*palitos*) on the side of one drum. The lead singer strikes two short hardwood sticks together to provide another pattern; these sticks and the standardized pattern played on them are both called *clave*, whose importance as an underlying rhythmic concept is discussed later. Meanwhile, another conga player (playing the higher-pitched *quinto* [pronounced “keen-toe”] drum) improvises throughout. Over this intricate composite rhythm, the lead vocalist, after singing a few introductory warm-up phrases (“a-lala-e,” etc.), performs an extended text, perhaps loosely improvising melodies and lyrics. The rumba lyrics can be about anything—love, politics, cockfights, or neighborhood events and people. This section of the rumba, the *canto*, can last a minute or two; sooner or later, the lead vocalist cues the other singers to commence singing a short refrain, and they then proceed in call-and-response fashion. This part is called the *montuno* (a word we encounter again later).

As soon as the *montuno* starts, a couple begins to dance in a pantomime game of coy evasion on the woman’s part and playful conquest on the man’s. While the female dancer undulates gracefully about, the man, generally without touching her, performs a variety of improvised, constantly chang-

Musical Example 2: Rumba guaguancó. The score is written in 4/4 time and consists of three staves. The top staff, labeled 'Palitos', shows a repeating eighth-note pattern: quarter, quarter, eighth, eighth, quarter, quarter, eighth, eighth. The middle staff, labeled 'Clave (2-3)', shows a 2-3 clave rhythm: quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, eighth, eighth, quarter, quarter. The bottom staff, labeled 'Congas', shows a simple ostinato pattern: quarter, quarter, eighth, eighth, quarter, quarter, eighth, eighth.

Musical Example 2: Rumba guaguancó.

ing steps and gestures around her, alternately importuning her, pretending to ignore her, mimetically cajoling her, and then, when he senses an opportunity, performing a *vacunao*, which consists of a pelvic thrust or even a graceful kick or swat in the direction of the woman's thighs. A sense of fun and humor prevails throughout, and the sophistication, variety, and suppleness of the dance save it from being vulgar. Indeed, rumba dance is a difficult art and is attempted only by Cubans who have really cultivated an interest in it.⁴ There are many colonial-era descriptions, from Cuba and elsewhere in the Caribbean, of dances like rumba, which European onlookers generally regarded as lewd. Accounts suggest that many contemporary Africans felt the same way about European couple dances, since in traditional African dancing men and women would rarely touch each other.

Of the other types of rumba still performed, the *yambú* is like a slower, more restrained *guaguancó*—more suited to older dancers—while the *columbia* is a solo dance for men that stresses the dancer's acrobatic grace and power. The *yambú* is often played on wooden boxes (*cajones*) instead of congas, and in fact such cartons were often used in the early 1900s to evade prohibitions of drumming that could be enforced by an overzealous police captain. Drums, sir? No, no drums in here! In recent decades, a new rhythm—at once looser and more demanding—has come into vogue, called *guarapachangueo* (“wah-ra-pa-chan-gay-o”).

Rumba today may not be as common as it was before the era of boom boxes, but Cuba still hosts a lively and innovative scene (aside from its popularity in prisons). Any group of amateur *rumberos* can form a folkloric group to perform in competitions, variety shows, or tourist venues. At one neighborhood talent show in Havana, I watched a rumba group whose act was loosely structured in the form of a skit set in the pre-Revolutionary days, when rumba parties and Santería ceremonies were often harassed by the police. In the skit, the group reconstructed a rumba fiesta, which came to an abrupt halt when a lanky black “policeman,” played by a tall black youth, appeared and broke up the festivities. The dancers pleaded with him and then offered him a few pesos, which he furtively accepted. The dancing resumed with a lively solo rumba *columbia*. After a few minutes, however, the “policeman,” who had been watching from the side, looked around to make sure his superiors were not watching and then, pushing the dancer aside, stepped into the ring and proceeded to perform his own virtuoso *columbia*. The audience roared with delighted applause and laughter.

Meanwhile, in New York barrios, rumba caught on in its own fashion in the 1950s, and many a young *guapo* would set up his drum on a street corner in Spanish Harlem or a Central Park nook, hoping to attract onlook-

ers and admirers (especially of the fairer sex). Rumba has also enjoyed its own niche in Puerto Rico, where, as in New York, the emphasis tends to be more on flashy conga playing than on the dance and singing. Nowadays, a typical Afro-Cuban folkloric group, whether in Cuba or abroad, typically does rumba and religious dances of Santería, Palo, and Abakuá. The Santería orisha dances are beautiful in their way, but they are designed for ordinary devotees and are simpler than rumba, which can be a showcase for the solo dancer's prowess and artistry.

Music in Santiago de Cuba

The eastern part of Cuba (traditionally called Oriente) is host to its own set of creole and Afro-Cuban musics. Santiago, the largest city, has quite a different flavor from Havana, with which there has long been a certain rivalry. There are no skyscrapers in Santiago, and the atmosphere is a bit more provincial and laid back. However, the region is renowned for its rich cultural heritage and for its proud, independent populace, who were leaders in the anticolonial wars. Oriente was traditionally a region of small coffee and tobacco farms, whose largely mulatto population had, over the centuries, generated a music culture that is distinctively creole. By contrast, western Cuba, with its legacy of large sugar plantations worked by slave labor, and the influx of Spanish and Canary Island immigrants in the later colonial period, has been the main center both of the more strictly Afro-Cuban traditions like Santería as well as overwhelmingly Hispanic-derived forms like *punto*, discussed later. Yet Oriente also has its own Afro-Cuban music traditions.

One of these is *tumba francesa*, which was cultivated in social clubs formed by the more than 30,000 Haitians who fled to eastern Cuba around 1800 during the Haitian Revolution; several thousand more Haitians immigrated in the early 1900s. The main *tumba francesa* activities are night-long social dances in which call-and-response singing is accompanied on a set of three large *tumba* drums, a hollowed-out log (*catá*) struck with sticks, and metal rattles (*chachas*). At present, only a few clubs survive. One of their two dance forms, the *masón* (from *maison*, “house”—or from the egalitarian “Masons”?) derives from the French contredanse as cultivated by Afro-Haitians in the early 1800s. As in Europe of the time, and in related dances like the Virginia reel, men and women line up opposite each other and perform a series of “figures,” advancing and retreating, and dancing together and then splitting up. *Tumba francesa* music, however, consists not of dainty creole ditties but of vigorous Afro-Haitian-style drumming with responsorial singing. In the other surviving dance, the *yuba*, a solo male dancer impro-

vises acrobatic steps in a sort of a duel with a drummer, who plays straddling the largest *tumba* drum, which is laid lengthwise on the floor. Nowadays, the *tumba francesa* societies no longer fulfill important functions, although the government encourages their art by hiring them to play at folkloric events, which performers may regard as an occasion to have a dance party that just happens to be on a stage.

Santiago is particularly famous for its Carnival (Carnaval), which is also celebrated avidly in similar fashion elsewhere in the island. Cuban Carnival originated as a Christmastime fiesta held on Three Kings Day (el Día de Reyes, January 6), during which the Afro-Cuban *cabildos* were allowed to form street processions, with drumming and dancing (and, often, fighting). In the early 1900s, the negrophobic white-dominated governments largely banned the processions, even as white performers in blackface would do their own versions of the songs and dances—called *congas*—in stage shows. In the 1930s the festivities were again legalized, in response to tourist interest, the desire to court black voters, and the support for Afro-Cuban culture

Street festivities on el Día de Reyes (Three Kings' Day), from a painting by Landaluze. (Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de La Habana.)





Drummers in Carnival procession, Santiago de Cuba. (Photograph by Peter Manuel.)

by intellectuals like Fernando Ortiz. Groups of white revelers also joined the fun, and eventually the processions came to be organized by competitive clubs with traditional titles and themes, from established Afro-Cuban barrio *comparsas* like Los Alacranes (the Scorpions) to bourgeois white groups like Los Dandys. Congas also came to flourish in cabaret shows, including as performed by Desi Arnaz prior to his *I Love Lucy* fame. The main Santiago Carnival had always been held in July, and Fidel Castro timed his initial revolutionary escapade—the 1953 attack on the Moncada barracks—to coincide with the festivities and prevailing inebriation. The attack was a fiasco, but after the eventual triumph of the Revolution in 1959, Carnival throughout the island was shifted to July to commemorate the event and to coincide with the end of the summer harvest. With a combination of state funding and avid grassroots participation, the event soon grew to be more extravagant and lavish than ever, although it was diminished somewhat due to the economic exigencies of the “special period.”

In Santiago, as in Havana, the processions take two forms. One set comprises the “congas” proper, which are informal, free-form, neighborhood-based processions (such as “Los Hoyos”), each enlivened by group singing and a core of musicians playing drums, iron bells, and the *corneta china*—a shrill oboe introduced by Chinese immigrants. The other type is the fancy

comparsa or *paseo*, whose members—usually of institutions like schools or a textile workers’ union—compete to present the most colorful choreographed parade of thematically costumed marchers, Abakuá *diablitos*, and elaborate floats, with bikini-clad “sexy women” dancers. The typical processional dance often follows the familiar conga beat—roughly, one-two-three-four-one, kick; one-two-three-four-one, kick.

European-Derived Musics

The various kinds of Afro-Cuban music were generally confined to a social underground until the mid-twentieth century, by which time they had come to pervade commercial dance music and had been celebrated by scholars like Ortiz. They have since come to be recognized as among the most dynamic parts of Cuban popular culture. But they represent only half the story of Cuban music, as the best-known forms of Cuban music—especially the country’s dance-band music—have been formed as much by European influences as by African ones.

As mentioned before, Cuba’s population has consisted of relatively equal proportions of whites, blacks, and mulattos since the early 1800s. Mainland Spanish and Canary Island settlers continued to come even through the early 1900s. The Spaniards brought their own musical traditions with them, from rustic peasant songs to genteel aristocratic dances. In Cuba, all these musics gradually acquired a distinctively national flavor, in some cases due to a clear Afro-Cuban influence. With the advent of Cuban nationalism in the late 1800s, these creole forms became symbols of Cuban patriotism, as opposed to the perceivedly *gallego* (stiff and stuffy) Spanish forms of music and dance.

The music of white Cuban farmers, who are called *guajiros*, derives primarily from peninsular Spanish and Canary Island origins, especially as reflected in its reliance on guitars and mandolin-like instruments. A now defunct colonial-era *guajiro* pastime was the zapateo, a lively couple dance featuring fancy footwork accompanied by a guitar or similar instrument, playing melodies full of *hemiola* syncopations (along the lines of “I like to live in A-me-ri-ca,” or one-two-three-one-two-three-one-and-two-and-three-and). Still popular are songs based on the *décima*, an old Spanish-derived verse form that consists of ten-line stanzas in the *espinela* rhyme scheme *abbaaccddc*. Although it largely died out in peninsular Spain after the 1600s, it is widely cultivated in various parts of Latin America. In Cuba and Puerto Rico, the *décima* is as familiar as limericks are in the United States, and students and literati have long learned to recite and compose



Colonial-era zapateo. (Adapted by Peter Manuel.)

them. Cuban peasants developed various styles of singing *décimas* (under the label *punto*) and still hold frequent contests at rural fiestas, especially in the central and western, white-populated tobacco-growing regions of the island. In such contests, singers are expected to compose impromptu *décimas*, perhaps using a last line (*pie forzado*; literally, forced foot) given to them on the spot. Such informal performances often take the form of a duel (*controversia*) between two singer-poets, who trade off *décimas*, attempting to outdo each other in their clever rhymes and witty insults (which are more important than the ability to sing well). Here is a famous *décima* from around 1900 that expresses the ambivalence of Cubans toward the United States, which had invaded Cuba in 1898, finishing off the already collapsing Spanish rule and establishing its own pattern of intervention in the island:

	(rhyme)
La tierra del Siboney	a
que da el tabaco y la caña	b
de la tutela de España	b
nos liberó McKinley.	a
Dáale vivas, que es del ley	a

a nuestros buenos hermanos	c
¡Vivan los americanos!	c
sin cesar repiteremos,	d
pero también les diremos:	d
¡Cuba para los cubanos!	c

[U.S. President] McKinley has liberated the land of Siboney, with its tobacco and sugarcane, from Spanish rule. Let's sing the praises of our good brothers: "Long live the Americans!" we'll ceaselessly repeat. But we'll also tell them, "Cuba is for the Cubans!"

The Punto Cubano

The Cuban *punto* is sung in a variety of styles throughout the island. The predominant style in the western part of the island is the so-called *punto libre*, in which the verses are rendered in free rhythm in a stock melody, or personal variants of it. In between the sung lines, the guitar (with perhaps a *clave*) plays a simple chordal ostinato, with flashy improvisations on the mandolin-like *laúd*. The *décima* about McKinley could be sung roughly as in the transcription shown in Musical Example 3. The standard format is this: *décima* verses 1 and 2 are sung to tune 1; then verses 3 and 4 are sung to tune 2 (as shown); then there may be an instrumental ritornello interlude (which can be repeated while the poet composes the following lines); then verses 5 and 6, and then 7 and 8 are sung to tune 1; and last, verses 9 and 10 are sung to tune 2, leading to another ritornello. To non-Hispanic ears, it may sound as if the tonic were C major, but in accordance with Spanish-derived harmonic conventions, there is an equal polar repose on G major, which is stressed in all cadences.

TUNE #1

La tie - rra del Si - bo - ney que da'el ta - ba - co y la ca - ña

TUNE #2

de la tu - te - la de'Es - pa - ña nos lí - be - ró Mc - Kin ley

RITORNELLO

C G C F G C F G

Musical Example 3: *Punto*.

In the 1800s, while the Cuban *punto* styles were evolving in the countryside, the white and mulatto populations of the island's towns and cities were cultivating their own, lively music culture. Until the early 1800s, the favored dance genres in urban white society consisted of European styles like the waltz, minuet, and *pasodoble*. Over the course of the century, however, these styles gradually came to be replaced by distinctively Cuban forms, which thus became nationalistic symbols in a time of growing resentment of—and, eventually, outright rebellion against—Spanish colonial rule.

Many Cubans were growing increasingly frustrated by the economic restrictions and corrupt and inefficient government Spain imposed on Cuba. Both culturally and politically, the Cuban middle classes became attracted less to backward, feudal, and repressive Spain than to the liberal bourgeois cultures flourishing in other European countries. The Franco-Haitian immigration from Haiti around 1800 brought cosmopolitan French culture to eastern Cuba. At the same time, the melodramatic Italian style of vibrato-laden bel canto singing, popularized by the operas of Donizetti and Bellini, became widely popular in Cuba and elsewhere in Latin America and was eventually adopted in patriotic *canciones*. Alongside Italian operas and European concert music, Spanish-language light operas called zarzuelas were particularly popular in Cuba from the late 1800s, as were the less formal *tonadilla* and *teatro bufo*, many of which were locally composed. Cuba's urban cultural scene became one of the liveliest in the hemisphere—and, indeed, by 1800 Havana had become the third largest city in the Americas (following Mexico City and Lima, and well ahead of provincial Boston and New York). As the Cuban author Alejo Carpentier observed, both the refinement of this bourgeois culture and the cruelty of its economic base could be seen in newspaper classified advertisements such as one in 1794 that offered for sale a spinet piano, a colt, and a seven-year-old Negro boy.⁵

Musically, the most important genre in the emergence of nineteenth-century Cuban creole music culture was the *contradanza*. In the late 1700s and early 1800s, various kinds of related dances—especially the aforementioned English country dance and French contredanse—had become popular among the European middle classes. These traditionally featured group-style dancing directed by a caller, in a fashion similar to a square dance. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the Cubans came to regard this style as stuffy and archaic, and they adopted the contemporary French and British trends, gradually dispensing with the dance's collective character and turning it into a dance of independent couples (in that sense like the contemporary and “revolutionary” waltz). At the same time, the Cubans gave their pieces—increasingly called “*danza*” rather than “*contradanza*”—a

bit of Afro-Caribbean spice in the form of syncopated rhythms, especially the pattern “x-xx-x-,” or “one-and-two-and-three-and-four-and,” which outside Cuba is often referred to as the “habanera” rhythm (see Musical Example 3). Some Cubans know the rhythm by its *maní tosta’o* (roasted peanuts) mnemonic: “[tao] maní tos-tao, maní tos-tao.” (For Puerto Ricans, it is “coffee with bread”—“pan, café con pan, café con pan”—and Anglos could think of it as “beat, a fun-ky beat.”)

Just as many upper-class Cuban white men liked to indulge themselves with mulatto women, so did Afro-Cuban syncopations enter—albeit via the servants’ door—into *contradanzas*, many of which bore appropriately “colorful” titles like “Tu madre es conga” (Your Mother Is Congolese). Accordingly, although most *contradanza* patrons may have been white or mulatto, most professional musicians in this period were dark-skinned, prompting one writer to proclaim with alarm in 1832, “The arts are in the hands of people of color!”

The *contradanza* was cultivated in different forms (aside from relatives like *tumba francesa*). Most characteristically, it was played by a horn-based *orquesta típica* at dance parties. While this tradition has died out, we still have the notated piano scores of the light-classical salon *contradanzas*, which were written either for dance or for listening, to be played by pianists or chamber groups in aristocratic parlors and ballrooms. The most gifted composers of such pieces were Manuel Saumell (1817–70) and Ignacio Cervantes (1847–1905), who wrote his elegant and tuneful *danzas* as trivial gifts for friends. Although the *contradanzas* were parlor pieces rather than political protests, they became at least indirectly associated with the independence movement insofar as they were celebrated as distinctly creole Cuban entities. And, of course, what gave them that creole character was precisely the Afro-Cuban syncopation, however diluted and camouflaged. Thus commenced the complex and ambivalent relationship between Afro-Cuban culture and bourgeois white Cuban nationalism, which could be as racist as it was patriotic.

From the 1840s, the *contradanza* could be fitted with a sung text, in which case it was generally called “habanera” (not “habañera”). These songs actually became more popular in Europe and Mexico than in Cuba and are still widely sung by amateur choruses in Spain. Georges Bizet used a contemporary habanera melody in his 1875 opera *Carmen*, and another habanera, “La paloma,” became one of the most popular songs in Latin America. Both songs use the basic ostinato shown in Musical Example 4.

In the 1850s–60s, Cuban urban musical life was enlivened by the presence of Louis Moreau Gottschalk, a flamboyant composer and virtuoso

EL ROMPESARAGÜEY.

Contradanza
POR
J de Sequeira

Publicada por EDELMANOVY C^o Calle de la Obra Pía N^o 12.

HABANA.

The musical score is written for piano and consists of four systems of music. The first system begins with a *Piano* marking in a decorative oval. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 2/4. The score includes various musical notations such as *con B.* (con brio), *p* (piano), *f* (forte), and *mf* (mezzo-forte). It features first and second endings, marked with *1^a* and *2^a*. The piece concludes with a *fine* marking.

A typical nineteenth-century contradanza for piano.

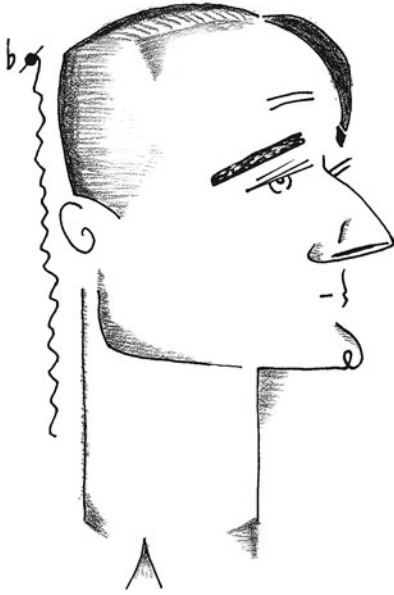


Musical Example 4: *Cinquillo* and "habanera" rhythm.

pianist from New Orleans. In his extended visits to Cuba, Puerto Rico, and elsewhere, Gottschalk inspired local composers and audiences with his flashy compositions using contemporary Caribbean melodies and rhythms. In Havana he organized a monster concert with more than 450 performers, including Afro-Cuban drummers and forty pianists.

By the 1880s, especially through the influence of composer and bandleader Miguel Faílde, the *contradanza* was eclipsed by a new form, the *danzón*, which reigned as the national dance of Cuba until the 1930s. The *danzón* retained a European light-classical orientation in its use of rondo-like sectional structure (often ABABACAC), written scores, sophisticated harmonies, and instrumentation. But if Afro-Cuban rhythmic flavor was hinted at in the *contradanza*, it was unmistakable in the *danzón*, especially in the persistence of the *cinquillo* ostinato (or "one-and-two-and-three-and-four-and," as in Musical Example 4). This ostinato, possibly of Afro-Haitian derivation, became a creole Caribbean rhythm found in a variety of musics, including Haitian Vodou drumming, *batá* music, and West Indian folksongs like "Yellow Bird." Through about 1910, for outdoor occasions the *danzón* was generally played on an old-fashioned *orquesta típica* ensemble, sounding a bit like early New Orleans jazz, with which it had some ties. By 1920, however, this tropical ragtime ensemble largely had been replaced by a sweeter, indoor-type ensemble called *charanga* (or *charanga francesa*), in which a wooden flute and two or three violins were backed by piano, string bass, *güiro* scraper, and *timbales* (metal-frame drums with a crisper sound than the *timpani*). The *charangas* and their favored idiom, the *danzón*, retained a certain bourgeois character, but their suave mixture of guts and grace ensured their vitality through the 1940s. While the *danzón* was a popular dance idiom, it was also a sophisticated salon genre whose composition and performance required training in European art music.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, Cuba had been producing many skilled classical performers—both white and black—and in the early twentieth century some of its composers achieved international renown. Amadeo Roldán (1900–39) and Alejandro García Caturla (1906–40) were two remarkable modernists who, inspired by Parisian avant-garde primitivism, synthesized Afro-Cuban rhythms with bold, Stravinsky-like sonorities. If Stravinsky, in a work like *The Rite of Spring*, had to turn to a fantasized Africa



Alejandro García Caturla.

(Adapted by Peter Manuel from a cartoon by Armando Maribona.)

or an imaginary pagan Russia for inspiration, Caturla and Roldán found inspiration in the actual Afro-Cuban music of their own homeland. Particularly outstanding are works such as Roldán's percussion-dominated "Rítmicas," where *clave* and *cinquillo* patterns and other syncopations weave in and out of each other, and Caturla's "Tres danzas cubanas," which succeeded in being both avant-garde and catchy. Tragically, both composers perished in their thirties. Roldán died of cancer, and Caturla—an iconoclast who had a

black common-law wife and as a magistrate was a heroic crusader for social justice—was murdered by a thug. Both collaborated extensively with Alejo Carpentier (1904–80), a brilliant and progressive music critic, librettist, musicologist, and novelist. Musical themes recur in Carpentier's fiction, especially in *Concierto barroco*, a playful postmodern novel showing Afro-Latin music invigorating the European Baroque in the form of a Mexican gentleman and his black factotum jamming with Vivaldi and Scarlatti.

Meanwhile, white composers and performers had been highlighting Afro-Cuban culture in a different manner in the context of the *teatro bufo*. This was a kind of local minstrelsy, with skits and songs featuring stock characters—especially the gregarious and musical *negrito*, the sexy *mulata* (mulatto woman), and the petty bourgeois and untalented white *gallego* (literally, Spaniard from Galicia). Such shows foregrounded saucy verse-and-refrain songs called *guarachas* and corny stage versions of Afro-Cuban rumbas and congas, performed by whites in blackface, at a time when the authentic street versions of these dances were outlawed. Despite the reliance on cartoonish racial stereotypes, the prominence of black and mulatto characters represented a kind of musical nationalism and indirectly helped legitimize Afro-Cuban culture.

In the 1930s, a more elaborate and sophisticated music theater came to flourish in the form of the zarzuelas of Ernesto Lecuona (1895–1963), Gonzalo Roig, and Ernesto Prats. These works, such as *El cafetal*, *María la O*, and *Cecilia Valdés*, typically involved love triangles among a male slave, a *mulata*, and

a white man. They portrayed the plight of the slave sympathetically but set the whole drama in the comfortable distance of the colonial past rather than the present, with its persistent racial inequalities. Due to the advent of cinema, the expense of their production, and the lack of tourist interest, these zarzuelas are seldom performed today, but tunes like Lecuona's "Siboney" and "María la O" remain familiar evergreen in Cuba. Lecuona is also remembered for his impressionistic piano compositions, such as the still popular "Malagueña."

Finally, in discussing the more European-oriented Cuban musics, we should also mention the bolero, which evolved in Cuba around the turn of the twentieth century as a popular, guitar-based, slow-dance song, especially as cultivated by singer-composers like Sindo Garay (1867–1968) and Pepe Sánchez (1856–1918). The bolero's lyrics, sung in European bel canto style, are unabashedly sentimental and romantic, celebrating eternal love, basking in the sweet pangs of unrequited longing, or lamenting the fickleness of faithless women. The bolero became widely popular as a voice-and-guitar idiom throughout much of Latin America by the 1920s. The original Cuban style was sung solo or duet in medium tempo, often with a prominent *cinquillo* syncopation. From the 1940s, Mexican groups like the Trío Calaveras popularized the practice of singing it in suave, smooth, three-part harmony, accompanied by sophisticated guitar playing and light percussion, with a languid rhythm akin to that of a greatly decelerated *son*. This style then became the norm in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and elsewhere. The most famous of all bolero groups was the New York-based Trío Los Panchos, which flourished in the 1950s and '60s, and generally consisted of two Mexicans and a Puerto Rican. In Cuba, guitar-based boleros and romantic *canciones* (not intended for dance)—which are often referred to collectively as *trova* (as in *trovador*, or troubador)—are performed today by groups at restaurants and at state-run "Casas de la Trova" for tourists and elders. Outside Cuba, the bolero is mostly enjoyed by elders, although it also gave birth to the Dominican bachata, which went on to take the Latin music world by storm in recent decades.

The *Son* and Modern Cuban Dance Music

The twentieth century constituted a new chapter in Cuban history. With Spain out of the picture, Cuba developed closer economic, political, and cultural ties with the United States. At the same time, many Cubans, fiercely nationalistic as always, resented the growing Yankee domination of the island and especially the humiliating occupations by the U.S. Marines in 1906–09, 1912, 1917–20, and 1933–34. Meanwhile, Cuban society was modernizing and transforming. Slavery was over, although most black people continued

to face dire poverty and overt discrimination until the Revolutionary reforms of the 1960s. One important challenge for the country was the need to develop a national cultural identity that would unite the entire population—white, black, and mulatto. Insofar as this goal has been achieved, music has played an important role in the formation of such an identity. From the 1920s on, hostility toward Yankee imperialism and toward corrupt dictators like Gerardo Machado fueled the growth of a vibrant cultural nationalism. Despite the persistence of racism, the 1930s saw the belated legalization of drumming and *comparsa* processions, the increasing penetration of Afro-Cuban features in popular music, and a dynamic Afrocubanismo intellectual movement spearheaded by the music of Caturra and Roldán, the ethnographic studies of Ortiz, and the poetry of Guillén. Perhaps most important for our purposes was the emergence of dance-music genres that synthesized European and Afro-Cuban elements.

I have suggested how the *contradanza* and *danzón* became symbols of creole national identity by departing from Spanish traditions and acquiring a distinctively Cuban flavor. Much of this flavor came from the incorporation, whether subtle or overt, of Afro-Cuban syncopations. But the medium-tempo *danzón*, for all of its once controversial rhythmic “oomph,” was still a rather genteel and restrained form, far removed from the rumba loved by lower-class blacks. The genre that was to succeed in creatively fusing equal quantities of white- and black-derived musical features was the *son*, which subsequently came to dominate musical culture not only in Cuba but also in much of the Spanish Caribbean.

The roots of the *son* are traditionally ascribed to eastern Cuba, where, in the decades around 1900, musicians would sing simple call-and-response refrains to the accompaniment of bongo, the guitar-like *tres*, and perhaps a guitar and a *marimbula*, a bass instrument derived from African “thumb-pianos” like the mbira. When this folksy proto-*son* reached cosmopolitan Havana in the early 1900s, it was taken up by local Afro-Cubans who enriched it with elements from other styles and developed it into a dynamic and endlessly fertile creole song form. A basic development—derived from both the rumba and sing-along versions of the *contradanza*—was the adoption of a two-part form, in which an initial “song”-like section with narrative verses would segue to a more rhythmic *montuno* section, featuring call-and-response patterns sung over a simple harmonic ostinato. Meanwhile, most ensembles added a trumpet and replaced the *marimbula* with a stand-up bass, making the standard format a septet.

With its predominantly black musicians and its lyrics rooted in Afro-Cuban street life and slang, the *son* was initially shunned by the urban

bourgeoisie. However, from the 1920s and '30s, recordings by the Sexteto Habanero, Ignacio Piñero's Septeto Nacional, and Miguel Matamoros's Trío Matamoros became popular throughout the island and outside Cuba (where their music was often confusingly labeled "rumba").

A spinoff of the *son* was the *guajira* or *guajira-son*, which, as flourishing from the 1930s, fused a medium-tempo *son* rhythm with guitar-based backing and lyrics that praise the beauty of the Cuban countryside and the simple, happy life of the Cuban peasant, as romanticized by urban songwriters. In that sense, many early *guajiras* represented a kind of fake country music, sort of like North American commercial cowboy music. The most famous *guajira* is "Guantanamera," which uses a patriotic text by José Martí (d. 1895), the poet, writer, and organizational leader of the war for independence from Spain.

The subsequent evolution of the *son* was marked by increasing sophistication, featuring the inclusion of more complex, jazz-influenced harmonies and European instruments (horns and piano) and the gradual adoption of faster tempos and a more percussive, rhythmic sound. In that sense, the mature *son* was as much an heir to the proletarian rumba as to the suave and genteel *danzón*. The most dramatic change came in the 1940s, especially in the music of the Conjunto Casino and of bandleader Arsenio Rodríguez (d. 1970), an Afro-Cuban *tres* player, composer, and arranger. Arsenio, blinded in childhood after being kicked by a mule, became the most influential bandleader of the decade. Despite his popularity among urban blacks, he was largely shut out of the white-dominated ballrooms of Cuba and, like other black performers in the country's virtual apartheid system, his band was relegated to lower-class and often dangerous black clubs. (Unlike in 1832, white musicians now occupied the good jobs.) Although blind, Arsenio could certainly learn from such discrimination what it meant to be black, and many of his songs defiantly asserted the pride he took in his Afro-Cuban heritage, some of which was allegedly transmitted to him by his grandfather, who was born in Calabar. Arsenio's direct contact with his African ancestry gave him both a sense of the continuity of his African ancestry and an acute awareness of the cultural rupture slavery had wrought. As he sang:

I was born of Africa
 Maybe I'm from the Congo, or maybe from Ampanga . . .
 I'm not a Rodríguez, I'm not a Fernández . . .
 Maybe I'm an Amoto, maybe I'm a Momomba.⁶

Together with the Conjunto Casino, Arsenio popularized an enlarged *son* ensemble (called a *conjunto*), adding piano, second or third trumpets,

and a conga (otherwise associated with the lumpen street rumba). Most important, all of the instruments were to play regulated parts. The horn players played precomposed sectional arrangements, while the rhythm section (piano, bass, and percussion) played standardized accompaniment patterns aligned with the *clave* pattern (see Musical Examples 5A and 5B). This modernized *son* gave up some of the informal, collective looseness of the traditional *son*. But it provided a tight composite rhythm that had a unique drive and an electrifying appeal to dancers. The introduction of prearranged instrumental passages (*moñas*), rhythmic breaks (*cierres*), and other devices added variety to the *montuno* sections (which, in the earlier *son*, had just bounced along pleasantly but uneventfully).

In the early 1950s, Arsenio moved to New York, where he laid the foundations for salsa, which exuberantly exploded in the years around 1970. Although able to pay his bills and still beloved by Cubans, Arsenio never achieved stardom in the United States, partly because only Cubans knew how to dance to his syncopated, medium-tempo songs (called *son montuno*).

Better able to adapt to the New York scene were mambo bandleader Machito (Frank Grillo) and vocalist Celia Cruz (1924–2003), who achieved fame in the 1950s as the singer with the Sonora Matancera, a *conjunto* with a somewhat cleaner, less syncopated, and “whiter” sound than Arsenio’s (Celia being the *café* in the band’s *leche*, or milk). A colorful contemporary of Cruz’s was vocalist La Lupe (Guadalupe Victoria Yolí, d. 1992), who was effectively exiled to the United States in 1962 for her flamboyant and transgressive stage

persona. Despite her fine voice and entertaining demeanor, she failed to make it in the salsa scene and died in poverty.

The basic two-part formal structure of the *son* has remained the same from the 1920s to the present, and almost all salsa songs (which many Cubans would call *son*) also follow this pattern. The first part (the *tema*, *guía*, or verse section) is like a closed “song” in itself, usually lasting less than two minutes. Often



Arsenio Rodríguez.

(Adapted by Peter Manuel.)

it uses the thirty-two-bar AABA format typical of Euro-American popular songs, in which the B section is a modulating bridge. The *montuno* is usually much longer than the “song” section. It can include extended instrumental solos as well as pre-composed horn-based interludes, which punctuate the call-and-response vocals.

One of the most distinctive features of the composite rhythm of the modern (1960s and on) *son* (including most salsa songs) is the bass pattern. In most North American and Afro-American popular musics, from rock and rap to disco and doo-wop, the bass emphasizes the downbeat, falling strongly on the “one” beat of the four-beat measure. In the *son*, by contrast, the bass usually omits the downbeat entirely in a pattern known as the “anticipated bass.” You can get the feel of this rhythm by repeatedly counting “one-two-three-one-two-three-one-two” and tapping on the underlined “ones” (not the first “one”!). The pattern is called “anticipated” because the note of the last “one” indicates the chord of the following measure. The resulting effect is quite different from the steady “thump-thump-thump” of disco, merengue, and most rock. Instead, the rhythm seems to glide along in a fluid manner that is reflected in the dance style. At fast tempos, it is not too hard for gringos and the uninitiated to get lost. (If that happens, listen to the bell part—or seek private therapy from a *salsero*.) Jazz trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie used to relate with amusement and awe how he once became completely disoriented in a concert with Cuban musicians, shouting helplessly, “Where’s beat one?” The anticipated bass pattern is found, with some variation, in most salsa songs; together with the characteristically syncopated piano and percussion parts, it forms an essential cog in the intricate machinery of Latin rhythm (and is illustrated in Musical Example 14 in Chapter 4).

Another important development of the 1940s was the emergence of the mambo. This term (which originally denoted a kind of Palo devotional song) was first popularized by charanga performers Orestes López and Antonio Arcaño in the late 1930s to denote their version of the funky, ostinato-based vamp section that had been tagged on to the end of the *danzón* since José Urfé’s “El bombín de Barreto” of 1910. But the better-known mambo consisted of a sped-up, big-band version of this section. Essentially, the mambo was a fusion of Afro-Cuban rhythms with the big-band format adopted from swing jazz. The key to big-band music—aside from its ability to fill a dancehall with sound—was the concept of sectional writing for contrasting instruments, in which distinct trumpet, trombone, and saxophone sections would play interlocking, often responsorial lines. Typically, the saxes might play a melodic theme or *guajeo*-type ostinatos adapted from *tres* patterns of the *son* (or the



Benny Moré.

(Adapted by Peter Manuel.)

violin vamps of Arcaño's coda), while the trumpets might blare out interjections, and all sections would occasionally join in for climactic bursts. Mambos were primarily instrumental dance music, with vocal parts, if present, generally restricted to short nonsense phrases.

Although Cuban bands like the Orquesta Riverside were already playing mambo-style arrangements in the 1940s, the invention of the big-band mambo is usually credited to innovative

Cuban bandleader Pérez Prado, who spent most of his years touring in Mexico and elsewhere outside the island. The advent of microphones enabled bandleaders like singer Benny Moré to combine the big-band mambo format with the *son*. The mambo reached its real peak in New York City in the 1950s, where bands led by Machito (with his brother-in-law Mario Bauzá) and the Harlem-born Puerto Rican Tito Puente incorporated jazz-influenced instrumental solos and more sophisticated arrangements. These bands, together with that of Puerto Rico's Tito Rodríguez, aside from regular gigs at the Palladium, played variously for Latino, Anglo-American, and Afro-American audiences, as well as at the Jewish "Borscht Belt" resorts in the Catskills—outshining corny crossover orchestras like Xavier Cugat's and setting the stage for the salsa boom of the 1970s. The mambo dances at Manhattan's Palladium and Savoy Ballroom were, in fact, remarkable occasions that united Afro-Americans, Irish, Italians, Jews, and, last but not least, Latinos. As was often noted, from the management's point of view, "The only color that mattered was green."

The Palladium was also the site of the evolution of flashy, exhibition-style mambo dancing, which supplemented the basic moves of the Cuban *son* style with figures taken from ballroom, swing, and other styles. With Prado based chiefly in Mexico and the New York mambo bands developing their own styles, Cuban-derived music—now more inclusively called "Latin music"—had already taken on a life of its own outside the island.

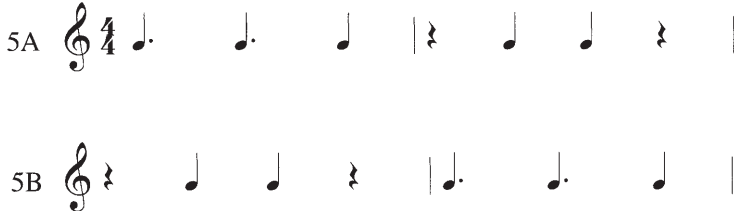


Frank “Machito” Grillo and vocalist Graciela at the Savoy Ballroom. (Courtesy of the Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.)

A Word about *Clave*

I have mentioned that *clave* (originally meaning “key,” while *clavijas* were the wooden pegs used in ships) refers to the pair of hardwood sticks used in rumba and *son*, as well as the pattern played on them. *Clave* is actually a rhythmic concept that underlies most forms of Latin (i.e., Afro-Cuban) dance music, from rumba to salsa; for musicians and, on an intuitive level, dancers and listeners, *clave* really is a “key” that makes the music fit together. Musicians swear by the importance of *clave*, and it is worth describing here, even if it is a somewhat technical matter.

In Latin dance music, there are basically two *clave* patterns, the “three-two” *clave* and the more common “two-three” *clave*. Those familiar with early rock ‘n’ roll will recognize the three-two *clave* from its use in Bo Diddley songs like “Not Fade Away” (Musical Example 5A). The two-three *clave* is the same but reversed (Musical Example 5B). A given song will be set in one or the other



Musical Example 5A: Three-two *clave*. Musical Example 5B: Two-three *clave*.

of these patterns. The *clave* rhythm has been common in Cuban music at least since the 1850s, but it may not have been until the music of Arsenio in the 1950s that its use in popular music was consciously codified and standardized.

In the traditional *rumba* and *son*, these patterns are clearly played on the *clave* sticks (although the *rumba* pattern, as shown in Musical Example 2, is slightly different). In *conjunto*, *mambo*, and *salsa* bands, the *clave* sticks are often absent, so the basic pattern is not sounded. However, in all of these forms, the *clave* pattern is always present in the minds of the musicians and, in a composite, subtle manner, in most of what they play or sing. Thus, the arranger composing the horn parts, the trumpeter or pianist improvising solos, the lead vocalist singing lines in the call-and-response *montuno*—in short, everyone—must have the *clave* pattern going in his or her head and be following it, however subtly, in the music. The idea is not to be slavishly and mechanically beating out the *clave* pattern. Instead, for example, if a piece (or a section of a piece) is in two-three *clave*, the musicians will try to suggest that pattern and, above all, to avoid playing or composing lines that suggest three-two *clave*.

Irregularities in *clave* can happen in different ways, aside from the case of a hopelessly amateurish band. Perhaps a guest soloist is present, in the form of some gringo jazz trumpeter who likes Latin music but doesn't really understand *clave*. Or perhaps, after a long percussion solo in the middle of the song where the *clave* is especially subtle, the musical director of the band cues the horns to reenter on the wrong measure. Also, a few popular songs have always been written with what hard-core musicians would regard as incorrect or *cruzado* (crossed) *clave*. An example is the 1989 hit "Cali pachanguero," by the Colombian band Grupo Niche. Chris Washburne, a New York salsa trombonist and ethnomusicology professor, told me, "That's a catchy song, and audiences love it, but most musicians hate to play it, because the *clave* is all messed up." Another event that can screw things up is when some misguided zealot in the audience stands up and starts clapping *clave*—the wrong way—and everyone else joins in. (Rhythmically challenged singers have also been known to do this on occasion. Not to mention names, but the young Marc Anthony did it at a massive concert in 1994, much to the dismay of his band members.)

Gm Dm

Vocals

ES - cu-CHE'us - TED la'e-SEN-cia DEL gua-GUAN - CO

2-3 clave

3-2 clave (wrong)

Detailed description: This musical score shows the vocal line and two different clave patterns for the song 'La esencia del guaguancó'. The vocal line is in G minor and D minor, 4/4 time, with lyrics 'ES - cu-CHE'us - TED la'e-SEN-cia DEL gua-GUAN - CO'. The '2-3 clave' pattern is in 4/4 time with a 2-beat first half and a 3-beat second half. The '3-2 clave (wrong)' pattern is also in 4/4 time but with a 3-beat first half and a 2-beat second half. Underlined syllables in the lyrics indicate the alignment with the 2-3 clave pattern.

Musical Example 6: "La esencia del guaguancó."

Vocals

POR-E-so'a - HO - RA YA YO no VUELVO/Aque-RER

3-2 clave

2-3 clave (wrong)

Detailed description: This musical score shows the vocal line and two different clave patterns for the song 'Consuélate'. The vocal line is in 4/4 time with lyrics 'POR-E-so'a - HO - RA YA YO no VUELVO/Aque-RER'. The '3-2 clave' pattern is in 4/4 time with a 3-beat first half and a 2-beat second half. The '2-3 clave (wrong)' pattern is also in 4/4 time but with a 2-beat first half and a 3-beat second half. Underlined syllables in the lyrics indicate the alignment with the 3-2 clave pattern.

Musical Example 7: "Consuélate."

If, for whatever reason, a dance band starts playing out of *clave*, knowledgeable musicians will exchange despairing glances as they play, and some veteran dancers on the floor may sense, however intuitively, that the sound is somehow jumbled and confused and perhaps this is a good time to take a break and have another beer.

You can get some idea of how *clave* is observed in the *montuno* refrains shown in "La esencia del guaguancó" (Musical Example 6), a *son* recorded by Johnny Pacheco and Pete "El Conde" Rodríguez, and from "Consuélate" (Musical Example 7), from a Cuban rumba of the 1930s by Tío Tom, later recorded in *son* and salsa versions by Eddie Palmieri.⁷ Musical Example 6 is in two-three *clave*; Musical Example 7 is in the somewhat less common three-two. In each case, several of the *clave* beats (as shown by the underlined syllables) coincide with structural beats of the melodies. You can try singing these patterns (with help, if need be) while clapping the *clave*. Then try doing the same thing over the "incorrect" three-two pattern. Ideally, you should be able to hear that the "incorrect" *clave* is out of sync with the melody. However, your reaction might still be, "What's so bad about that? It sounds OK to me." But if you listen to a lot of Latin music, you will reach a point where such incongruities sound messy and inappropriate to you (and the rest of the music will sound even better).

While the mambo and conjunto bands were in full flower, the charangas, with their quaint yet soulful flute-and-violin sound, were surviving by changing with the times and making their music hotter and more Afro-Cuban. I have mentioned how in the 1930s and '40s Antonio Arcaño's group codified the use of the "mambo" coda and shortened the opening, more "European" sections. Other charanga groups, such as the famous Orquesta Aragón, started playing up-tempo *son*, effectively Afro-Cubanizing the charanga repertoire (even if many of its audiences and performers were white). Then, around 1950, charangas got a big boost when bandleader Enrique Jorrín popularized the chachachá, a funky, medium-tempo song form with unison vocals, a rhythm like the charanga-style mambo, and a catchy "one—two—chachachá" choreography. The chachachá enjoyed its own craze in the United States, but its accompanying commercialization and Arthur Murray-style dilution also guaranteed its decline, at least among Latin musicians, who by the end of the decade seemed to be saying, "You Anglos like the chachachá, so take it. We're moving on."

Commercial or not, it was through such syntheses of Euro-American and Afro-Cuban elements that these fresh forms, especially the modernized *son*, became the favorite dance music of Cubans of all ages, classes, and races. Meanwhile, the success of the synthesis was reflected internationally, as the *son* and mambo became widely popular in the United States, Africa, and Latin America and provided the basis for what later came to be known as salsa.

In the late 1940s, New York became the crucible for another dynamic Afro-Cuban spinoff when Dizzy Gillespie teamed up with Cuban conga player Chano Pozo to form a Latin big band. Although jazz influences had already come to permeate Cuban dance music, Gillespie's band was the first to present mambo-style big-band pieces like "Manteca" not as dance music but as listening music, emphasizing jazz-style solos. Thus began the subgenre known as Latin jazz, which came to denote listening-oriented, predominantly instrumental music, usually played by a combo rather than a big band and featuring sophisticated improvised solos.

Cuban dance music reached a peak of sorts in the 1950s. While there was little audience for serious classical music, the *son*, mambo, and chachachá were in full flower, with New York and Havana as the twin poles of a pulsating Latin dance circuit. Havana had also become America's bachelor entertainment center, with its glittery world of casinos, cabarets, brothels, and roughly a hundred nightclubs. Bands led by Miguelito Cuní, Benny Moré, and Felix Chappotín (whose last name may be spelled however one likes) were in constant local and international demand.



Old trovadores. (Photographs by María Eugenia Haya ["Marucha"].
Courtesy of the Center for Cuban Studies Archives.)



But the revelry and merriment of the 1950s could barely mask the deep tensions in Cuban society that were in the process of exploding. More and more Cubans were growing disgusted with the prostitution, the poverty, and the alienation of the lower classes; the continued domination of the Cuban economy by Yankee businesses and mafiosi; and the corrupt, gangster-friendly dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, who spent most of his waking hours playing canasta and whom the U.S. government indulgently regarded as “a son of a bitch, but *our* son of a bitch.” People of various political leanings began to sympathize with the earnest urban guerrillas and with the ragtag band of bearded revolutionaries off in the Sierra Maestra led by one Fidel Castro.

“Socialism with *Pachanga*”?

Although a communist dictatorship was not what most Cuban supporters of the anti-Batista struggle had in mind, that was the direction in which the Cuban Revolution was driven by events, including hostility from Washington, D.C., Soviet friendship, and Fidel Castro’s personal vision. The Revolution had profound, and profoundly mixed, effects on every aspect of Cuban life and culture, including music. One change was that because of the U.S. embargo of Cuba, North Americans and Puerto Ricans were cut off from musical activities on the island. Cuban groups and their records were not allowed into the United States, so a myth began to spread in this country that communism had killed Cuban music. The reality is a bit more complex, and whatever the merits or demerits of the Revolution as a whole, music has exhibited considerable vigor in recent decades. In general, the communist government—at least, since the mid-1970s—has treated culture and the arts as relatively high priorities, and music has received a fair amount of support. Revolutionary leader Che Guevara envisioned Cuban communism not as a drab work regime but as a dynamic program of economic justice and lively popular culture—or, as he put it, as “socialism with *pachanga*” (referring to a popular dance rhythm of the 1950s).

Guevara’s vision was only partially achieved, and not without some egregious shortcomings—starting, perhaps, with the defection of the *pachanga*’s inventor, Eduardo Davidson, and the subsequent banning of his songs. Critics argue that the extraordinary musical vitality of the 1950s has not been matched since, with the Revolution having “Castrated,” as it were, the lively music culture that thrived in the colorful world of casinos, brothels, and nightclubs. The initial decades of the Revolution were indeed tough for dance music and musicians, as the tourist venues that had sustained them closed, the economy floundered under Castro’s harebrained mismanage-

ment, and the government seemed generally indifferent to music. While the state eventually set up a network of conservatories, the hundreds of private music schools were abolished, and it became illegal even to offer piano lessons (or cut someone's hair, or do a manicure, etc.) at one's home. (In Castro's view, "We don't want to be a petty bourgeois nation!") Matters deteriorated further in the years around 1970, when ongoing attacks and sabotage by the CIA precipitated a state-of-siege mentality under which censorship and persecutions intensified. As the state—the nearly exclusive employer of professional musicians—did little to promote Cuban dance music, many young people came to prefer rock and, in any case, had little opportunity to hear live music of any sort.

The performance of the record industry—a nationalized bureaucracy since the early 1960s—was similarly undistinguished. Fans of capitalism would say that even a well-meaning state bureaucracy is simply incapable of running anything as complex as a music industry, not to mention a national economy, and that the Cubans who knew how to run it had gone to Miami. (Others, of course, might point to state-run enterprises—from postal services to railroads—that operate very well.) Because the mass media in Cuba did not disseminate any music by the numerous defectors, Cubans lost touch with the music of expatriates like Celia Cruz just as the bamboo curtain kept North Americans in the dark about the Cuban music scene. Meanwhile, salaried musicians were thrown together in motley groups and sent on tours to rural cooperative farms and Soviet-bloc towns. Among the most frustrated musicians were Latin jazz superstars like trumpeter Arturo Sandoval and saxophonist Paquito D'Rivera, who were prohibited from playing jazz professionally and were unable to tour the United States because of the American embargo; both eventually defected to that country.

In the early 1980s, the situation improved considerably. The foreign salsa vogue—and a tour by Venezuelan *salsero* Oscar D'León—did much to rekindle youth interest in local dance music. In effect, the *son*, after being neglected in its homeland, had to get a fashionable facelift and approval stamp in New York before being revived in Cuba. Belatedly, the government decided to promote it, while also outgrowing its hang-ups about rock, jazz, and Afro-Cuban religion (and homosexuality). The two most popular groups of the era were Los Van Van, a sort of enlarged charanga ensemble that popularized the *comparsa*-influenced *songo* beat, and Irakere, a brassy supergroup that did both straight-ahead dance music and eclectic avant-garde syntheses of *son*, jazz, rock, and Afro-Cuban music. In a more straightforward *son/salsa* format were groups such as Adalberto Álvarez's Son 14, which was as hot as any New York band.

In some respects, the Revolution had more impact on how music was produced and consumed than on the nature of the music itself. With the nationalization of all aspects of the music industry—from clubs and conservatories to the manufacture of conga drums—all forms of commercialism were removed from music culture. Qualified students, including many from humble backgrounds, have enjoyed free music education at conservatories, which have continued to churn out impressive ranks of rigorously trained performers. Most dance-band musicians are steel-fingered, classically trained graduates of these institutions. Particularly lionized has been Leo Brouwer (b. 1939), who is globally acclaimed as the finest composer for guitar in the modern era.

Since the 1980s, musicians have been free to experiment, and they have not been pressured to politicize their art (although they would also be ill-advised to criticize the basic goals of the Revolution in public). Many professional musicians, once they achieved full-time status (*plantilla*), came to enjoy leisurely work schedules. In the 1980s, Antonio, a bass player in a hotel dance band, told me, “I play three hours a day, and for that I get full salary, a month’s vacation, and, of course, free health care. The rest of the time I practice, hang out, and watch American TV, which I pick up via my homemade antenna.” (That kind of low productivity is exactly what is wrong with Cuban socialism, say some critics.)

Meanwhile, the state has supported all kinds of old and new music, from *punto* contests to the modernist compositions of Brouwer and the pyrotechnics of jazz pianist Gonzalo Rubalcaba. For people such as folklorist Rogelio Martínez Furé, director of the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional, the biggest improvement that resulted from the Cuban Revolution was the integration of lower-class Afro-Cubans and their culture into the mainstream of Cuban society. This reform was achieved partly by raising the lower class’s standard of living and education (at the expense of the rich); by eliminating the racial discrimination that barred black people from many pre-Revolutionary clubs, beaches, hotels, colleges, and restaurants; and by providing state support—however qualified and inconsistent—for Afro-Cuban culture and music and thus fostering a new, integrated Cuban sense of identity. Although racism and various forms of discrimination certainly persist, Cuba and its culture in many ways have grown increasingly blacker in the Revolutionary period, partly due to the emigration of several hundred thousand whites around 1960. The openness to black culture was also indirectly promoted by Cuban involvement in Angola in the 1980s, where the Cuban army, at considerable cost, defeated the invading South African army, guaranteeing Angola’s freedom and hastening the downfall of apartheid.

At its best, the Revolution fostered a fervent nationalism, an invigorated sense of purpose and social justice, and state support for education and the arts that together unleashed considerable creative energy, manifesting itself in several aspects of Cuban life, from music and cinema to sports and medical research. For that matter, the vitality of music in Revolutionary Cuba must also be viewed in relation to changes in society as a whole. Communist Cuba, for example, was for several decades the only country in the Americas with a music industry free of under-the-table payoffs, liquor company and narco-dollar sponsorship, advertisements, and commercialism in general. It has also been the only country in the hemisphere with no homelessness, drug addiction, gun violence, and malnutrition. Insofar as these aspects of modern Cuba have influenced musicians, audiences, and cultural life in general, they have been relevant features of the Cuban musical milieu. Another relevant feature, unfortunately, has been the stultifying atmosphere of censorship, fear, and bureaucratized stagnation that has impoverished many aspects of intellectual life, artistic creativity, and civil society in general.

The most distinctive new music associated with the Revolution was *nueva trova*, the Cuban variety of Latin American *nueva canción* (new song), which itself was loosely related to North American “protest music.” *Nueva trova* emerged in the late 1960s, and insofar as its performers were inspired by Yankee singers like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, they had to struggle to over-

The *nueva trova* singer Pablo Milanés. (Photograph by María Eugenia Haya [“Marucha”]. Courtesy of the Center for Cuban Studies Archives.)





Poster for 1973 festival of political song. (Courtesy of the Center for Cuban Studies Archives.)

come a profound mistrust—including active repression—on the part of the state bureaucracy. Nevertheless, in the 1970s and '80s, *nueva trova*'s leading performers, Pablo Milanés and Silvio Rodríguez, became international stars, especially among educated, politically progressive Latin American youths. Some *nueva trova* songs made self-conscious use of traditional Cuban ele-

ments, but most have been in the singer-songwriter vein of international balladeers. Much *nueva trova* sounds essentially like soft-rock ballads, appreciated by listeners for its sophisticated lyrics, its often beautiful melodies, and the progressive politics of its singers. Many *nueva trova* songs have been about love, but many have dealt with contemporary sociopolitical issues. While most songs implicitly endorse the ideals of the Revolution, they have generally avoided vulgar slogan mongering, preferring the pensive yet committed affirmation of Pablo Milanés’s “I Don’t Live in a Perfect Society” or Silvio Rodríguez’s “Little Daytime Serenade,” a subtle, poignant tribute to the martyrs of the Cuban wars for independence and the Revolution.

The “Special Period” and Its Special Music

In the early 1990s, the Cuban economy collapsed because of the loss of the Soviet umbilical cord, the inflexibility of hard-line communist economic policies (“Castro Inconvertible”), and an ongoing American embargo designed either to provoke civil war or to starve the country (children and all) into submission. Life for most Cubans has since come to revolve around securing basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter. With the state-run economy more inefficient than ever, black-marketeering has become pervasive, and a spirit of cynicism and opportunism has largely replaced the Revolutionary ideals of earlier decades. As the government has belatedly turned to tourism to stay afloat, there has been a reemergence of the 1950s-style prostitution and the alienation generated by an opulent tourist sector that is inaccessible to Cubans. Accompanying these is a demoralizing parallel economy that separates those who have access to dollars from the other 95 percent, who have to survive on pathetically small peso salaries—hence, the standard street greeting “¿Qué vola, asere?” (What’s up, bro?), answered with, “Ya tú sabes, la lucha” (You know, struggling). As of 2016, the “special period” continues as dismally as ever for most people, although recent laws have allowed a small private sector to germinate, and many entrepreneurs in Havana and elsewhere have been able to profit from the expanded tourism (which now even includes Americans, since President Barack Obama restored diplomatic relations and eased travel and trade restrictions in 2014). If the Cubans are lucky, they may be able to open up the economy Chinese-style, without letting its assets be plundered, Russian-style, by local and foreign kleptocrats.

The effects of the changes on music have been substantial. One structural development has been a decrease in state subsidies of and controls on the arts and a new tolerance, or even promotion, of any kind of music that can

bring in a few dollars. Classical music and zarzuela, which have little tourist appeal, have suffered. Santería and its music can be said to be thriving, as the state has fully recognized Afro-Cuban religions, and from all accounts more people than ever are turning to Santería as a source of social, civic, and spiritual fulfillment. Many songs, whether in rap or salsa styles, openly celebrate Santería. For its part, the appeal of *nueva trova* has decreased along with Revolutionary idealism, although a few singers have modernized the genre in style and content. Especially notable in the 1990s was Carlos Varela, whose most famous song, “Guillermo Tell,” portrayed William Tell’s son asking his aging father to give him the bow and arrow and put the apple on his own head. As Cuban audiences knew well how to interpret this, Varela was clearly pushing the boundaries of the permissible, as did Pedro Luís Ferrer in “El Abuelo Paco”:

Be patient with Grandpa, remember how much he’s done . . .
 Don’t forget that he has a revolver and a knife
 And as long as they’re not taken away, he poses a threat
 Even if you know the answer is no, say yes,
 If you contradict him, it will go badly for you.

(In 2014, of course, Grandpa finally retired, and his slightly younger brother Raúl introduced some modest reforms.)

Grave problems notwithstanding, the post-Soviet period has been a fertile time for dance music, especially in the emergence of a new sound called timba. As popularized in the 1990s by NG La Banda, Charanga Habanera, and other bands, most timba sounds like jazzed-up salsa with an aggressive, avant-garde edge, featuring multiple, often rapped or shouted *coro* refrains, virtuoso horn lines, funky slapped bass lines, and “break-downs” in which several instruments drop out. The lines played by NG La Banda’s horn section were so formidable that it became known as the “metals of terror.” In the tradition of calypsos like “Rum and Coca-Cola,” lyrics typically comment with wry ambivalence on the world of tourists and dollar-chasing *jineteras*—a word that literally means “female jockeys” but now implies women who, one way or another, hustle dollars from tourists. Charanga Habanera’s “La temba” was typical, especially in its use of contemporary slang:

Find yourself a *temba* [an eligible middle-age bachelor] who can
 keep you,
 so that you can have what you need,
 a *papirriqui* [sugar daddy] with *wanikiki* [dollars].

Dance has changed accordingly, with the standard salsa-type *casino* couple dance being supplemented by the *despelote* in which women shake their waists freestyle with their hands raised. The dominance of women in this style, which parallels counterparts in reggae and soca dancing, seems to reflect the independence and entrepreneurial spirit of *jineteras* in the new, dollar-driven milieu. Alternately, dancers might form a collective *rueda de casino*, in which several couples do complex figures following signals shouted by a leader. Meanwhile, the poor bureaucrats, for their part, weren't quite sure how to handle the whole timba scene. On the one hand, the state initially disapproved of the flashy, consumerist lifestyle of the stars and the way that the whole genre was entrenched both in the seedy side of tourist culture and in urban, black, lumpen-proletarian street culture. On the other hand, timba put Cuba back on the Latin music map, and the scene brought in money, especially via taxes paid by the musicians, who since the 1990s have been allowed to tour abroad and record with foreign labels. Since that decade, the timba scene has diminished a bit, but a few hot groups, such as those of Adalberto Álvarez and Pupy Pedroso, still perform in Cuba, Europe, and elsewhere.

Meanwhile, although most Cubans have to make do with pathetically small salaries and rations, the combination of free health care and education, subsidized housing and food, and abundant leisure time can make for a fertile artistic environment in which musicians have plenty of time and means to practice, rehearse, and create. As a result, some of the bands, such as Bamboleo, get to be tighter and hotter than anything in the American salsa scene, where pickup bands have been the norm for decades. They also manage to produce entertaining videos on limited budgets, such as Bamboleo's "La que manda soy yo," a witty, upbeat challenge to Latin machismo. Many Cuban groups are hobbled by the ongoing defections of key members to the United States, but with the new ease of travel, some of those who jumped ship, such as Manolín González and Issac Delgado, are back in Cuba for much of the year.⁸

A different sort of musical development came in the form of the American guitarist Ry Cooder's trio of albums in 1997 and Wim Wenders's subsequent film *The Buena Vista Social Club*, which featured a set of octogenarian performers of 1920s-style *son* and bolero. The records and film, with their nostalgic "discovery" of this quaint and authentic-sounding music, became international hits (except among the more pragmatic Latino communities), and the performers enjoyed unprecedented international stardom in their twilight years. Cubans themselves had mixed reactions. The state was happy with the money made, some Cubans were proud of the new fad of their heri-

tage, timba musicians felt annoyed by the focus on such old-timers, and most people seemed at once indifferent to this long-out-of-vogue music and bemused by the faddish eccentricity of the international music scene.

Since the turn of the millennium, Buena Vista-type bands still perform at open-air tourist restaurants in Old Havana, but other aspects of the Cuban music scene have modernized in their own way. With the gingerly liberalization of the economy, many nightclubs—whether privately owned or state-owned—have sprung up throughout the country, providing a new network of performance venues and places for young people to dance and enjoy themselves, whether to live bands or, more often, deejayed sound systems. The American tourist can also find much entertainment. One visiting student described a typical Saturday afternoon in Havana this way:

My friends and I were walking along and happened on an eclectic modern art gallery called El Ojo del Ciclón [The Eye of the Cyclone], where a group of people were partying and immediately invited us in, offering us rum and Coke in plastic cups. We danced and partied, and then the locals invited us to go out, so we crammed into someone's blue 1964 Ford taxi, which had Rihanna playing on the radio. They took us to La Gruta [The Grotto], a dance club for Cubans, and for the rest of the night we danced to reggaeton, salsa, and American pop. Every time my friend would start dancing, the space would kind of clear and the gorgeous and not so gorgeous *jineteras* would swarm him like hungry dogs fighting to dance with him.⁹

Unfortunately for locals, some of the best nightclubs charge admission fees equivalent to what an average Cuban earns in a few months, so their clientele is limited to tourists, children of Communist Party big shots, and people who are somehow plugged into the dollar economy. As for hearing music in the media, there are, of course, state-run radio and TV, but the main mass medium nowadays is *el paquete*, meaning regularly updated USB flash drives loaded with digital bundles of all kinds of music, videos, movies, and more. The drives are distributed throughout the island by informal-sector networks of entrepreneurs and gofers and then purchased, shared, and plugged into laptops, cell phones, TVs, auto stereos, and boom boxes. No need for the Internet—not to mention records, CDs, or cassettes!

For the performer—whether a rapper, a *trova*-type singer-songwriter, or a timba bandleader—the new era presents new challenges and opportunities. You can forget about getting the old-style, cushy *plantilla* job, and about making money through sales of recordings, unless you manage to make it as

big as Gente de Zona, the reggaeton superstars. Instead, you've got to make it in the local club scene, and, ideally, in Miami and especially Europe, where Cuban music of various sorts is widely popular and some actual money can be made—and a little money goes a long way back in Cuba. To get such gigs, one needs, for promotion, some recordings and music videos, produced in local studios either at one's own expense or via a backer with whom one cuts some sort of deal. A video might cost \$5,000, which is absurdly cheap by foreign standards but equivalent to more than twenty years' salary for the average Cuban. Exhibiting the same ingenuity with which Cubans keep their 1950s Chevies running, some of the videos (visible on the website of the state-run Premio Lucas competition) are remarkably creative and professional-looking.

In the early 2000s, foreign observers were particularly excited by the emergence of a local hip-hop scene, with rappers like Los Aldeanos and Anónimo Consejo pushing the boundaries of how much sociopolitical criticism would be tolerated. With its North American origins and its penchant for angry dissidence, rap was precisely the sort of thing that the Cuban regime would have opposed in earlier decades, as it did with rock in the 1970s. This time around, however, the state was determined not to be so heavy-handed, so the decision was made, including by Fidel Castro himself, to embrace Cuban rap as a reflection of how the island can keep up with trends despite the embargo (and maybe earn some *wanikiki* at the same time). The government—perhaps in a policy of “containment”—established the Agencia Cubana de Rap (Cuban Rap Agency) to support the art by organizing concerts and recordings and facilitating contacts with the foreign journalists and intellectuals who fawned over the rappers as the new voices of dissidence. For these starry-eyed but influential foreign fans, Cuban rap seemed to be reviving the spirit of 1970s *nueva canción* and recapturing the idealism that American rap supposedly once had and lost in the early 1980s.

For their part, the rappers learned how to tread the line between acceptable critique and seditious opposition by framing their complaints as “positive” support for the original goals of the Revolution. As one rapper said, the new situation “has brought back the need to talk about things that weren't talked about before, things like racism, sexism, homophobia . . . in a process that's healthy for the Revolution.”¹⁰ However, with their stentorian, angry diatribes, the rappers never established more than niche status in Cuba, although the apolitical emigré group Orishas earned well-deserved popularity in Europe. To make matters worse, in 2014 it emerged that the CIA had been indirectly supporting Los Aldeanos—probably unbeknownst to its members—effectively discrediting the group and reminding Cuban

hard-liners that any relaxation of censorship in the island will be exploited, however ineptly, by American plots to subvert the government.

If rap presented one sort of challenge to Cuban Revolutionary cultural policy, a different sort was presented by reggaeton, the music that, of course, has taken the Latin music scene by storm in recent decades. Production and performance of reggaeton, as with rap, mostly involve only a vocalist or two and an accompaniment track produced by some software-handy beat maker. The success these people enjoy, which they flaunt in the form of bling and cell phones, may be resented by timba musicians and others who have spent years mastering their instruments. The defiant materialism is also directly contradictory to state socialist ideals, with reggaeton seemingly associated with the black underclass as well as with the *mikis* (Mickey Mouse people) whose access to dollars allows them to attend clubs and flaunt their cell phones and designer clothing. In other ways, rap and reggaeton are as different in Cuba as elsewhere. If Cuban rap is about moralistic, grumpy hectoring and protesting, reggaeton is about dancing and having fun. If its lyrics are controversial, it's not because they are political but because they are often lewd, money-oriented, and, dare we say, rather on the shallow side. And unlike rap, reggaeton generates real money—for the artists, the clubs that host it, and even the state. And by this point, with the advent of commercial nightclubs and a gray-market music scene, the bureaucratic squabbles between government institutions are increasingly irrelevant, as was the denial of the Premio Lucas music video award in 2011 to Osmani García's ode to oral sex, "Chupi chupi," despite its phenomenal popularity. Who the Fidel cares whether some bureaucrats like it or not?!

Those who wish *reguetoneros* would cultivate Cuban musical sounds rather than ape foreign ones make much of the handful of "Cubatón" songs that incorporate elements of timba and rumba, but most reggaeton fans and performers are less interested in developing a distinct Cuban sound than in being part of the broader pan-Caribbean/Newyorican youth scene. Young Cubans want to feel and show that they can do reggaeton as well as anyone. And indeed they can, with hits like Gente de Zona's pop-reggaeton "Bailando" garnering more than a billion views on YouTube. Aside from the sort of busy, multi-tracked sound of much Cuban reggaeton, perhaps the distinctly Cuban elements are most evident in dance styles, where locals mix up the basic *perreo* with moves from rumba, timba-style *tembleque* (the shake), and other Afro-Cuban genres. With the lively coexistence of timba, reggaeton, and other idioms, and the sprouting of commercial dance clubs, the nightlife in Havana and a few other cities is better than it's been for many decades.

Miami Comes Alive

Meanwhile, a hundred miles to the north, Miami has belatedly emerged as a lively center for Latin and Cuban music, after decades of somnolence. Miami is home to around 800,000 Cuban Americans, especially white and bourgeois exiles from the Revolution and their descendants. Despite the Miami community's size, the city's Latin music scene has traditionally been weakened by a shortage of talent and a ferocious banning of any musicians deemed less than rabidly anti-Castro—a category that has included not only Cuban nationals but non-Cuban salsa stars Oscar D'León, Ruben Blades, and others. Until the past decade, the few local venues that dared to host occasional visiting Cuban musicians were subjected to bombings and violent protests, with the police blandly looking the other way. But in the new millennium, Miami has finally emerged as a cosmopolitan cultural as well as economic hub of the Latin United States, enlivened by a new, more open-minded generation of Cubans as well as the presence of Cuban defectors and part-time residents. The community's racial complexion changed somewhat with the arrival of thousands of Afro-Cubans during the Mariel boatlift of 1980 and the influx of "boat people" (*balseros*) in subsequent years. The ranks of these refugees included many *rumberos* and Santería musicians whose traditions finally took root and came to flourish in the area. Then the Cuban government relaxed its own travel restrictions, allowing many islanders—including rappers and reggaeton artists—to become regular visitors or residents. Nowadays Miami is a dynamic hub of reggaeton, enlivened by the presence and interaction of visiting Cubans, Cuban Americans like Pitbull, and a young generation that is happy to dance to any hit song, whether it was produced by locals, Puerto Ricans, or Cuban nationals. Collaborations are especially successful, such as Gente de Zona's "Bailando," with the Spanish-born, U.S.-based Enrique Iglesias, and the ribald reggaeton hit "El taxi," by Pitbull and Cuban vocalist Osmani García.

Further Reading

Cuban writers have produced many some books on all varieties of Cuban music, but they are in Spanish and generally are unavailable even in Cuba, not to mention elsewhere. Spanish-language books available (with a bit of hunting) in the United States include Natalio Galán's magisterial but little-known masterpiece *Cuba y sus sonos* (Valencia, Spain: Pre-Textos, 1983). Alejo Carpentier's dated but still remarkable *La música en Cuba* (1946) is available in English as *Music in Cuba*, edited by Timothy Brennan, trans-

lated by Alan West-Durán (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). The best overview of Cuban music before the 1950s is Ned Sublette's masterly *Cuba and Its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2004). Other fine studies are Geoffrey Baker, *Buena Vista in the Club: Rap, Reggaeton, and Revolution in Havana* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011); Robin Moore, *Music and Revolution: Cultural Change in Socialist Cuba* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Robin Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness: Afrocubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920–1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997); and Vincenzo Perna, *Timba: The Sound of the Cuban Crisis* (London: Ashgate, 2005). See also Peter Manuel, ed., *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), chap. 2.

Puerto Rico

MUCH OF URBAN PUERTO RICO looks more or less like parts of the mainland United States. After all, in its “commonwealth” status, Puerto Rico, although not a state, is politically and economically part of the United States. Its culture is also a mixed bag of the indigenous and the imported. Certainly, there is plenty of mainstream stateside culture there, from Beyoncé to Burger King. For that matter, in speaking of Puerto Rican society, it is ultimately impossible to separate the island from the mainland United States, where half of the people of Puerto Rican descent live. Likewise, New York is the largest Puerto Rican city and has been the biggest center for some kinds of Puerto Rican dance music since the 1930s. But there are many aspects of Puerto Rican culture that really flourish only on the island, especially its rich heritage of folk-derived musics, from rural songs to the lively percussive plena and bomba.

In my first trip to Puerto Rico, I visited an Anglo friend, Al, who had married a Puerto Rican woman and lived in San Juan.

“How do you get along with your in-laws?” I asked.

“It’s been fine since I learned to dance,” he replied. “That was a big problem at first. It seemed that every time I was over there, at the drop of a hat someone would put on a record, and then it’s party time, and I have to dance with the mother, the grandmother, the aunts, you name it. But I didn’t know how to dance Latin-style, so I felt like a real *pendejo* [not a nice word]. Then I actually took lessons for almost a year and learned to dance salsa, merengue, bolero, all that stuff. Since then it’s been great. Man, these people just love to dance.”

“Do you ever hear plena?”

“All the time. There’s a business being picketed by striking union workers across from my apartment, and the protesters sing plena most of the day.”

“Sounds more like a party than a picket line,” I mused. “Well, that’s certainly how some people felt in New York, when it seemed to them that the Puerto Rican contingent in street demonstrations was turning them into fiestas. But that’s how they use plena down here. No student protest is complete without it.”

“What about bomba?” I asked, eager to see the island’s oldest Afro-Caribbean dance form.

“That can be a bit harder to find. But if we’re lucky we’ll see some at the *fiesta patronal* in Loíza next weekend.”

And indeed we did. But before I tell you about that, let’s review some of the historical background of Puerto Rican music.

Puerto Rico and Cuba: “The Two Wings of the Same Bird”

In its history and culture, Puerto Rico has much in common with Cuba, its sister colony under Spanish rule until 1898. As in Cuba, the Spanish conquistadors who claimed Puerto Rico in 1493 found a local Taino Indian population, whom they enslaved and soon effectively exterminated as a distinct ethnic group. Taino culture also died out, but as in Cuba, several Taino words survive, especially food and place names—including the island’s original name, Borinquen (Borikén). This name and the image of Taino culture in general live on as symbols of national identity and of a free and independent Puerto Rico. Like Cuba, colonial Puerto Rico became populated by substantial numbers of Europeans from Spain and elsewhere and by slaves brought from Africa and other Caribbean islands.

From the 1840s, Cuba and Puerto Rico were the only remaining Latin American colonies of Spain, and their cultural links and shared struggle for independence united them as “the two wings of the same bird,” in the words of Puerto Rican poet Lola Rodríguez de Tió. As more and more Puerto Ricans grew frustrated with backward and oppressive Spanish rule, a nationalistic creole culture developed on the island in tandem with its Cuban counterpart. From the early 1800s until today, Puerto Ricans have avidly borrowed and mastered various music styles from Cuba and elsewhere, including the Cuban *son*, rumba, and bolero, and the Dominican merengue, not to mention rock, rap, and reggaeton. Indeed, the richness of Puerto

Rican musical culture derives in large part from the way it has adopted so many imported musics and turned them into something new and local while at the same time nurturing its own dynamic folk and contemporary popular musics. Some of the major Puerto Rican music genres can also be seen as counterparts to Cuban ones; thus, for example, the Puerto Rican *seis* and *danza*, discussed later, can be regarded as parallels to Cuban campesino music and the *danzón*, respectively.

But Puerto Rico should not be regarded as simply a miniature Cuba, especially since genres like the *seis*, bomba, and plena are distinctly Puerto Rican creations, owing little to Cuban influence in their traditional forms. Beyond that, there are significant historical, cultural, and political differences between the two islands, which are reflected in their distinct musical heritages. One difference is that while Cuba's sugar-plantation economy brought about the massive importation of African slaves in the nineteenth century, Puerto Rico's main agricultural products in the Spanish period were tobacco and coffee, neither of which required large amounts of slave labor. As a result, proportionally fewer Africans were brought to Puerto Rico; slaves never amounted to more than 12 percent of the population, and the institution of slavery as a whole was far less widespread and culturally significant than in Cuba (or in the United States, for that matter). Partly as a consequence of this, neo-African music and religion are less prominent in Puerto Rico than in Cuba.

The islands' political fortunes also diverged after 1898. While both came under the domination of the United States, in Puerto Rico this took the form of direct colonial rule. After the institutionalization of the "commonwealth" arrangement in 1952, Puerto Rico achieved the highest average standard of living in Latin America, but North American rule has been a mixed blessing. Most Puerto Ricans lived in dire poverty until the 1950s, when Governor Luis Muñoz Marín's combination of socialist public works, capitalist investment stimuli, and incentives to emigrate helped uplift the island economy. However, industry and agribusiness brought pollution and ended the island's former self-sufficiency, so that it has since exported most of its products to the mainland and imported most of what it consumes. Most of the rural population has been effectively dispossessed, driven to seek work in San Juan, New York City, Florida, and elsewhere in the United States. Puerto Rican migrants developed an acute sense of marginalization and alienation, while many on the island came to resent the dominance of mainland corporations and the inundation of cheap American commercial culture. Since the early 2000s, globalization and the phasing out of tax breaks have led many American manufacturers to leave the island, and Puerto Rico's economy and

standard of living have fallen dangerously, with an accompanying rise in crime and drug addiction and a renewed exodus to the mainland. Under such conditions, Latin music, and especially indigenous music genres, have taken on a special role in Puerto Rican culture as symbols of an independent national identity.

European-Derived Musics

The Hispanic-derived musical forms that evolved in Puerto Rico reflected the class stratification of colonial society. Classical and light-classical musics flourished in the salons of the small but culturally significant elite, which consisted mostly of agricultural landowners, or *hacendados*. Most *hacendados* had natural cultural ties to Spain, but as in Cuba, autocratic and economically repressive colonial dictatorship bred increasing discontent. One colonial governor declared, “The locals can be ruled with a whip and a violin,” while another banned beards because they looked subversive to him. Frustration with such misrule fed nationalistic sentiment and conditioned the development of an aristocratic creole culture.

The primary urban base for this culture was the southern town of Ponce rather than the capital, San Juan, whose cultural and intellectual life was stifled by the colonial bureaucracy and the reactionary Catholic Church. The musical form that came to embody the spirit of emerging bourgeois nationalism was the creole *danza*, whose trajectory in some ways paralleled that of its counterpart in Cuba. The *contradanza*—with its longways-style format of men and women commencing in opposing lines—had been the predominant salon dance in Puerto Rico in the first half of the 1800s. Like its Cuban counterpart, it often involved the first couple executing a series of figures, which would then have to be reproduced without error by subsequent couples. Alternately, a caller (*bastonero*) would dictate the figures.

By the 1840s–50s, this collective, rule-bound format had come to be seen as stuffy and stale, and waltz-style independent couple dancing came into vogue, as in Europe and Cuba. The new emphasis on romantic and perhaps even sensual couple dancing—rather than “family-fun” collective dancing—provoked some opposition, and in 1848 the priggish Spanish governor, Juan de la Pezuela, attempted ineffectually to prohibit the new style (which could confusingly be called “merengue” at the time). In subsequent decades, the *danza* (as it was increasingly called) came to be the most popular local dance, especially as performed by small horn-based bands like those in Cuba. While accommodating influences from Cuba and elsewhere, Puerto Rican musicians turned the *danza* idiom into something new and distinctly local. One

direction was that taken by Manuel Tavárez (1843–95), whose solo piano *danzas* transformed the genre from a quaint and provincial dance-music form into an elegant, sophisticated light-classical idiom, comparable in style and even quality to the lighter works of Chopin. A more populist, dance-oriented direction was taken by Juan Morel Campos (d. 1896), an astoundingly prolific composer and bandleader whose hundreds of *danzas* were performed at soirées throughout the island’s towns in the decades around 1900. The Puerto Rican *danzas*, like the *danzón* then reigning in Cuba, used the familiar creole *cinquillo* ostinato but had various features—including “obligato” counterpoint melodies played on the tuba-like *bombardino*—that gave it a unique character. By the 1920s, the *danza* had become archaic. Although no longer popular at dancehalls, it is still often heard at weddings, and the unofficial Puerto Rican anthem, “La borinqueña,” is a suave *danza* rather than a pompous martial air.¹

More resilient and widespread forms of creole music were developed by the island’s small farmers, the *jíbaros*. White and mixed-race peasants who accounted for the vast majority of the population until the 1930s, the *jíbaros* have been regarded as the epitome of traditional Puerto Rican identity. In literature and song they have long been celebrated, however paternalistically and nostalgically, for their legendary hospitality, individuality, self-sufficiency, and love of the simple pleasures of nature, coffee, fiestas, and homespun music. Accordingly, *jíbaro* music has been regarded as a quintessential symbol of island culture, however diminished its actual popularity is now.

The most distinctive feature of *jíbaro* music is its typical ensemble of *cuatro* (a guitar relative with five doubled strings), guitar, and assorted percussion instruments (usually *güiro* and maracas). The *jíbaro* music repertoire today includes several forms of obvious European origin, such as the waltz and the mazurka, along with the Cuban-derived *guaracha* and the occasional Dominican merengue. But the backbone of the *jíbaro* repertoire consists of the purely local *seis* and *aguinaldo*.

Both the *seis* and the *aguinaldo* have several subvarieties, distinguished by stock melodies and harmonic progressions. They are named variously after places of origin (*seis fajardeño*, *aguinaldo orocoveño*), musicians (*seis andino*), or formal features (*seis con décimas*). *Aguinaldos* are particularly associated with the Christmas season, when roving bands of amateur musicians (*parrandas*) stroll from house to house, singing, drinking, and partying. Since a visit by such an entourage can be unexpected, it is typically referred to as an *asalto*, or assault.

In its heyday, the *seis* often accompanied dancing, with men and women in opposite lines. While *jíbaros* were legendary for their hospitality and so-

ciability, Manuel Alonso noted in his 1849 chronicle *El jíbaro*, “Treading on another man’s foot, bumping into him, a lover’s jealousy, a spectator’s smile and such incidents not infrequently cause dances to end in knife battles.” From the 1930s, such dances declined, especially as *jibaros* themselves became an endangered species, losing their land to agribusiness conglomerates like the United Fruit Company.

With the decline of dancing, the most important aspect of the *seis* and the *aguinaldo* has been the lyrics, which since have constituted a rich body of oral literature chronicling the joys and sorrows of the Puerto Rican people. *Seis* and *aguinaldo* lyrics, like those of the Cuban *punto*, are generally in the ten-line *décima* form, which, though derived from Spain, largely died out in that country. It is important to remember that, as in Cuba, poetry and especially the *décima* have been not purely aristocratic forms but idioms widely cultivated by ordinary folk. Partly as a result of the low literacy prevailing until the mid-twentieth century, oral culture has been particularly vital in Puerto Rico, and it is safe to say that poetry in general has been much more widely cultivated on the island than in the United States. Particularly prized is the ability of the poet-singer (*trovador*) to improvise *décimas* on the spot, whether on a given *pie forzado* (forced foot, or the final line of a *décima*) or in response to a competitor in a *controversia*. Accordingly, the lyric content of the *seis* and the *aguinaldo* is rich, dealing with a wide variety of topics. The timeless themes of love, patriotism, maternal devotion, and religion are prominent, along with all manner of topical sociopolitical commentary. Often lyrics relate the cruel misfortune of the singer, who laments, *triste y olvidado*—sad and forgotten. Other *décimas* are humorous and satirical, particularly in the case of *controversias*, such as this one between the famed *jíbaro* singer Chuito (Jesús Sánchez) and his son, Chuitín:

CHUITÍN:

Come with me, my friend, let’s go hear Ejío’s band,
it’s a hot party, and they say it’ll go on till dawn.
My wife is so proper, she’ll stay at home.
Don’t say no, let’s go party,
and I’ll show you that I’m the boss in my house.

CHUITO:

I won’t go there with you,
because everyone knows your wife is fearsome and disliked by all.
If she finds out you’re planning to drink,
God bless you, she won’t let you go.

She won't let you move from the plaza to the corner,
because I know that she's the boss in your house.

CHUITÍN:

You're all wrong, you know that I'll go by car
and I'll spend the whole night dancing.
When I get a little tipsy, I even dance the *guaguancó*.
The dance has started, so let's go and boogie,
I'll show you who's the boss at my house.

CHUITO:

You're a fool if you go there, because your wife has you boxed up in a coffin.
She'll give you a black eye, listen Chuitín, you'll see.
In the morning when you return she'll be as hot as a coal,
because I know in your house she's the boss.²

In the first half of the twentieth century, Puerto Rican society changed beyond recognition under the impact of U.S. rule. As American agribusiness acquired most of the arable land, most *hacendados* were bankrupted, and the *jibaros* were dispossessed. Most Puerto Ricans lived in abject poverty until the 1940s. Deprived of livelihood, they migrated en masse to cities, especially San Juan, where they congregated in slums like La Perla. The rate of urbanization was dramatic: In 1900, roughly 95 percent of the population was rural; by 1970, it was 60 percent urban. From the 1940s on, hundreds of thousands of *jibaros* migrated to the mainland United States in search of work. As a result, *jibaros*, along with their lifestyle, have nearly disappeared, although their music lives on.

Many *seises* and *aguinaldos* chronicle the migrant experience, discussed later. Some focus on the problems of adjusting to modernization:

The first shoes I got, I used to wear them on the wrong feet.
When I came to Mayagüez, caramba, what a spectacle I caused.³

Others, like this poignant *décima* sung by Ramito (Flor Morales Ramos, 1915–90), the most brilliant *jibaro* singer of his century, nostalgically lament the passing of an entire way of life:

My Borinquen has changed so much,
and for me it's a surprise.
It causes me great pain,

that the past is so transformed.
 It's become so modernized,
 in a way I can't explain.
 Today, while I sing, I'll tell you,
 I feel an emptiness in my soul,
 because they've changed my hut
 for a house made of cement.

There is no one to shoe
 either the mare or the stallion,
 and in preparing his vegetables,
 the peasant doesn't even want to do it by hand anymore.
 He no longer listens intently to the song of the rooster,
 and to feel at home,
 he can no longer walk about in the morning
 when the river and brook
 are replaced by a cement canal.⁴

While the decline of *jibaro* culture is chronicled in such song texts, it is also clear in the reduced popularity and importance of *jibaro* music in Puerto Rican culture. Many young Puerto Ricans regard *seis* and *aguinaldo* as “hick” music, preferring the contemporary sounds of salsa, bachata, and reggaeton. Mainland Puerto Ricans have little exposure to *jibaro* music, except

perhaps via their grandparents' record collections.⁵

Although *jibaro* music has declined, it is far from dead. One still hears a fair amount of it around Christmastime, and school programs teach children to play *cuatro* and sing *seis*. Festivals of *jibaro* music are held in the town of Comerío and elsewhere, and other villages in the hilly interior might also feature *controversias* in their patron-saint fiestas, along with performances by school groups, salsa bands, and the like.



Jíbaro musician with cuatro.
 (Courtesy of the Center for
 Traditional Music and Dance.)

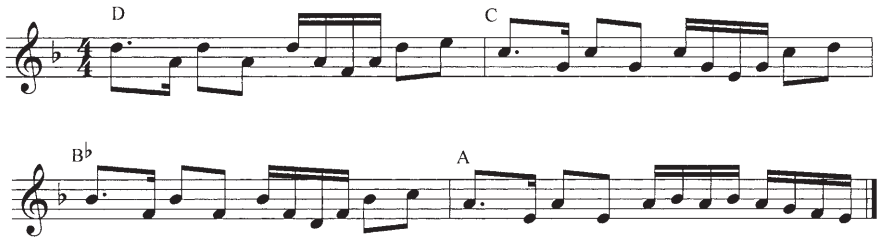


Jíbaro musicians. (Courtesy of the Center for Traditional Music and Dance.)

A few television programs—especially *PR y sus trovadores: voces trujillanas*—also foreground *decimistas*, and especially youngsters. Particularly popular is the radio show *El trovatón*, which will pit a *décima* singer against a rapper or *reggaetonero* like Vico C in a musical argument (a *tiraera*). Meanwhile, there are plenty of *cuatro* players, some of whom, such as Prodigio Claudio, have taken the instrument to unprecedented heights of flashy virtuosity. To some extent, *jíbaro* music has become disassociated from its rural roots and its lyrics about roosters and babbling brooks, while being resignified as an icon of island pride and culture.

Seis and Aguinaldo Structure

About fifteen or twenty forms of *seis* and *aguinaldo* are in common usage today. Each has its own, standardized accompaniment pattern and melody. The verses, which are sung solo, are usually in *décima* form. In between the verses, the *cuatro* player performs improvisations, which may be quite virtuoso in style. A few of the most common and easily recognizable accompaniment patterns are *seis mapeyé* (Musical Example 8), *seis fajardeño* (Musical Example 9), *aguinaldo orocoveño* (Musical Example 10), and *aguinaldo jíbaro cayeyano* (Musical Example 11).



Musical Example 8: *Seis mapayé*.



Musical Example 9: *Seis fajardoño*.



Musical Example 10: *Aguinaldo orocoveño*.



Musical Example 11: *Aguinaldo jíbaro cayeyano*.

The Fiesta Patronal de Santiago Apóstol at Loíza Aldea

For a look at Puerto Rico's African-derived musical heritage, we can visit the town of Loíza, some twenty miles east of San Juan. Loíza, which consists of a few adjacent neighborhoods (notably, Medianía Alta, Medianía Baja, and Loíza Aldea), is populated mostly by black descendants of slaves who worked at nearby sugar plantations. Along with a few villages on the southern coast, Loíza is renowned as a cradle of Afro-Rican culture, especially music and dance.

For three days every July, Loíza comes alive for the festival of its patron saint, Santiago (Saint James), whose cult invigorated the Spanish war against

the Moors (the Reconquista) in the ninth century. As in most Spanish Caribbean patron-saint festivals (*fiestas patronales*), the image of the saint is removed from the church and taken on a procession, after which performances of local musics may be held in the town square. The core religious events of the Loíza festival are processions on three successive days, in which statuettes of Santiago are carried between the barrios. In the accompanying parade, townspeople symbolically reenact the Christian-Moor conflict by dressing either as swashbuckling mounted Spaniards or as the pagan demons. The latter include *vejigantes* wearing African-derived spiked masks and bearing balloons mounted on sticks, and *locas* (crazy women), who are actually men in drag, all behaving outlandishly. In addition, some participants wear various K-mart costumes (Freddie Krueger, Batman, etc.), while others have designed their own clever outfits. After the parade, there are usually stage concerts and informal parties that may feature bomba.

It is a few years ago, and some friends and I have come to Loíza to enjoy the spectacle and, we hope, to see some bomba. Route 187 paralleling the sea is lined with spectators. In the early afternoon, the ragtag parade appears. The first thing I notice is that the “Spaniards” are far outnumbered by *vejigantes* and *locas*. My Puerto Rican friend comments, “Of course—it’s much more fun to be a pagan. Besides, most of these people are black, and if anything, they identify with the Moors, not with the Spaniards who enslaved them.”

Indeed, whatever religious significance the event may have for some people seems to be largely inverted. The *vejigantes* are running amuck, bopping women on the head with their balloons and extorting change from them, and the *locas* are dancing and strutting lasciviously; one, dressed in a bridal gown, walks calmly down the center of the street, flanked by attendants, smiling beatifically at admirers and looking angelic except for his thick moustache. Every now and then someone will shout the nonsense phrase, “Vejigante a la boya,” and people respond, “Pan y cebolla!” Meanwhile, following the three Santiago figurines is a group of giggling, beer-quaffing men carrying a similar statuette, which on closer inspection turns out to be a Mickey Mouse doll mounted on a toy horse. To make the entire event quintessentially Caribbean, there are intermittent torrential downpours in which everyone is thoroughly drenched.

Puttering along in the parade is a truck with a horn-based ensemble playing *danzas* of Juan Morel Campos. Santiago, someone explains to me, is fond of *danzas* (as am I), and the pieces add a bit of dignity to the otherwise motley procession.⁶ Following the *danza*-mobile comes an impromptu plena group consisting of a dozen or so young men, some of whom play

San - ta Ma - ri - a li - bra nos de to - do mal am -
 pa - a nos se - ño - ra de'es-te te - rri - ble a - ni - mal

Musical Example 12: Plena: “Santa María.”

panderetas (*panderos*), the jingle-less tambourines that are the basic instrument in the genre. They pause in front of a house while one of them runs and fetches a trumpet. Plena, which emerged in the early 1900s, is informal music, performed at parties, street protests, and processions like this one. Its lyrics, set to sing-songy verse-and-refrain tunes, can be about news, barrio gossip, or anything at all. Aside from the obligatory *panderos*, which play a steady four-beat pulse, a plena group could include whatever instruments are handy, such as a guitar, an accordion, or nothing at all. This group in Loíza is singing “Santa María,” one plena that everybody in Puerto Rico knows (Musical Example 12). Then they segue to other familiar plenas, some of which, such as “Cortaron a Elena” (They stabbed/cut Elena), may have originated as chronicles of barrio events but now have the same sort of historicity as “Jack and Jill.”

The next day, the parade is even larger and is followed in the afternoon by a stage competition of “Afro-Antillean musics” in Loíza’s central plaza. This consists of about three hours of nonstop rumba drumming on congas, with occasional vocal accompaniment and no dancing. At one point, the organizers invite audience members to come up to the stage and dance bomba; one man casually walks up and does a few indifferent steps, thereby winning a liter of beer, as he is the only contestant. I am starting to wonder whether Cuban rumba has overrun the local bomba scene.

In the evening, the plaza fills up with people who have come to hear the dance bands. First comes a local professional plena band, Los Pleneros de Loíza, who, like a few other groups on the island, add trumpets, keyboard, and bass to the plena format while retaining the genre’s typical rhythms, melodies, and *panderos*. Then follows the real attraction, a salsa band, which is responsible for the traffic jam now ensnaring the area as people flood into town. Actually, there are relatively few salsa clubs in Puerto Rico, since many people prefer to go to free concerts at *fiestas patronales* like this one. On the final day, the parade is bigger still, and there is another concert at the plaza. However, acting on a hunch, we decide to pass the evening at a humble

barrio by the beach in Medianía. Nothing much is happening until around dusk. Then, just as we are contemplating leaving, two men appear, each carrying a squat bomba barrel drum (called *barril*) and, seating themselves on benches in a café open to the road, start to play. Another man assumes the lead-singer role, and the women standing by energetically join in singing the responsorial choruses (mostly “Hueso tiene mi novio na’má,” or “My boyfriend is nothing but bones”).

But the real focus is the dancing, which is done by a solo dancer (mostly young women) directly in front of the drummers, with the singers and onlookers forming a dense ring (a *soberao*) around them. (This is the African format discussed in Chapter 1.) While one drummer provides a steady ostinato, the lead drummer (on the *subidor*) mimics and follows the dancer, who performs a variety of stock, improvised movements. I can see that everyone has his or her own personal style of dancing, but certain moves recur—such as taking small backward hops with your feet close together, or strutting in a cocky posture with hands on your hips. Further, the typical dance sequence seems to start with a short introductory stroll (*paseo*), then a sudden jerk (*ponche*), followed by a series of free moves (*piquetes*) imitated by the drummer, who is the real dance partner. The women take turns, each dancing a few minutes before the drummer, while the onlookers cheer, clap, and gleefully sing the choral refrains, including that shown in Musical Example 13.⁷

Bomba, the island’s neo-African music and dance idiom, is a product of the slave barracks and was described in chronicles dating from the early 1800s. More than once it was allegedly used by slaves to distract their masters from impending revolts or escape breaks. Bomba is a local creation, but its components reflect how the island received diverse influences, especially via slaves brought from other islands. A French Caribbean connection is evident in the Creole words of refrains from Ponce and Mayagüez, and some dance *piquetes* seem to resemble counterparts in the *gwoka* of Guadeloupe. The Ponce practice of laying the drum on the ground and straddling it, while probably of Congolese derivation, also recalls similar techniques in *gwoka*, Haitian-Cuban *tumba francesa*, Jamaican *Kumina*, and Dominican *balsie* playing.

Au - re - lia Au - re - lia di - le'al con - de que su - ba
di - le'al con - de que su - ba que su - ba que su - ba por la ven - ta - na

Musical Example 13: Bomba refrain.

After slavery ended in the 1870s, bomba took root in different forms in Afro-Rican communities in Loíza, Ponce, Mayagüez, and the Santurce barrio of San Juan. By the 1950s bomba was in steep decline, and spontaneous, informal, community bomba parties, such as I was fortunate to see and film in Loíza, have become rare. However, a folkloricized revival has taken place, originally as led by the Cepeda and Ayala families of Santurce and Loíza, with support from the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (ICP). At present, several stage groups keep the genre alive not only on the island but also in New York, home to Los Pleneros de la 21, Alma Moyo, and the all-female bomba and Dominican *palo* group Yayas. Most of the New York “bomba people” are intellectuals, folklorists, and activists rather than working-class Afro-Puerto Ricans who have grown up with the genre like those in Loíza. This background doesn’t prevent them from being fine and spirited dancers and musicians, although it adds a new dimension of self-consciousness to their attitudes toward innovation and tradition. In the island, aside from Rafael Cortijo’s idiosyncratic bombas discussed below, a glitzy Banco Popular video documentary of 2001 generated some interest, and rap and reggaeton icon Tego Calderón included a few bombas in his CD *El abayarde* (2003). Calderón, who hails from a town near Loíza, grew up playing and dancing bomba there and has a keen appreciation of the genre’s role in island culture. Recently the Catholic Church in Loíza finally stopped denouncing bomba and even started incorporating it into its masses. Last and perhaps least, Ricky Martin’s hit “La bomba” (1998), if not really a bomba, does invoke an old bomba refrain.

Plena and Bomba in the Dancehall

Since the 1920s, plena and, to a lesser extent, bomba have been performed and commercially recorded, in modified forms, by professional dance bands. One challenge for these genres has been that throughout the twentieth century the realm of commercial dance music in Puerto Rico (and among New-Yorican communities) tended to be dominated by Cuban-style music and, in the 1990s, by merengue. Moreover, even when Puerto Rican dance bands adapted plena and bomba, there was a marked tendency to use Cuban-style rhythms, arrangements, and instrumental mannerisms, so that the commercial plena and bomba risked losing their local flavor (which was an issue for some people and not for others). The story of urban plena and bomba was in part a chronicle of the interaction of native Puerto Rican forms with imported Cuban genres, which Puerto Ricans have adopted as their own.

The first bandleader to popularize plena in a dance-band format was Manuel “Canario” Jiménez, a New York–based singer and longshoreman who, after being contracted by RCA, brought a modernized plena to audiences in New York and Puerto Rico in the 1930s. American record companies had been recording island music for mainland consumption since 1909, when an industry trade journal announced a project to market “love songs in the original Porto Rican language, whatever that may be.” Canario, singing for both island and migrant audiences, retained much of the traditional plena’s character by using the *pandero*, simple melodies, topical texts commenting on current events, mixed choruses of men and women, and alternating verse-and-chorus structure (as opposed to the verses-and-*montuno* format of the *son*). At the same time, he filled out its traditionally sparse instrumentation with piano, bass, and trumpets. Canario sang both original compositions and traditional plenas, many of which showed the genre’s characteristic proletarian irreverence, such as “The Bishop Has Arrived”:

Mama, the Bishop has come, the Bishop of Rome
 If you could only see him, he’s such a cute and pretty thing!
 The Bishop doesn’t drink rum, he prefers moonshine
 If you could only see him, what a cute thing, when he’s drunk!⁸

Due to such flippant lyrics and the genre’s generally informal character and plebian audience, plena enjoyed little social status, although the respected essayist Tomás Blanco hailed it as an admirably mulatto mixture in his 1935 article “Eulogy to the Plena.”

In the late 1940s and ’50s, inspired by big-band swing jazz and the Cuban mambo, bandleader Cesar Concepción brought the *plena de salón* to a new level of bourgeois “respectability,” with his big-band plena typically performed at fancy ballrooms for genteel audiences in tuxedos and evening gowns. In doing so, Concepción removed the plena far from its earthy proletarian roots in such a way that it came to be seen by many as *gallego*—whitewashed, bland, and overly refined. In the 1950s, Rafael Cortijo, an Afro-Rican bandleader from Santurce, together with singer Ismael “Maelo” Rivera of Loíza and a similar band led by Mon Rivera, burst onto the Puerto Rican music scene with a raw, revitalized plena and bomba, successfully adapted to standard Cuban *conjunto* format. Much of Cortijo’s repertoire consisted of Cuban-style *son*, and his version of bomba—loosely based on the *sicá* rhythm—was far removed from its folk model. However, the band’s renditions of both bomba and plena, for which it was particularly renowned, re-



Plena on stage—New York's Los Pleneros de la 21.
(Photograph by Peter Manuel.)

Plena on the streets of New York. (Photograph by Peter Manuel.)



tained the genres' original earthy, barrio vitality and distinctly Puerto Rican character. Cortijo's lyrics, far from reiterating romantic clichés, provided evocative, often whimsical vignettes of Afro-Rican barrio life, whether about black magic ("Huy qué pote"), a racist murderer ("Negro bembón"), or a commuter choo-choo train in Santurce ("Maquinolandra"—or is it about sex?). Such songs constituted a new sort of urban folklore and placed black music squarely in the mainstream of island culture. Similarly, Rivera's "Aló, ¿quién ñama?" dramatizing a contemporary textile workers' strike, linked the commercial plena with the genre's traditional usage in proletarian protests.

Unfortunately for the commercial plena, Rivera spent much of the 1960s in prison on a drug conviction, and the "straight" members of the band reformed as the salsa dynamo El Gran Combo in 1962 (still going, with renewed personnel, in 2016). Plena and bomba then receded from the dance arenas, which have since been dominated by salsa, merengue, and, nowadays, reggaeton. Plena is still performed by revivalist bands such as Plena Libre and New York's Pleneros de la 21. Meanwhile, throughout the trendy rise and fall of dance-band plena and bomba, the genres in their traditional forms have continued to thrive as vehicles of popular expression, completely independent of the commercial record industry.

Music and the Puerto Rican Diaspora

Since the 1920s, Puerto Rican music has been as much a product of New York City as of the island itself, due to the fundamental role that the migration experience has come to play in Puerto Rican culture. The diaspora has been massive: More people of Puerto Rican descent live on the mainland than on the island. Moreover, many of those still residing on the island visit the mainland, and, of course, the mass media, the Internet, visits by mainland relatives, and the effects of international capital make island society even more intertwined with that of the greater United States. As a result, Puerto Rican culture cannot be conceived of as something that exists only or even primarily in Puerto Rico; rather, it has become inseparable from "Newyoric" culture, which itself overlaps with Puerto Rican communities elsewhere in the United States, with black and other Latino subcultures in New York, and, for that matter, with mainland North American culture as a whole.

Migration to the greater United States had been a steady trickle through the 1930s, and handfuls of Puerto Ricans had settled as far away as Hawaii to market their skill at growing sugarcane. In the 1940s, the trickle turned into a flood, as hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans took advantage of cheap airline tickets to try to escape poverty and find better fortunes abroad.

Many moved to rural New Jersey and Connecticut to work in migrant labor camps. However, the most common destination was New York City, and especially East Harlem, which subsequently became known as Spanish Harlem or simply “the barrio.” Altogether, some 5 million people of full or partial Puerto Rican descent now live on the mainland, as opposed to 3.7 million living on the island.

As Newyoricans migrants found themselves in the alien, English-speaking, stressful, and often hostile milieu of New York’s tenements, it was natural for them to try to make their surroundings more familiar by transplanting as much of island culture as possible to the barrio. Hence, taverns and clubs formed where migrants from island villages and barrios like La Perla could regroup and socialize. Enterprising Newyoricans built flimsy yet gaily decorated shacks (*casitas*) on vacant lots to serve as clubhouses. One migrant related in the 1970s, “I can’t live in Puerto Rico because there’s no life for me there, so I’ll bring it with me bit by bit; four land crabs from Vacía Talega, in the trip before, two fighting cocks, in my next, all of Cortijo’s records.”⁹

Music has been an important source of solace and recreation for the migrants, and Puerto Ricans have tried to maintain their traditional musics, whether they have settled in Harlem or in Hawaii (where their *jíbaro* songs are called “kachi-kachi” music, in reference to the scratchy *güiro*). Conditions favored the transplantation and flourishing of certain genres more than others; thus, trios and quartets playing Cuban-style *son* and bolero at parties and clubs proliferated through the 1940s, while *jíbaro* music and bomba did not thrive as much on the mainland.

As can be imagined, the migration experience was often difficult, if not traumatic, especially for illiterate *jíbaros* who moved straight from the countryside to Spanish Harlem. Migrants were gouged by landlords, victimized by thugs, ruthlessly exploited by sweatshop employers, and harassed or, at best, neglected by police. Even those eligible to vote in New York were disenfranchised by gerrymandering and English literacy tests until the mid-1950s. These and other features of tenement life exacerbated tendencies toward family disintegration, crime, and drugs. The travails of migration have been described in many books, but they are also extensively chronicled in the oral folklore of *plenas*, *boleros*, and *seises*, such as this song from 1927 by Rafael Hernández:

I came to New York hoping to get ahead,
but if it was bad back home, here it’s worse.
Sometimes it’s hot, and other times freezing cold,
sometimes I look like a bundle sliding around on the snow.
I don’t like this, I’m going back to my hut.¹⁰

Coping with the language barrier and the unfamiliarity of the city was a perpetual frustration, especially for uneducated former *jíbaros*, whose travails were the subject of innumerable *seises*:

One morning I went out to get medicine
for my friend who was suffering with pneumonia,
but since I didn't know how to get around in New York,
I took the wrong subway, and it took me five days to get back.¹¹

Another *seis* relates:

I came to New York thinking that they spoke as much Spanish as English,
but here they told me, "No you're quite mistaken,"
when you want bacalao, you have to say 'co'fi' [codfish] . . .
I feel so ridiculous in the restaurant when they ask, "Wha' you wan'?"
and I have to point with my finger.¹²

Feelings of nostalgia and homesickness are particularly intense during Christmas season, which is an occasion for family reunions and celebration in Puerto Rico, as elsewhere. An *aguinaldo* consoles migrants:

You don't suffer in vain even if you're far away
as long as the memory of your beloved homeland
shines in your heart and remains there your entire life.
If someday you may return, come with a kiss;
your country, Borinquen, awaits you at Christmas.¹³

While the material problems of poverty, climate, and harsh working conditions have been formidable, the psychological stress of the diaspora experience was equally painful. Many Puerto Ricans, whether black, white, or mulatto, were exposed to humiliating ethnic discrimination on the mainland. The migration experience heightened the long-standing identity problem felt by some Puerto Ricans, already self-conscious about their status as perpetual colonial subjects. In a conformist mainland society where schoolchildren were punished for speaking Spanish and the mass media excluded any people of color, it was natural for the first generations of migrants to feel ashamed of their ethnicity. Many Newyoricans did their best to assimilate and to raise their children without any sense of their Latino cultural heritage. For many such parents, it was a cruel irony to see their children being socially rejected despite their best attempts to Anglicize them. Indeed, it

was a different sense of identity that inspired Newyorican *salsero* Marc Anthony to thank his parents, in the liner notes for his 1993 record, for making him speak Spanish at home. By that time, being Puerto Rican was no longer something to be ashamed of in New York.

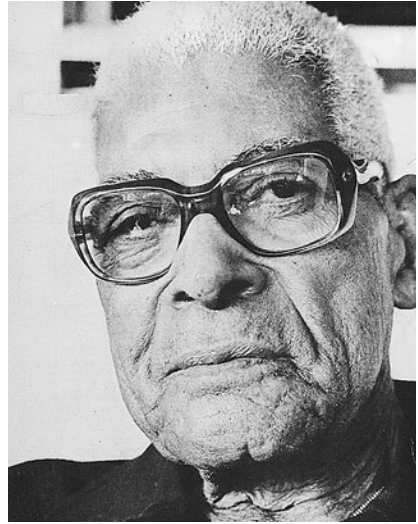
We saw in the previous chapter how by the 1940s New York City had become a second center for the development of Cuban music. The city also came to be a center for Puerto Rican/Newyorican culture, but in a somewhat different sense. It was not that Puerto Rican music per se took New York by storm but, rather, that Puerto Rican musicians and audiences came to dominate the city's small but growing Latin music scene. Meanwhile, many of the most famous Puerto Rican songs of those decades were in fact composed in New York, especially by Rafael Hernández (d. 1965) and his Afro-Puerto Rican contemporary Pedro Flores, both of whom spent many years living, composing, performing, and recording in the metropolis. Their songs—mostly boleros sung by one or two voices with guitar-based accompaniment—dominated Puerto Rican popular music in the 1930s and '40s and still warm the hearts of the older generations. Most of these pieces are sentimental love songs; some of the best-known ones obliquely address the migrant experience by combining nostalgia for the homeland with the memory of a loved one left behind. Flores's "Bajo un palmar" is typical:

I had a blissful dream, which I wanted to make into a song . . .
 It was on a beach in my homeland so beloved . . .
 It was there that we were picnicking under a palm tree . . .
 You were so precious . . . and I felt you breathing nervously in my arms.¹⁴

One might wonder why Hernández, instead of lamenting his absence from Puerto Rico, didn't just go back there and sing about something else. However, given his goals as a composer and performer, New York was a more advantageous place to be. It had recording studios, a media infrastructure, and the concentrated barrio markets where records could easily be sold. Moreover, New York Puerto Ricans, though working-class rather than wealthy, were in better shape financially than most islanders and could afford to buy records and attend nightclubs. Further, in New York musicians and audiences alike were exposed to broader cultural horizons and were increasingly able to perform for non-Latino audiences. Cuban music and diluted versions thereof were gaining popularity among Anglo dance fans, especially after the hit success of Don Azpiazu's 1930 ditty "The Peanut Vendor" (El manicero), a catchy *son* popularized under the misnomer "rhumba." To some extent, a "downtown–uptown" dichotomy emerged between the hotter, more authentic



Rafael Hernández.



Pedro Flores.

Latin music played for Puerto Ricans and Cubans in East Harlem and the slicker, smoother sounds played for Anglos in swanky lower Manhattan ballrooms. The most popular downtown-style bandleader was the Spanish-born, Cuban-raised Xavier Cugat, who commented, “To succeed in America I gave the Americans a Latin music that had nothing authentic about it.”¹⁵

The Latin bands, whether small or large, “authentic” or “commercial,” soon became filled with Puerto Rican musicians, many of whom had acquired formal music training in municipal bands back home. Puerto Rican musicians thus became highly versatile and, in their own way, cosmopolitan, while adopting Cuban-derived styles as a basic musical lingua franca. By the late 1940s, Newyoricans such as timbales player Tito Puente and his rival Tito Rodríguez (d. 1973) had become the top bandleaders and innovators, and the Latin dance music scene in New York came to outstrip that on the island.

As Newyorican culture developed in its own directions, it was natural for a gap to widen between it and island culture. Hence, some Newyoricans have come to regard islanders as provincial, while some islanders deprecate their mainland cousins as deculturated half-breeds who cannot even speak Spanish properly, if at all. At the same time, however, factors like the Internet and the ease of traversing the “blue pond” of the Atlantic have made the connections and flows between the two sites facile and fluid in many respects. Such connections are also intensified by the ongoing diaspora of migrants from the island to New York, Florida, and elsewhere as the Puerto Rican economy tailspins.¹⁶

The history of emigrant Puerto Ricans has been, in part, the slow, sometimes difficult process of establishing enough self-confidence (or righteous indignation) to take pride in their distinct ethnicity and culture and to assert their right to exist in a multicultural society. Such a conception of identity goes beyond merely establishing a beachhead enclave of transplanted traditional culture, an “island in the city”; rather, it involves building a new cultural identity that at once embraces island tradition and engages actively with mainstream society. In the words of Juan Flores, a leading theorist of Newyorican culture, “The Newyorican experience is showing how it is possible to struggle through the quandary of biculturalism and affirm the straddling position.”¹⁷ At that stage, it is the metaphorical borderland constituted by the “island in the city” that becomes the fluid site of the most dynamic and progressive forms of cultural creation.

In this transition from Puerto Rican to Newyorican, music has played a particularly crucial role. But it was really not until the late 1960s that Newyoricans on a mass level began to recognize and affirm the uniqueness and vitality of their culture. This new self-consciousness demanded a new form of musical expression—or, perhaps, a reinterpretation of an older form. That music, called salsa, is the subject of the next chapter.

Music and Island Identity under “Colonialism Lite”

Music culture in Puerto Rico, like that in most Caribbean and Latin American countries, consists of a mix of distinctly local genres and others that may have been imports, some of which, like salsa and rap, have become thoroughly international. In Puerto Rico, as elsewhere, most people listen to whatever they like without particularly worrying about how it relates to issues of national or local identity. However, on certain occasions, at certain times, to certain people, the question of whether a music is “local” or “imported” can become important. Various Latin American countries have had laws decreeing that a certain amount of radio programming must consist of “local” music. In Puerto Rico, an organization such as the ICP, which supports local arts through concerts, publications, and other activities, must also occasionally decide what kinds of music are “Puerto Rican” and worthy of state subsidy. (And which should get more funding: the ICP or programs like the Pablo Casals Festival that support Western classical music?) Meanwhile, intellectuals, pseudo-intellectuals, folklorists, and others may engage in heated arguments about things like the origins of salsa or reggaeton and their relation to local culture.

While such issues can arise in any country, they can have special prominence in Puerto Rico because of the island’s lack of political (and, for that

matter, economic) independence. Moreover, the very fact that most Puerto Ricans favor alliance with the United States (either in the form of statehood or the commonwealth status quo) can make culture—including music—a particularly important symbol of sovereignty. Questions then naturally arise about precisely which features distinguish a type of music as “local.” Does the genre in question have to originate on the island? Can an imported genre be effectively indigenized by the introduction of local features (such as the use of the *cuatro*), or by being performed by local musicians, or by having lyrics that refer to local phenomena? Does something like salsa, merengue, or reggaeton have to incorporate the *cuatro* and “le-lo-lai” phrases in order to become “Puerto Rican”?

In Puerto Rico, bomba, plena, and *jibaro* music do enjoy a special status as musics that were created on the island. As traditional genres, they are not destined to dominate the hit parade, and many young people may have little interest in them, but in certain contexts they are celebrated as national icons. For example, a pro-independence rally or New York’s Puerto Rican Day Parade may feature several plena groups and people carrying *cuatros*, or even posters of them. Meanwhile a very different sort of status would be held by a figure such as Ricky Martin, little of whose music is distinctively Puerto Rican in any way, but whom Ricans can be proud of as an international pop superstar (as well as a generally bright and sensitive individual).

Much music in the island may have a more ambiguous status in terms of being “local,” “imported,” or “international.” The influence of the sister island of Cuba was long paramount, but Puerto Ricans were able to develop the Cuban borrowings in such a way as to make their foreign origins effectively irrelevant. Hence, the Puerto Rican *danza*, although owing much to Cuban inspiration in the 1840s–50s, developed its own flavor and richness and itself came to dominate salon music scenes in the Dominican Republic, Curaçao, and elsewhere. Similarly, it has been more than a century since the bolero would have been regarded as “Cuban music” per se. Since the input of Rafael Hernández and so many other artists, it has continued to be Cuban, of course, but it is also Puerto Rican, Mexican, Venezuelan, and, for that matter, French and even Vietnamese. Meanwhile, as discussed in Chapter 4, salsa derives its style overwhelmingly from Cuban dance music, but it was the Puerto Ricans and Newyoricans who took that style, revitalized it, and ran with it, even as it was stagnating in Cuba itself.

In the 1970s and ’80s, the popularity of rock music among some Puerto Ricans introduced a new kind of local-vs.-foreign dynamic. The *rockeros* (or *roqueros*—that is, rock fans) tended to be whitish, middle or upper class, and more educated (especially in English) than Latin music fans. The latter were

mostly working-class black and mulatto salsa enthusiasts, sometimes disparagingly called *cocolos* (loosely, “coconut-heads”). In the 1970s and ’80s, the tension between these two groups often became explicit, with the *rockeros* regarding *cocolos* as insular and unsophisticated, and the *cocolos* seeing themselves as proud Boricua (Puerto Rican) nationalists rather than snobbish wanna-be Yankees. In the 1990s, this simple dichotomy ceased to be simple at all and eventually became analytically useless. One complicating factor was the emergence of Puerto Rican rock groups. *Rock en español* had become an international trend in Latin America and Spain, as local Beatles and Led Zepelín cover bands eventually decided that rock didn’t have to be in English and that it was OK for them to compose new songs in Spanish. In Puerto Rico, the late mid-1990s saw the emergence of some talented groups, especially Puya and Fiel a la Vega. Both groups regarded themselves as Puerto Rican to the core, singing about topics like the struggle to reclaim the island of Vieques, and if one were to tell them that they were just copying Yankee music, he might be hit on the head with a guitar. In effect, rock, like the earlier *danza*, bolero, and *son*, had become incorporated into the fabric of Puerto Rican music culture in such a way that made its imported origins in many respects irrelevant.

Around the same time, the advent of Puerto Rican rappers like Vico C, Tego Calderón, and Eddie Dee further obfuscated the *rockero*-vs.-*cocolo* divide. Rap, on the one hand, is clearly derived from the mainland, like rock, but on the other hand, in Puerto Rico it was very much a working-class black and mulatto thing—that is, on the *cocolo* side. By the time reggaeton exploded on the scene a few years later, the *rockero*-vs.-*cocolo* split no longer made sense, and although reggaeton’s roots may lie in Panama, everyone knows that its epicenter is Puerto Rico. (Reggaeton is covered in Chapter 4.) In general, one might have to conclude that Puerto Ricans cultivate and enjoy a fairly healthy balance of traditional, local folk musics and cosmopolitan, international idioms. In fact, for an island of 3.7 million people, Puerto Rico is a musical dynamo.

Further Reading

The most thorough studies of Puerto Rican music are in Spanish, especially Pedro Malavet Vega, *Historia de la canción popular puertorriqueña folklórica de Puerto Rico, 1493–1898* (Ponce, P.R.: Self-published, 1992); María Luisa Muñoz, *La música en Puerto Rico* (Sharon, Conn.: Troutman, 1966); and Francisco López Cruz, *La música folklórica de Puerto Rico* (Sharon, Conn.: Troutman, 1967). See also Peter Manuel, ed., *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), chap. 3.

Salsa, Reggaeton, and Beyond

The *Son* Sires a Son

THE 1960S DID NOT COMMENCE as an auspicious period for Latin music in the New York City area. The advent of small amplified ensembles and rock 'n' roll had contributed to the decline of big bands, and the mambo craze had fizzled out accordingly. The big Latin ballrooms, which had hosted the mambo bands of Machito and Tito Puente, were no longer profitable, and the closing of the Palladium in 1966 marked the definitive end of an era. There was little Cuban-style dance music in the media, except for a few radio programs deejayed by Anglo enthusiasts. A few major record companies (notably, RCA) were producing some Latin music, but they seemed to regard it as ethnic throwaway music, to be packaged with cheap covers featuring a sexy woman and a conga and dumped in barrio grocery bins. Only two small record companies, Tico and Alegre, were marketing Latin dance music with any creativity and energy. Finally, the embargo against Cuba, designed to strangle the rebellious island and isolate it culturally, cut off influence from that powerhouse of Latin dance music. But the decade ended up being an extremely fertile one for Latin music in the United States, and for American music in general. Indeed, the 1960s constituted a period of dynamic upheaval and reorientation for American culture.

Young Newyoricans in the 1960s, like many first-generation migrants, lived a schizophrenic life. Typically, they spoke English at school and with their Afro-American friends, who listened to soul and doo-wop, and spoke Spanish at home with their parents, who still cherished their records of *boleos* and *jibaro* music. One product of this barrio melting pot was the booga-

loo, which flourished briefly in the mid-1960s. The boogaloo, as popularized by Joe Cuba, Pete Rodriguez, and others, fused a hard-driving, medium-tempo *son*-type beat with gospel-style hand-clapping on the backbeat, and simple lyrics typically in English rather than Spanish (as in “I Like It like That” and “Bang Bang”). But before the boogaloo attracted much national notice, it faded away. In retrospect, it represented at once a lively historical moment of ethnic interaction and a transitional stage when young Newyoricans seemed to lack the confidence to sing in Spanish and cultivate a more distinctively Latino music style. In effect, the boogaloo was swept away by the Latino cultural revolution of the late 1960s and ’70s.

The sociopolitical ferment for which the 1960s are remembered was to some extent a phenomenon of white bourgeois youth. Frustrated by the stifling social conformism of the 1950s; empowered by allowances, cars, and the growing economy; and emboldened by their purchasing power and sheer demographic mass, middle-class white baby boomers symbolically rejected much of their parents’ culture and values, cultivating new styles of music, dress, art, politics, and recreation. The focal point for countercultural dissent was the Vietnam War, in which the government killed some 2 million Asians in trying to prop up a series of right-wing dictatorships. Some of the causes and products of the 1960s counterculture had little resonance with Latinos and other minorities. While white middle-class youths seemed to be rejecting the American house-and-two-car dream as boring, minorities still wanted to achieve that dream and resented being denied it. And in many respects, the barrio remained a closed, Spanish-speaking world, where the Beach Boys, the Beatles, and legions of white pseudo-bluesmen were essentially irrelevant.

But the 1960s were also a period of upheaval for minorities, and there were significant areas of overlap between their turmoil and the middle-class youth revolt. Minorities had made some economic progress, which at once empowered them and heightened their resentment of social discrimination. Opposition to the war united Anglos and minorities, and to the extent that the white youth counterculture constituted a genuine protest against social injustice, it marched hand in hand with the Civil Rights Movement. Most important, the 1960s saw the intensification and increased militancy of the Black Power movement. Latinos were profoundly affected by this and started to conceive of themselves as more than just the “other” that was neither Anglo nor Afro-American. Inspired by the Civil Rights leaders, the Young Lords, a group of sociopolitical activists, mobilized Newyoricans (and initially Chicago-based Latinos) to demand fair treatment and better social services for their city’s large but previously neglected Latino population. The



Tito Puente with the singer Frankie Feliciano. (Photograph by Fran Vogel.)

Young Lords achieved several of their material goals, but the most significant development was a new sense of pride in being Latino. For the first time, Latinos on a mass scale rejected the Anglocentric assimilationist goals that had led so many Newyoricans to feel ashamed of their language and culture. The model of the Civil Rights Movement, the new interest in “roots,” and, indirectly, the still smoldering Puerto Rican independence movement made the barrio a cauldron of militant assertiveness and artistic creativity.

The new social consciousness called for a new musical movement that could at once embrace Puerto Rican tradition and capture the spirit of the barrio in all its alienated energy and heightened self-awareness. The logical musical vehicle for this was not the quaint and folksy *seis* or *plena* but modernized Cuban dance music—especially the *conjunto*-style *son*, which had been cultivated in Puerto Rico (by Cortijo’s band, among others) and, more importantly, by Arsenio Rodríguez in New York City. By the 1960s, Arsenio himself was neither young nor glamorous-looking, and even New York Latinos had come to prefer the faster tempos of the mambo, but for the young generation of up-and-coming bandleaders like Ray Barretto and Johnny Pacheco, his *son* provided the model for a music that was ripe for modernization and revamping. In their hands, the *son*’s Cuban origin, like that of the rumba now so avidly played by barrio street drummers, was de-

emphasized, and the genre became resignified as a symbol of Newyorican and, by extension, pan-Latino ethnic identity.

The rise of salsa was tied to Fania Records, which had been founded in 1964 by Johnny Pacheco, a bandleader of Dominican parentage and Cuban musical tastes. Fania started out as a fledgling independent label, with Pacheco distributing records to area stores from the trunk of his car. From 1967 on, Fania, then headed by the Italian American lawyer Jerry Masucci, embarked on an aggressive and phenomenally successful program of recording and promotion. Fania's early roster included established performers such as boogaloo king Ray Barretto and Pacheco himself, who performed in a standard *típico* (loosely, "traditional") style of 1950s Cuban bands like the Sonora Matancera, using the *conjunto* format of two trumpets and rhythm section.¹ But the characteristic Fania sound came to be defined in the 1970s by the barrio-based groups that the label sought out and promoted.

Particularly influential was composer-arranger Willie Colon, a Bronx prodigy discovered and signed by Fania at the age of sixteen. Colon's early albums, with vocalists Hector Lavoe, Ismael Miranda, and Ruben Blades, epitomized the Fania style at its best and captured the fresh sound, restless energy, and aggressive dynamism of the barrio youth. As 1990s *salsero* Sergio George described it, "In my opinion, the true salsa sound of that era was the musical fusion of New York with Puerto Rico, with Cuba and with Africa; that whole fusion was for me the true roots of salsa in the late '60s, early '70s. It came out of a street sound, a barrio sound. People jamming in the park with the congas and somebody coming to sing. . . . That was the raw street salsa sound."²

Every commercial music genre needs a catchy label, and there was a natural desire for a handier one than "modernized Cuban dance music" or the vague Cuban term "*música bailable*" (dance music). Hence, Fania promoted the term "salsa" (literally, "hot sauce"), which was already familiar as a bandstand interjection (and as the name of a Venezuelan radio show), and which started to catch on in the wake of a famous Fania All-Stars concert at the Cheetah Club in 1971. To many, the term has always seemed to be an artificial, commercial rubric, designed partially to obscure the politically inconvenient Cuban origin of the music. The label seems especially meaningless when applied to *típico* musicians like Pacheco or to Tito Puente and Celia Cruz, whose musical styles evolved twenty-five years before the label was coined. (While Puente reconciled himself to the term, he also said, "The only salsa I know comes in a bottle. I play Cuban music.") Even mainstream salsa still follows the basic styles and formal structure of 1950s Cuban dance music. In defense of the term, however, one could make various arguments. First of all, Cuban



Eddie Palmieri.
(Photograph by
Fran Vogel.)

dance music was stagnating in Cuba itself in the 1960s–70s, and it was the salsa musicians in New York and elsewhere who not only rescued it but also revamped and revitalized it. Further, one could point to various innovations that distinguished the new subgenre, such as the greater use of trombones, the use of timbales, the foregrounding of them and the bongo and congas by putting them up front, and the occasional Puerto Rican elements (like singing “le-lo-lai”). Such innovations were especially prominent in the music of the salsa “vanguard” of the 1970s and ’80s, whose outstanding figures were Eddie Palmieri and Ruben Blades. Palmieri is a unique bandleader, composer, and pianist whose best music combined dramatically original arrangements (often produced with arranger Barry Rogers), modern jazz-influenced solos, and an ineffable drive and power. Blades, discussed later, is quite a different sort of character, whose brilliance was particularly reflected in his eclectic style and artful lyrics.

The most significant justification for the new term “salsa,” however, was the way in which the music voiced the assertive self-consciousness of the new generation of Latinos, becoming, as in the title of a Los Angeles radio program, *el alma del barrio* (the soul of the barrio). This spirit was most explicit in song texts. Most songs dealt with romance, in more or less traditional manners, but a significant minority openly reflected the new mood of the barrio, becoming soundtracks for early 1970s street protests. Some songs called for pan-Latin solidarity, as in Conjunto Libre’s “Imágenes latinas”:

Indians, Hispanics, and blacks, we've been mixed into a blend,
 with the blood of all races, to create a new future;
 we've come to strengthen ourselves, to work and live
 within the entrails of the monster, as Martí put it.³
 From Quisqueya to La Plata, from the Pampas to Havana,
 we are blood, voice, and part of this American land;
 whether in the land of snow or underneath a palm tree,
 Latinos everywhere struggle for their liberty.
 We're Latin American, from the center,
 north, and south, with a present of struggle and a future of light.
 This is my Latin image, my new song,
 to tell you, my brother, to seek and find unity.

Other songs confronted American imperialism, whether directly or obliquely. Most characteristically, several songs portrayed the alienation, violence, and lurking malevolence of barrio life. Typical in this respect are early songs of Willie Colon, who styled himself “El Malo,” or “bad.” His 1973 “Calle luna calle sol” warns:

Listen, mister, if you value your life,
 stay out of trouble or you'll lose it . . .
 Listen lady, hang on to your purse,
 you don't know this barrio, here they attack anyone . . .
 In the barrio of guapos, no one lives at peace;
 watch what you say or you won't be worth a kilo,
 walk straight ahead and don't look sideways.
 You may have a patron saint but you're not a *babalao* [Santería priest].⁴

In such songs, there is an ambiguous mixture of attitudinal stances. On one level, these songs are simply “telling it like it is,” baring barrio reality in a nonjudgmental way. One could also interpret such lyrics as denunciations of the social system that produces such conditions. Colon's classic dictum, “I'm bad—because I've got heart,”⁵ implies that the Hobbesian world of the barrio obliges a man to be tough in order to defend his sense of justice. But the lyrics also convey a sort of tension-ridden adrenaline high and suggest at least a hint of fascination with the ghetto's lawlessness and with the figure of the *guapo*, the macho hoodlum who has achieved power in the marginalized and oppressed world of the barrio. The song “Juanito Alimaña” (Johnny Varmint), written by Puerto Rican composer (and postman) Tite Curet Alonso (1926–2003) and recorded by Colon and Lavoe, captures this spirit:

The street is a concrete jungle full of wild animals;
 no one leaves home full of joy anymore.
 Here you can expect the worst, wherever you are.
 Juanito Alimaña swaggers to the cash register,
 nonchalantly draws his knife, and demands the money.
 He takes the bills, takes the pistol, then he disappears like the wind,
 and although everyone saw him, no one saw anything.
 Juanito Alimaña commits his daily crime,
 drinks his beer, has an orgy; people fear him because he's careful,
 you'd have to be mad to challenge him.
 If he gets arrested, he walks free the next day
 because a cousin of his is in the police.
 If Juanito Alimaña has brains, they're in the form of shrewd deceit.
 He's tight with whoever's in power,
 and although he steals from half the world
 and everyone talks about him, no one betrays him.
 When he was a little boy, he'd ask for things
 and if you didn't give them to him, he'd steal them.

In their ambivalent portrayal of ghetto lawlessness, such songs foreshadowed hard-core rap, although they contain little of the latter's misogyny and nihilistic celebration of violence for its own sake. Songs like "Juanito Alimaña" epitomize how distinct salsa's milieu was from that of the glamorous Palladium era or from the Cuban heyday, with its songs about quaint and colorful old Havana. From the Puerto Rican perspective, they also contrast the grim and violent barrio with the picturesque and forever-lost world of the *jíbaro*. Salsa captured the new mood of Latinos in the 1970s, reflecting their consciousness of marginalization, their politicization, and their enhanced awareness of one another, all of which were reinforced by the mass media and the migrant experience. Salsa was rooted in the New York barrio, but because the modern urban alienation it described was common to so many other Latin American cities, salsa soon became an international phenomenon, a chronicle of the urban Hispanic Caribbean.

Salsa's international pan-Latin character was, of course, inherent even in the New York context. Both salsa's audiences and its musicians, though dominated by Newyoricans (and a few Cubans), included a variety of Latinos from other backgrounds. Among New York-based *salseros*, one could mention the Dominicans Johnny Pacheco and José Alberto and the Panamanian Ruben Blades, and, for that matter, the Jewish Americans Marty Sheller and Larry Harlow, a brilliant pianist and bandleader dubbed "El Judío Maravil-

loso”—The Marvelous Jew. Fania also continued to mine the island of Puerto Rico for talent, from Hector Lavoe to Tite Curet Alonso, who, like other stars on the label, received fame but no royalties from record sales. More significant, however, was the spread of salsa throughout the Spanish-speaking countries of the Caribbean Basin.

The case of Venezuela is representative. Between 1935 and 1988, the country’s population had gone from being 70 percent rural to 85 percent urban. By 1970, salsa, whether performed by local or foreign groups, had become the favored music of the urban lower classes, cherished especially for its barrio-oriented *malandro* (malevolent) edge. Initially, the predominantly white bourgeoisie tended to disparage salsa as *música de monos*—“monkey music”—just as their Yankee-oriented Puerto Rican *rockero* counterparts deprecated salsa fans using the racist term *cocolos*. But by the mid-1970s, salsa, especially as performed by local superstar Oscar D’León, had won over even the middle classes, and salsa record sales in Venezuela came to surpass those in New York.

Meanwhile, Colombia emerged as another vital center and mass market for salsa and came to replace economically troubled Venezuela as a transnational hub for salsa, generating its own superstars, Joe Arroyo and Grupo Niche. On a smaller scale, salsa went on to take root beyond the Latin world, especially in Sweden, Denmark, and even Japan, whose slick Orquesta de la Luz raised eyebrows throughout the salsa world in the early 1990s.

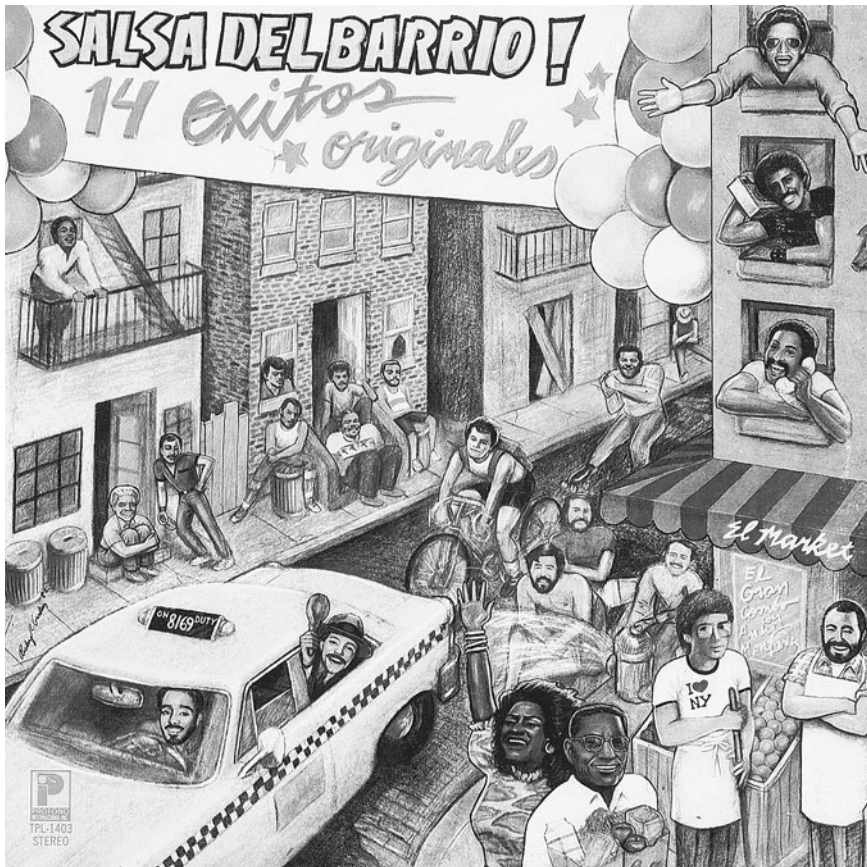
Unfortunately, there have been limits to salsa’s ability to cross market boundaries. In the 1970s, when the style was at its peak, many had high hopes that it, like reggae, could cross over to the Anglo and world-beat markets. For promoters that would mean a taste of the commercial jackpot, while musicians could find a way out of the exhausting and exploitative club circuit. But salsa, despite Fania’s commercially inspired efforts, never did catch on with the mainstream record audience. Carlos Santana’s rock versions of Tito Puente songs—especially “Oye como va”—inspired a few Anglo rock fans to seek out the real thing, but on the whole the language barrier and competition from disco and rock kept salsa marginalized in its ethnic enclave. Most Anglo buyers had little interest in what looked like corny big-band music played by short-haired slickers in matching polyester leisure suits.

Despite the failure of salsa’s crossover dreams, the 1970s and ’80s were the heyday of salsa and of Fania, which dominated the market. New York City alone hosted more than fifty venues offering live salsa and as many bands, whether big-name groups or cover bands playing the less prestigious *cuchifrito* circuit (named after the fried snacks served there). A popular band might often play a dozen gigs in a single week, zipping from club to club on

weekend nights and finishing up a bit before dawn. Mainstream acts like El Gran Combo, Ray Barretto, and Ismael Miranda churned out hits and kept the dancers on their feet, while innovators like Palmieri, Blades, and Jerry and Andy Gonzalez made the margins of the music scene shimmer with creativity. Composer, arranger, bandleader, and timbales player Tito Puente, who had been on the scene since the late 1940s, was going strong, as was his contemporary, the Cuban expatriate Celia Cruz. Particularly dynamic were the collaborations of composer-arranger Willie Colon with the soulful, *jíbaro*-voiced Hector Lavoe.

During these golden decades of the 1970s–90s, the business aspect of the salsa scene in the United States was dominated by a few impresarial moguls—typically one at any given time. In the 1970s, it was Fania’s owner, Jerry Masucci, who energetically promoted the music while cheating artists of their royalties. Fania eventually dissolved, and Masucci retired (“to play tennis”) to Argentina (where he died in 1997). In the late 1980s and ’90s, the crown passed to another man, whom I shall call Ralph Mercado (since that is his name). Like Masucci in his time, Mercado expanded the salsa market with great entrepreneurial creativity and energy. He also managed most of the major bands and controlled most club bookings and big concerts. His record company, RMM, was the biggest salsa label of the era, and he wielded considerable influence (via “incentives” to deejays) over airplay on the two New York radio stations that played salsa regularly. Groups that, for whatever reason, did not work with Mercado would have a hard time getting gigs and recording contracts. Those that did work with him could do well, especially if they were able to conform to the paternalistic structure of his organization.

RMM could be likened to Motown, the soul label run in the 1960s by Berry Gordy in the manner of a family factory, complete with “house” composers and an authoritarian command structure. RMM’s in-house musical wizard was Sergio George, a talented Newyorican who arranged and played piano on most recordings and who codified the smooth, brassy sound of modern pop salsa, influenced by R&B groups like Tower of Power. George’s arrangements would be doled out, Motown-style, to the appropriate artists on the RMM roster, in consultation with Mercado. The result was the slick and commercially successful sound that still dominates New York’s salsa radio slots. Like Fania, RMM was accused by musicians of failing to pay royalties, and a lawsuit led to the dissolution of the company in 2001 and the banishment of Mercado (but not his daughter!) from the business. The RMM saga, like that of Fania and Motown, illustrates what often happens when a single producer dominates a music scene. Mercado, like Masucci and Gordy,



Salsa LP cover from 1982. (Profono TPL 1403.)

was a skilled and energetic promoter of the music, but he also exploited his monopoly power to swindle his musicians while stifling the careers of those who tried to bypass him.

By the early 1980s, however, salsa found itself on the defensive against an onslaught of merengue and hip-hop and an internal creative decline. But before discussing that situation, let us look at one of its most remarkable artists.

Ruben Blades: The Cutting Edge

Most *salseros*, if asked to identify the single most distinguished figure in the field, would probably unhesitatingly name Ruben Blades. While pursuing law, acting, and politics, Blades, in his intermittent periods devoted to

salsa, produced much of the genre's most innovative, ambitious, and socially relevant music.

Blades grew up in Panama City, where he acquired a law degree while singing with local Cuban-style bands. In 1974, he moved to New York and, forsaking the law library for the concert stage, joined the roster of Fania Records, which was then at its peak. Blades's charisma, razor-like voice, and good looks might have guaranteed him some measure of success in themselves, but he had much more to offer. Unlike many singers, Blades is a skilled instrumentalist (guitar) and composer; many of the pieces he wrote or co-wrote (sometimes in collaboration with Willie Colon) rank among salsa's most memorable and popular melodies and are full of innovative touches. His LP *Siembra* gained both critical acclaim and commercial success, selling more than 400,000 copies, which constituted a hit by salsa standards.

Blades's music is particularly celebrated for his intelligent lyrics, which, departing from the normal *telenovela* (soap opera) doggerel and "Hey, let's dance" clichés, embraced a variety of social themes with incisive originality. Inspired by such writers as Gabriel García Márquez and Carlos Fuentes, Blades wrote songs about everything from disarmament to the environment. His 1980 recording of Tite Curet Alonso's "Tiburón" (Shark), an allegorical indictment of American imperialism, along with his denunciation of U.S. economic warfare against Cuba, earned him death threats from right-wing Cubans in Miami, who banned his music from local radio stations. Perhaps Blades's most memorable songs were not the controversial political ones but those in which he strived to create, as he put it, "a folklore of the city—not of one city, but of all the cities in Latin America."⁶ His "Numero seis" (Number 6) was a lighthearted lament about waiting for the New York subway, while "Te están buscando" (They're Looking for You) portrayed the plight of a deadbeat gambler pursued by thugs "whose mommies didn't love them when they were kids" (while the song itself dares to blatantly violate The Sacred Rules of Clave discussed in Chapter 2.)

Some of his most famous songs are epigrammatic character studies that personify, with a mixture of criticism and empathy, the vanities and travails of urban proletarian Latinos. The lyrics of "Juan Pachanga" portray a perfumed dandy whose suave exterior conceals an inner emptiness and loneliness; the song is also a driving dance tune whose title became the name of a Queens salsa club. "Pablo Pueblo" describes the monotonous, pointless, and joyless life of a proletarian worker:

A man returns in silence from his exhausting work,
his gait is slow, his shadow trails behind.

The same barrio awaits him, with the light at the corner,
 the trash in front, and the music emanating from the bar . . .
 He enters the room and stares at his wife and children,
 wondering, “How long does this go on?”
 He takes his broken dreams,
 and patching them with hope, making a pillow out of hunger,
 he lies down, with an inner misery.

In “Pedro Navaja,” whose text is a sort of existential snapshot of barrio life, a petty gangster and a hooker shoot each other in an incident whose background is unknown and essentially irrelevant:

And Pedro Navaja fell mortally wounded to the sidewalk,
 watching this woman who, revolver in hand, tells him,
 “I was thinking that this just isn’t my day, and I’m sunk,
 but look at you—you’re really shit out of luck.”
 And believe me, folks, that although there had been a noise,
 no one stopped, no one was interested,
 no one asked what happened, no one wept.
 Only one drunk, stumbling over the two corpses,
 pocketed their pistols, switchblades, and money, and walked on.
 And as he staggered merrily along, he sang, out of tune,
 the refrain that is the message of my song:
 “Ay Dios, life is full of surprises!”

The encounter portrayed in “Pedro Navaja,” for all its wry and enigmatic depiction, was so evocative that it inspired a movie and a long-running play in Puerto Rico. In a musical milieu where hits come and go, the song, with its catchy melody, hard-driving *montuno*, and the innovative arrangement by Willie Colon, became a true classic, still beloved by young and old Latinos several decades after its appearance.

Blades constantly tried to expand the horizons of Latin music. While he disliked the word “crossover,” he tried to break barriers between the compartmentalized Latin and mainstream markets. Seeking to reach English-speaking Latinos, as well as Anglos, he recorded several songs in English, and his later LP covers included English and Spanish versions of his texts. Stylistically, some of his later music drew eclectically from reggae, merengue, and rock, and he collaborated with artists as diverse as Joe Jackson, Linda Ronstadt, Lou Reed, and Elvis Costello. Blades, indeed, was the only salsa-based artist to break into the world-beat market while maintaining his preeminence

Ruben Blades.

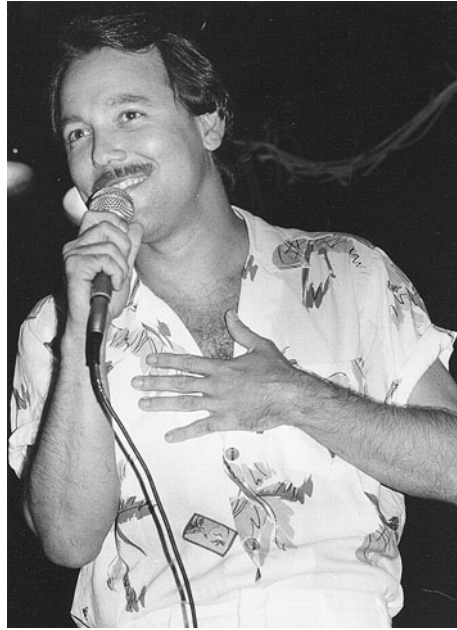
(Photograph by Fran Vogel.)

in the salsa world. Nevertheless, Blades never really attained superstar popularity, a fact that he accepted stoically: “I will never be a superstar. My role is to be different, to do what others won’t do, and as a result, my fortunes will always fluctuate.”⁷

After the early 1980s, Blades devoted much of his time to interests other than music. In 1984, he left salsa to earn a degree in international law from Harvard, and he also pursued a moderately successful Hollywood acting career. From one perspective,

Blades’s preeminence as a *salsero* was paradoxical in that his commitment to music was never more than sporadic and part time, involved as he was in law, cinema, politics, and other matters. But seen from another angle, his ongoing involvement with nonmusical endeavors had much to do with his greatness, since it was precisely his broader vision that distinguished him from the ranks of mainstream *salseros* who, however talented, couldn’t seem to transcend the provincial club scene. As Trinidadian author C. L. R. James wrote, “What do they know of cricket, who only cricket know?”⁸

In 1989, U.S. President George H. W. Bush ordered the invasion of Panama to depose his former CIA employee, the dictator Manuel Noriega, who had been involved in drug trading. After the invasion, which caused hundreds of Panamanian deaths and some \$2 billion worth of damage, the nation’s presidency fell into the immense lap of Guillermo Endara, a nincompoop under whose rule drug trafficking and corruption increased beyond the level of the Noriega era. Among those incensed by the invasion and its aftermath was Blades, who in 1993 returned to Panama to run for president, with the goal of rescuing his country from corruption and Yankee big-stick imperialism. His campaign failed, but Blades did not give up on public service. He went on to become Panama’s minister of tourism, and in 2015 his album *Tangos* won a Grammy. If Blades’s sociopolitical pursuits might seem far removed from singing, for him both sorts of endeavors have had the same ultimate goal:



“What I propose is to create what up to this point has been a mythical place: a Latin America that respects and loves itself, is incorruptible, romantic, nationalistic, and has a human perception of the needs of the world at large.”⁹

Style and Structure

In accordance with salsa’s international popularity, the repertoires of some salsa bands have included a few jazzed-up Puerto Rican *plenas* and *bombas* and assorted elements borrowed from here and there in the Caribbean Basin and the United States. While some commentators have celebrated such eclecticism, mainstream salsa, in its basic style and structure, can be categorized basically as a modernized version of the Cuban *son*, as codified in the 1950s by Arsenio and his contemporaries. The typical salsa song, then, coheres to the pattern of the modern *son* as described in Chapter 2. Like the *son*, it commences with a “song”-like first section with solo verses, followed by an extended *montuno* with call-and-response vocals, instrumental breaks (mambo, *moña*), and—in live performance—improvised, jazz-influenced solos, all over a repeated harmonic-rhythmic ostinato.

A typical band consists of ten to fifteen people: the leader (who nowadays is usually the singer), two to five horn players, those who play piano, bass, conga, bongo, and timbales (a kit that includes two tom-toms and a cowbell), and perhaps one or two *coro* (choral refrain) singers. One of the vocalists might also play *clave*, *güiro*, or maracas, and the bongo player typically switches to second cowbell when the *montuno* begins. A variety of horn

The musical score is for a salsa excerpt in 4/4 time, featuring five staves. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The score includes the following parts:

- Vocals:** The melody is in the treble clef. It starts with a D minor chord (Dm) and a C major chord (C). The lyrics are: "ven ven ven (solo:) a bai - lar la rum - ba bue".
- Piano:** The piano part is in the grand staff (treble and bass clefs). It features a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- Bass:** The bass part is in the bass clef, providing a steady accompaniment with eighth notes.
- Bell:** The bell part is in the treble clef, playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.
- Conga Drums:** The conga part is in the percussion staff, using 'x' marks to indicate hits on the conga.

Musical Example 14: Salsa excerpt.



Latin percussion instruments—bongo, cowbell, and Dominican *tambora* (atop a *marimbula*), *güira*, *clave*, *maracas*, and *güiro*. (Photograph by Peter Manuel.)

instrumentations are found, including the lean, crisp *conjunto* format of just two trumpets (used, for example, by Johnny Pacheco); a brassy four-trumpet section (Papo Lucca's Sonora Ponceña); or, more commonly, two trumpets plus two trombones, and perhaps a saxophone or two.

As in the Cuban *son*, the instrumental parts follow somewhat standardized accompaniment patterns, especially in the *montunos*. The schematized excerpt in Musical Example 14, loosely taken from Eddie Palmieri's "Ven ven,"¹⁰ illustrates some of these basic features. The rhythmic ostinatos are

two-bar patterns fitting into the *clave* structure, which in this case is “two-three” *clave*. Accordingly, the piano part hits the downbeat of the odd-numbered (e.g., first) bars while gliding over the even-numbered (e.g., second) bars. The “anticipated bass” skips—or rather, glides—over the downbeats, playing the chordal roots before the other instruments (here, the piano) reach the corresponding chord. The *coro* (choral response), which here is a simple “ven ven” (come, come), is answered throughout the *montuno* by the lead vocalist’s semi-improvised “calls,” or *sonejos*—in this case, “a bailar la rumba buena” ([come, come] to dance the lovely rumba).

Salsa songs are generally collaborative products of a songwriter and an arranger. The primary composer comes up with the basic tune and perhaps the lyrics and then has an arranger (who may or may not be a band member) compose and write out the ensemble (especially horn) accompaniment, including the instrumental interludes (mambos and *moñas*). This division of labor can be very effective, facilitating the input of, say, someone like Barry Rogers, who was not necessarily a gifted tunesmith but had great talent for arranging, composing, and playing accompaniment parts. Accordingly, it can be hard to ascertain how much of the distinctive “Eddie Palmieri sound” came from the input of Rogers (d. 1991), and sometimes a degree of tension may exist between composer and arranger in terms of division of renown and royalties.

Salsa Lite?

After its initial heyday in the late 1960s and ’70s, mainstream salsa went into a sort of holding pattern in which it still hovers. Some of its problems have been external developments beyond the control of *salseros*. One problem has been the ongoing process of cultural and linguistic Americanization that has led so many Latino youths to shun salsa for English-language hip-hop and R&B. The Young Lords and their ilk may have persuaded millions of Latinos to be proud of their heritage, but inevitably many third- and fourth-generation immigrants have been losing their Spanish and assimilating into neighborhood Anglo- or Afro-American culture. For many of them, salsa is the old-time music of their parents’ generation or of provincial islanders. In the 1990s, a few *salseros* like Tito (“I’ll Always Love You”) Nieves tried to rein in such defectors by singing in English, but such experiments failed to catch on.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for salsa came in the form of competing Latin musics, starting with the merengue boom of the 1980s. Since the late 1970s, New York and Puerto Rico have been subject to a massive influx of Dominican immigrants (who now number some 800,000 in New York alone, outnumbering Puerto Ricans and constituting the largest immigrant group).

The Dominicans brought with them their national music, the merengue, which invaded the bastions of salsa's popularity and won over much of salsa's former or would-be audience. The Dominican bands were cheaper, their showmanship snappier, the dance style is simpler, and a lot of Latinos—from New York to Venezuela—just came to like merengue more than salsa, for whatever reason. It is fast, tight, intricate, and danceable, even if some hardcore *salseros* regarded it as trivial and monotonous. In the merengue's wake, salsa's share of the Latin music market was further diminished by the advent of bachata and reggaeton. In retrospect, it was naïve of some zealous *salseros* of the 1970s to imagine that salsa would be *the* music that would unite all of Latin America (or even Latin New York); rather, salsa is just one kind of Latin music—although an especially dynamic one—among several others, in a rich, diverse, and continually changing music scene.

Some critics have tried to link salsa's difficulties to the directions the genre has taken since its heyday. By the late 1970s, salsa, whether in New York or Caracas, had largely abandoned its portrayals of proletarian barrio reality and its themes of Latino solidarity in favor of sentimental love lyrics. Of course, salsa is not the first art form to have to confront the dual and often incompatible functions of being educational or, alternately, being escapist entertainment. Some people may always prefer fantasy to social realism, and many Latinos who dress up to go dancing in plush salsa clubs do not want to hear songs about barrio murders—that's what they are trying to get away from. Accordingly, as salsa earned a stable niche in the record market, the music industry—starting with Fania in the mid-1970s—has tended to direct it away from its barrio orientation, to make it into a blander, more depoliticized pop—ketchup rather than salsa.

The trend toward sweet rather than hot salsa crystallized in the 1980s with the emergence of *salsa romántica*, a slick, sentimental sound popularized by crooners like Eddie Santiago, contrasting with the more aggressive, proletarian, Afro-Caribbean *salsa dura* (hard-driving salsa). Accordingly, the new generation of *salsa romántica* bandleaders came to be not trained musicians and seasoned club performers like Willie Colon but cuddly singers distinguished by their pretty-boy (read: white) looks and supposed sex appeal (Sex Appeal also being the name of a 1990s group). Many of them, like Jerry Rivera, have been studio-bred creations of the commercial music industry who, in their occasional live performances, cling timidly to the recorded versions of their songs rather than improvising *soneos* in the *montuno*—an art that was the traditional mark of a *sonero*. Even stars like Marc Anthony would seldom risk improvising lines. Puerto Rican-born singer Jorge Manuel “Giro” López articulated the new ideal: “Salsa used to have a nasty image, with its sexuality

and rough performers, but my salsa is romantic, soothing, pretty . . . sort of like a rhythmic bolero, and that's today's salsa, which has changed a lot from the original style. Salsa used to be all about the timbales and bongo, but now it's about sweet and elegant words, and the girls like it much more than the earlier, macho salsa."¹¹ Singer Ray Sepulveda echoed this *romántica* approach, saying, "You only need to sell to the young women, and they only buy love songs, so that's what we sing."¹² The disappearance of improvised instrumental solos from records also took the avant-garde, jazz-related element out of recordings and situated salsa more firmly in the realm of pop. But whether one liked the *romántica* sound or not, it attracted many younger listeners—especially women—to the market. It has also illustrated how salsa could depart, in general sound and orientation, quite markedly from the 1950s Cuban *son*. As of 2016, the *romántica* sound remains dominant in New York and Puerto Rican salsa, whether performed by established stars or newcomers like Maelo Ruiz.

The 1990s scene was enlivened by the silver-voiced Linda “La India” Caballero and Marc Anthony (whose career was not hurt by an *intercambio* with J-Lo). Anthony enjoyed considerable crossover success, singing pop ballads and salsa in both English and Spanish. For her part, a few of India's songs, like “Ese hombre” (That Man) and “Dicen que soy” (They Say That I'm . . .), became anthems for female salsa lovers, and her stage antics provided much entertainment for fans and journalists. At a concert in 1999 she leapt off the stage and attacked with a microphone stand a man who had tossed a wad of paper at her, and on another occasion she punched her musical mentor, Eddie Palmieri, sending his false teeth skittering across the floor. Meanwhile, if some salsa zealots complain about the “merengue invasion,” Dominicans have certainly contributed to the salsa scene in their own way. Cuban-style *son* always had niche popularity in Santo Domingo, many Dominicans are avid salsa dancers themselves, and the ranks of top salsa musicians have always included Dominicans, from José “El Canario” Alberto to the modern-day David Kada, Yiyo Sarante, and the eclectic Chichi Peralta.

The New Millennium: Holding Pattern or Death Spiral?

Musicians who played in salsa bands in the fat decades of the 1970s and '80s are fond of reminiscing about the ups and downs of the scene in those years. The downs were genuine: the exhaustion of playing two or even three gigs a night; the pay that could barely support an individual, much less a family; the experience of being repeatedly ripped off by club owners, managers, and

bandleaders; and the occasional brushes with violence. Yet these were largely offset by the positive aspects: the male camaraderie; the ability to make some sort of a living (or at least supplemental income) playing music; the excitement of providing the soundtrack for a few hundred exuberant dancers; and the sheer exhilaration of playing such hot music, especially with a cohort of top sidemen who knew how to make every song fresh and spontaneous with improvised flourishes, solos, and even ensemble *moña* interludes.

Tragically, in the early 2000s the live salsa club scene largely fizzled out. In former hubs such as New York, a critical mass of Latinos still enjoy dancing to salsa, but most venues feature only deejays rather than live bands. Live bands are heard only on special occasions, and most young salsa fans are so accustomed to dancing to canned music that they don't even mind, for better or worse. And as for the dozens of bands that the scene used to sustain: they are history.

Among those who lament the passing of the bygone era, one hears different explanations for the decline, several of which may be true. The most common refrain is that club owners prefer deejays because they are incomparably cheaper than live bands, but this wouldn't explain why bands were the norm in the heyday. Certainly the advent of competing musics—merengue, bachata, and reggaeton—has had an impact on the scene, as bands are unable to play all these genres, whereas deejays can mix up their sets to please almost everyone. Improvisation in general, and hence the rationale of having a live band, declined in the *salsa romántica* style, as pretty-boy singers were unable to stray from the lines they had learned in the studio, and instrumental solos no longer appealed to audiences who merely wanted to hear the band duplicate the singer's hit record. Meanwhile, the intensified federal war on drugs resulted in the closing of many clubs that were used as money-laundering sites and even vanity hobbies by druglords. Even among the clientele, there came to be fewer of the bling-laden dealers whose extravagant spending helped fund the clubs. Higher fares made cross-country touring unremunerative, so that a headline vocalist like Marc Anthony may just assemble a pick-up band rather than tour with his own, well-rehearsed group. This trend reinforced a more general decline in band chemistry: With fewer live gigs, tight cohorts who knew how to feed off one another's energy and ideas gave way to pick-up bands whose members had never played together. Most young club-goers today don't even remember the halcyon era when live bands were the norm. And on top of everything came the new breed of "On-2" dancers, discussed below, who actually prefer canned music to a live band that might play a song a bit too long or otherwise distract them from executing their well-rehearsed "shines."

What remains of the salsa scene is a mixed bag of venues. The dance clubs mostly feature deejays spinning salsa, perhaps mixed in with bachata, reggaeton, and the odd merengue. Then there are handfuls of swank supper clubs that, having made their profits through the diners, feature live bands as a post-dinner attraction. (Clubs make their money from drinkers and diners, not from dancers.) Live bands are also occasionally booked for college gigs, the summer festival circuit, and special events like weddings and corporate parties. With increased government monitoring of music-business finances, band members nowadays are mostly paid above board, by check rather than (undeclared) cash. So the good news is that most salsa musicians in the United States are finally unionized and will be paid properly for gigs, and the bad news is that there are hardly any more gigs. Perhaps the best places to hear live salsa are abroad, especially Colombia and Cotonou, Benin, in West Africa.

Meanwhile, the salsa recording industry has undergone the same crisis as every other music genre in the digital era. In the new millennium of downloading and file sharing, few people are willing to pay to acquire recordings, so CDs (and their videos) serve more as an expensive but necessary form of promotion for live concerts than as profitable entities in themselves. But the live concert scene has declined, and the only artists who actually make money from recordings are the big names like Victor Manuelle and Jerry Rivera. And although the new crowd of salsa dance specialists has created a vast and thriving network of venues and events, salsa performers don't profit much from it, as merits further discussion.

Salsa Dance, from On-1 to On-2

In many kinds of social dance there may exist a continuum with, at one end, those who are happy just grooving and moving with the music together with a partner, doing a limited repertoire of patterns, and at the other end, those who see dance as a technical virtuoso art to be mastered through command of a wide variety of intricate moves. As salsa is a couple dance generally executed in "closed" ballroom format, the latter approach would depend on tight coordination between partners. Meanwhile, although salsa as a musical style—especially as transmitted by recordings—may be the same throughout its international circuit, dancers in different cities and regions may develop their own, distinctive styles. Both of these factors have contributed to the emergence of different ways of dancing salsa, the most conspicuous of which is the On-2 style, which went from being a New York curiosity to a global phenomenon.

In the 1950s and '60s, the New York mambo clubs, and especially the Palladium, were remarkable cauldrons not only of musical creativity but also of an unprecedented sort of choreographic innovation. Many dancers adhered to the established Cuban style, with its basic step-tap-step, step-tap-step pattern. However, given the clubs' mixed clientele of Anglos, Italians, and Afro-Americans, it's not surprising that dancers started introducing moves from jitterbug, swing, jazz, and other ballroom styles, and then a new and distinctive form of mambo dancing took shape. The best of these dancers tended to display their art—especially solo “shines”—in certain spots, such as one side of the stage or dance floor, where they would attract onlookers, imitators, and professional dance teachers looking for material to teach, especially to their non-Latino students. As competitions, stage shows, and dance classes proliferated, a flashy “New York mambo” style of dance became institutionalized and commercially marketed in studios throughout the mainland USA and Puerto Rico.¹³

This flamboyant, exhibitionist style involves the couple executing a dizzying series of intricate and even acrobatic turns and spins in perfect harmony, with the lady generally following the gent's signals. Under the inspiration of teacher Eddie Torres, the dance style came to be known as “On-2” because of its basic foot pattern (to be maintained throughout all the pyrotechnics). To be slightly more specific: Salsa (and *son*, *chachachá*, etc.) can be counted in four beats, and both the *clave* rhythm and the basic footwork sequence suggest a two-bar (or eight-beat) pattern, with the dancers stepping one-two-three-pause-five-six-seven-pause. While the traditional “mainstream” norm was to “break”—that is, change direction—on beats one and five, the On-2 dancers break on two (hence the name) and six. This might seem like a trivial technical distinction to the non-dancing reader, but in fact it is fundamental enough a difference that an On-1 dancer cannot dance with an On-2 partner—unless they wish to subject each other to an ongoing sequence of mashed toes, bumped knees, and body collisions.

Over the decades, as the On-2 style grew increasingly elaborate and codified, the gulf widened between the “studio” On-2 dancers (who learned in dance classes and may often be middle-class Anglos) and the “street” On-1 dancers, who typically learned by dancing in the kitchen with their Puerto Rican mother while she was cooking with the radio on. Hence, if you meet a salsa dancer, ask her whether she dances On-1 or On-2, and she doesn't know what you're talking about, she probably dances On-1, because only in the studio classes would one learn about On-2 and its beat-counting system. The On-2 dancers also learn in a systematic fashion, with standardized names (like “haircomb,” “sombbrero,” and “cucarachas”) for moves that the “street” dancers may have been doing for decades. Many On-2 dancers seem

(BEAT:)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
				PAUSE				PAUSE

The Eddie Torres New York On-2 basic salsa step (male/leader; shaded footprint is weight-bearing).

to regard dancing more as an athletic sport than as a social dance, and they specialize in mastering a great variety of acrobatic turns and spins, which they learn in classes, from instructional videos, and via the Internet.

While On-1 dancing has persisted as a kind of un verbalized mainstream among North American Latinos, On-2 dancing has evolved into a transnational network of studios, websites, and dedicated clubs and events (where “kitchen”-trained On-1 dancers are not particularly welcome). The venues consist primarily of monthly “socials” and larger “congresses,” which may draw a few thousand dancers from near and far and generate lots of money for organizers and teachers. Unfortunately for musicians, dancers at these events generally prefer deejays to live bands, partly because they like hard-driving 1970s–80s *salsa dura* rather than the syrupy *romántica* style of modern bands, and also because they don’t seem to know what to do with themselves if a song by a live band goes on too long. For their part, musicians in the live bands that are occasionally hired complain that the On-2 dancers are unresponsive to the music, as they are too self-absorbed in their bubble of “let’s-get-in-as-many-complicated-turns-as-possible.” But the dancers have their own tastes and aesthetics, prizing virtuosity over simple mutual enjoyment. As one wrote in a chat forum, “I want to work on detail and perfection and go over the same complicated move again and again and nail it—and I’m not going to get that from social dancing.”¹⁴

On-2 dancers also enjoy being part of a global community, whose members manage to find one another wherever there is a critical mass. Websites offer guidance as to what international travelers can expect—for example, Lake Baikal region (Siberia): mostly 234–678 contra tiempo; Helsinki (Finland): mostly cross-body On-1; Cairo (Egypt): occasional double spins, but some triples and quads; Raqqa (ISIS Caliphate, formerly Syria): OK, there’s not much of a scene there right now, better to try nearby Beirut.

Reggaeton

In any urban Latino neighborhood today, whether in San Juan, Cartagena, the Bronx, or Los Angeles, the music one is most likely to hear resounding from car stereos and boom boxes is no longer salsa or merengue but the insistent, kinetic *boom-chaboom-chick-boom-chaboom-chick* of reggaeton (*reggaetón*).

Puerto Rico is perhaps the biggest producer of reggaeton, and islanders Lisa M and Vico C were early pioneers of 1980s *reggae en español*, but reggaetonologists generally trace the roots of the genre to a nexus involving Jamaica, New York, Puerto Rico, and especially Panama. Home to Ruben Blades and the three-toed sloth, Panama had attracted some 45,000 guest workers from Jamaica during the construction of the canal in the early 1900s. The descendants of these immigrants—now numbering about 230,000—though generally fluent in Spanish, also speak Jamaican patwa at home and traditionally have had one ear cocked to the sounds coming from the ancestral homeland a few hundred miles away. By the mid-1980s, alongside the Panamanian salsa scene were reggae-style sound systems and an informal recording market that catered to, among other people, bus drivers competing for riders. In this milieu, El General (Edgardo Franco), Renato (Leonardo Renato Aulder), and the group Nando Boom earned some local popularity for their raps in English and Spanish over dancehall riddims (on the B sides of Jamaican records). El General moved to New York to study business but dabbled in the city's rap and reggae scene and in the late 1980s recorded the Spanish-language dancehall-style "Tu pun pun," which became a runaway hit. The new style soon caught on in Puerto Rico, where Vico C, Don Chezina, and others had already established a niche for Spanish-language rap. Then in 1991, the catchy *boom-chaboom-chick* riddim of Shabba Ranks's "Dem Bow" was adopted as the basic all-purpose beat, and the newly crystallized style took off, initially under the moniker "Dem Bow" or "underground," but by the late 1990s as "reggaeton."¹⁵

Reggaeton is a quintessentially eclectic Caribbean entity. While Shabba's song provided the direct model of its beat, the riddim is also yet another variant of the creole "habanera" rhythm that, aside from being common in Haitian Vodou drumming, permeated the nineteenth-century Cuban *contradanza* and continues to pop up in various other genres, from bachata to soca. Reggaeton artists come from all over; in addition to the Panamanians, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans such as the Gente de Zona members, the top producers are the Lunny Tunes duo (Francisco Saldaña and Victor Cabrera), Dominican-Americans who now live in Puerto Rico. Meanwhile, Afro-American hip-hop provided reggaeton artists with the model for their

standard attire and swagger, and also for the nihilistic violence and bitches-and-ho's misogyny of some 1990s reggaeton lyrics, which had little precedent in the history of Latin music. Aside from the Dem Bow beat, Jamaica also supplied the sing-songy dancehall style, and Latinos added the Spanish language. By the mid-1990s, however, reggaeton had evolved into much more than a sum of these component parts, and it acquired its own, distinctive flavor, quite different from dancehall or rap, and quite more than just "dancehall sung in Spanish."

The trajectory of Puerto Rican reggaeton/underground in the 1990s was far from smooth. From the start, the new music, like Latin rap, was associated with lower-class, darker-skinned urban youth, and particularly with young men who used the music as a vehicle for their fantasies of hyper-masculine empowerment. While the typical lyrics celebrating chicks (*gatas*), partying, and dancing were innocuous enough, the explicit, in-your-face vulgarity of some songs, coupled with the pornographic nature of the accompanying videos, provoked an alarmed outcry from journalists, politicians, and others. The brouhaha reached a peak in 1995 when the police raided several record stores and confiscated hundreds of CDs and videos. When the issue proceeded to the courts, the confiscations were deemed illegal, but oddly enough the furor seemed to persuade the reggaetoneros that perhaps their songs didn't need to be quite so smutty and that there might even be certain commercial advantages to their not being banned from the radio.

By the turn of the millennium, reggaeton had matured greatly, both from its enhanced vision and the entrance of a generation of talented producers and performers. As a whole, the style has become considerably more "musical" and melodic than dancehall or, for that matter, 1980s *reggae en español*, and the production level is more sophisticated. Most lyrics, however, have stuck to the default themes of partying, dancing, and desire, especially as voiced from the man's point of view. As one female Dominican student stated, "After reggaeton emerged, I gave up hopes of ever finding a female-empowering music."¹⁶ Nevertheless, a fair amount of thematic variety has crept into the genre, whether through Tego Calderón's evocations of barrio life or Don Omar's poignant portrayal of a fallen woman in "Pobre diablo." But as with rap, reggaeton is not so much about the semantic content of the lyrics as about the rhetorical flow and the way the text and tune support that insistent, pounding, visceral beat.

Then there is, of course, the dance, whose basic move is the doggy-style *perreo*, in which the lady bends over and grinds her butt against the gentleman's groin. There is perhaps no way this cannot be explicitly sexual, though intellectuals debate whether it symbolically empowers the man (who is being

serviced, as it were) or the woman (who is the active twerking partner to the man, whose role is mostly to stand there and be twerked upon). Dance connoisseurs might opine that there is little scope for variety or expressivity, and this is indeed a far cry from the virtuoso triple turns of On-2 salsa. The *perreo*, to be sure, is not every woman's idea of dancing, and people do find other ways of moving to reggaeton—including doing zumba.

Nueva Canción

Meriting at least a brief elegy in the history of Hispanic Caribbean music is *nueva canción*, or “new song,” which emerged in the late 1960s in Cuba, Chile, and elsewhere as a sort of self-conscious Latin American “protest music,” emphasizing highbrow, progressive verses rather than dance rhythms and *telenovela* lyrics. Although to some extent inspired by the early Bob Dylan and other North American neo-folkies, *nueva canción* was motivated in part by an opposition to Yankee imperialism and to the inundation of North American commercial music. With most Latin American governments in the 1970s and '80s consisting of right-wing regimes closely tied to North American political and economic interests, *nueva canción* emerged as a persistent, if marginal, voice of progressive opposition, advocating Latino and working-class solidarity and cultural renewal. Throughout Latin America, regional *nueva canción* styles have differed as artists have made self-conscious use of local folkloric musics, but all have been united by an underlying opposition to imperialism, sexism, and exploitation, and a commitment to the creation of a just, humane society. Perhaps above all, the *nueva canción* movement sought to avoid and counterbalance the cultural deformations caused by the capitalist music industry, with its sordid machinery of payola, advertisements, narco-dollars, liquor and tobacco industry sponsorship; its vested interest in maintaining the socioeconomic status quo; and its tendency to reduce all art to entertainment rather than enlightenment.

The *nueva canción* movement had its distinctive local efflorescences in the Spanish Caribbean. I discussed Cuban *nueva trova* in Chapter 2, noting how it came to be actively supported by the Revolutionary government. The marginal status of the *nueva canción* movement in the Dominican Republic was more typical of its presence in Latin America. Dominican *nueva canción* emerged in the 1960s, during the years of Joaquín Balaguer's presidency, as the most explicit and outspoken music of dissent. As elsewhere, it was an internally diverse movement, incorporating, for example, the quasi-folkloric group Convite, which reinterpreted Afro-Dominican traditional musics, and the sui generis folk-rockero Luis Díaz, who ended up moving to the United States to

avoid persecution. A local variety of *nueva canción* also flourished in Puerto Rico, as represented by Roy Brown, Silverio Pérez, Andrés Jiménez, and the groups Taoná and Hacienda Punto (with some overlapping members).

If the workings of the corporate music industry are in some ways contradictory, the *nueva canción* movement had its own ideological and aesthetic dilemmas and contradictions. At the heart of these was the fact that, despite the sincere celebration of proletarian and folkloric values and concerns, most *nueva canción* artists and audiences were from the educated bourgeoisie. From one perspective, their self-conscious usage of folk styles lacked the “authenticity” of its models, and only a few performers, such as the Puerto Rican neo-*jibaro* singer Andrés Jiménez, were able to straddle the two genres comfortably. Another subject of controversy was that the search for a pan-Latin medium often led to the use of Yankee-style singer-songwriter soft rock as a musical lingua franca. However, what really undermined the new song movement was the changed political climate after the end of the Cold War. The replacement of right-wing dictatorships with democracies took the wind out of the sails of the left, which was further enervated by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the bankruptcy of the Cuban Revolution. As amorphous workings of globalized capital replaced the tangible evil of American big-stick imperialism, there were no longer any easy targets for progressive ire, as could be voiced in protest song. Nevertheless, a few socially conscious artists, such as the rap group Calle 13, maintain a commitment to social commentary and show that song lyrics can address more than the usual default topics promoted by the music industry.

Further Reading

A useful survey of the salsa scene until 1988 is César Miguel Rondón, *The Book of Salsa: A Chronicle of Urban Music from the Caribbean to New York City*, translated by Frances R. Aparicio with Jackie White (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2008). A useful text for performers and analysts is Rebecca Mauleón, *Salsa Guidebook for Piano and Ensemble* (Petaluma, Calif.: Sher Music, 1993). Fine studies of salsa dance are Juliet McMains, *Spinning Mambo into Salsa: Caribbean Dance in Global Commerce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), and Sydney Hutchinson, ed., *Salsa World: A Global Dance in Local Contexts* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014). See also Raquel Rivera, Wayne Marshall, and Deborah Pacini-Hernandez, eds., *Reggaetón* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009); and Christopher Washburne, *Sounding Salsa: Performing Latin Music in New York City* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008).

The Dominican Republic

BEFORE THE 1980s, a non-Dominican observer of the Latin music scene might have been forgiven for thinking of that scene primarily as a Cuba–Puerto Rico–New York axis, with the Dominican Republic as a hermetic place that must have some kind of music, but we’re not sure what it is. Throughout the 1800s, when Cuba and Puerto Rico—the remaining sister colonies of Spain—were the “twin wings of the same bird,” the Dominican Republic, rather than forming the torso, was in many ways flapping about in its own independent and tortuous trajectory. Then, from 1930, the country served for thirty years as the isolated private ranch of dictator Rafael Trujillo, and then underwent another two difficult and unstable decades. In the 1980s, however, Dominican music burst onto the scene as the merengue took the Latin music world by storm, and in the next decade bachata came to enjoy as much popularity as any kind of Latin music has ever had. The DR, in fact, has become a powerhouse on the Latin music scene, and its soundscape involves much more than the contemporary hit parade.

The early colonial history of Santo Domingo, as the Spanish called their half of the island of Hispaniola, superficially resembled that of Cuba and Puerto Rico. As in those islands, Christopher Columbus’s arrival and Spanish conquest led to the decimation of the Taino population (who called their homeland “Quisqueya”), the importation of enslaved Africans, and, after the exhaustion of the island’s scanty mineral reserves in the 1500s, ensuing neglect and indifferent misrule by Spain. In other respects, however, Dominican history followed a different, and in many ways more troubled,

course from that of Cuba and Puerto Rico. Spanish rule can be regarded as having effectively ended in 1795, when the chaos of the Haitian Revolution spilled over to the rest of the island, after which Spain never managed to reassert genuine sovereignty. Then in 1822, the newly independent Haitian government invaded Santo Domingo, occupying the region until 1844. With colonial rule having ended so early, Santo Domingo never developed an extensive plantation-based economy, and slavery never played a central role in the region's society. Nominal independence in 1844 failed to bring prosperity or stability, as the country remained undeveloped, insolvent, battered by hurricanes, and divided among regional strongmen (*caudillos*). Occupation by the U.S. Marines from 1916 to 1924 established a certain sort of stability while paving the way for the despotic dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo.

The African Heritage in a Creole Culture

Like most other Caribbean countries, the Dominican Republic has its share of lively Afro-Caribbean music traditions, which, like counterparts elsewhere, feature “hot” drumming, call-and-response singing, association with darker-skinned peoples, and in some religious contexts, spirit possession. As elsewhere, these music styles traditionally have been regarded as backward and illegitimate by Hispanophilic upper classes, but their status in national culture has been complex, and is not even as simple as a tale of “denial and repression.” This complexity parallels the ambiguities and contradictions in Dominican racial identity as a whole.

Denial and repression are certainly part of the story. Despite the fact that most Dominicans are mixed-race, there was until recently little public acknowledgment of the country's Afro-Caribbean heritage. The middle and upper classes traditionally identified with Spain, and even black and mulatto people generally identified themselves as *indios* or *indios oscuros* (dark-skinned Indians) rather than “black” on their identification cards. While Dominican conceptions of race in general are mostly fluid and tolerant, overt African heritage and blackness have tended to be associated with Haiti, the chaotic and impoverished neighbor. Accordingly, Dominican nationalism developed in opposition not to Spain but to Haiti and traditionally has been animated by fear and denial of Afro-Caribbean culture. The Négritude movement so influential elsewhere in the Caribbean had little impact in the Dominican Republic, and until very recently there were few local counterparts to the innumerable Cuban and Puerto Rican popular songs that celebrate Afro-Latin identity.

However, if the Afro-Caribbean aspects of Dominican culture have generally not been celebrated or perhaps even acknowledged, it would have to be



Votive objects for the "21 Divisions" in a Dominican New York household, with maracas to accompany devotional songs. (Photograph by Damien Troncoso.)

noted that Dominican culture is mostly creole in character. While sugar plantations in Cuba and elsewhere tended to foster a society polarized between white owners and black slaves, Santo Domingo's cattle ranches generated a more fluid and homogeneous continuum in which whites, mulattos, and blacks—whether free or technically enslaved—often worked and lived side by side while intermarrying and developing shared creole music and dance forms. Moreover, the importation of African slaves had dwindled by 1800,

unlike in Cuba and Puerto Rico, such that neo-African practices tended to blend with Hispanic ones (except insofar as they were imported from Haiti), and the country's population became prevailingly (though not entirely) mulatto. Thus, most Dominicans do not see themselves as “black” per se, but as mulattos with a syncretic culture whose diverse European- and African-derived elements have long since been amalgamated into a creole entity.

Despite such attitudes and the historical remoteness of the slave-importation period, the country's African heritage is evident, particularly in the veneration, by some Dominicans, of West African- and Congolese-derived spirits (*misterios*) such as Yemayá and Kalunga. The worship of these spirits is not as formalized and standardized as is, say, Cuban Santería. Rather, it tends to be mixed up with folk Catholicism, Haitian Vodou, the Espiritismo founded by the French guru Allen Kardec (1804–69), and invocations of Santa Marta and the Venezuelan healer Dr. José Gregorio Hernández (1864–1919). These traditions and practices can be idiosyncratically combined in forms called *vudú*, *sanse* (“sahn-say”), or the “21 Divisions,” which is not as systematic as it might sound. The 21 Divisions ceremonies can feature lively drumming and singing that may induce spirit possession by Anaisa, Belie Belcan, Ogun, Papá Candelo, Santa Marta, or other *misterios*.

The music used in 21 Divisions events is called *palo*. It generally consists of simple responsorial songs accompanied by three long *palo* hand drums and a *güira* (pronounced “wee-ra,” a tin scraper that looks like a cylindrical cheese grater). *Palo* music is performed in various other contexts, including patron-saint fiestas, wakes, staged folkloric events, and—nowadays—informal parties and festivities of all sorts.¹ The songs themselves might be in the form of *salve*, which otherwise denotes a Hispanic-derived liturgical prayer or song. A *salve* could also be accompanied by tambourine-like *panderos*.²

One distinctive type of Afro-Dominican religious music is that used in the practices of the Cofradía de los Congos de Espíritu Santo (literally, Brotherhood of the Congolese of the Holy Spirit), in Villa Mella, an Afro-Dominican neighborhood in Santo Domingo. This *cofradía*—somewhat akin to a Cuban *cabildo*—preserves its own tradition of music and dance, honoring Kalunga and the Holy Spirit. The African aspects of the music are more diluted than in Santería, as the songs are mostly in Spanish, and the rhythms may feature the more creolized “habanera” beat (in fast tempo) rather than classic neo-African polyrhythms. Another loosely religious Afro-Dominican tradition is the annual *sarandunga* festival honoring San Juan Bautista (St. John the Baptist), held in the southern town of Baní and a nearby village, La Vereda. This lively event attracts hundreds of visitors, who go to picnic, make merry, honor the patron saint, and dance to an ensemble

of drummers and singers. Most dancers may shuffle about freestyle, but a few knowledgeable locals will do the proper *sarandunga* dance in which the man flirtatiously circles the woman, flourishing a handkerchief.³

Another kind of Afro-Dominican music is *gagá*, derived from and closely resembling Haitian Rara (see Chapter 6, and not to be confused with Lady Gaga). *Gagá* is processional music that is performed especially during Holy Week (*Semana Santa*), in which an ambulatory group will play interlocking hocket patterns on trumpet-blown bamboo (or nowadays, PVC) tubes called *vaksín*. Each tube can play only one note, but the group will come up with a signature ostinato pattern. Drummers, singers, and whistle-blowing martial officiants wearing flamboyant skirts accompany the group. *Gagá* is particularly common among people of Haitian descent in the border areas, but it has been adopted elsewhere, and the accompanying songs may now be in Spanish.

Until the 1980s or so, these various Afro-Dominican musics, although common in much of the country, had little official status or recognition and were regarded by bourgeois urbanites as crude and presumably Haitian borrowings that had nothing to do with “legitimate” Dominican culture. Then, starting in the years around 2000, a funny thing happened: Afro-Dominican music became not only recognized but also downright fashionable. It’s hard to pinpoint exactly why, but several factors may have been involved, aside from a certain merengue fatigue. Juan Luis Guerra’s foregrounding of *palo* and *gagá* in the video of his merengue hit “A pedir su mano” clearly had some impact on popular attitudes. With the unprecedented visibility of Santería and its music in Cuba, the waves of Afro-Caribbean pride may have been washing up belatedly on Dominican shores. Finally, UNESCO’s formal recognition of the Cofradía in Villa Mella in 2001 helped persuade many young Dominicans that their country’s Afro-Dominican heritage was a treasure rather than an embarrassment.

Whatever the reasons, in the early years of the new millennium, and especially as starting in New York City, *palo* music and similar versions of devotional *salve* became hot dance music at parties, whether the music was provided by one of the handful of extant CDs or by live drummers and singers. Such ensembles might consist of a few singers with *panderos* or an electrified “*salve electrónica*” group, or it might be rendered *a palo limpio*—straight-ahead *palo*, as in the title of the popular cut on merengue singer Kinito Mendez’s CD. To this ardent drumming and responsorial singing people now dance, in more or less free-form-style (rather than merengue-style), often singing along with the newly familiar *salve* chants. The catchiest and most popular of these, shown in Musical Example 15, is “Yo soy Ogun



Palo drummers in New York: the Legacy Women (Manuela Arciniegas, second from right). (Photograph by Kwesi Abbensetts.)

Yo soy O-gun Ba-len - yo y ven-go de los o - li - vos a
 dar le la ma - no alen - fer - mo y'a levan - ta - r los ca - i - dos

Musical Example 15: Salve.

Balenyo” (I Am Ogun Balenyo), which almost all Dominicans know, whether or not they recognize it as referring to the local incarnation of a West African deity. New folkloric and commercial groups have sprung up out of nowhere, and elder rural groups, which used to perform for free at rituals, are now regulars at club dates. One such veteran told researcher Angelina Tallaj, “I never thought we would get paid to do this!” During San Miguel’s festival every fall, young couples throng to nightclubs—whether in the DR or New York—where they dance to music by *palo* groups, drink beer, and, if so inclined, roll around on the floor in a state of genuine or feigned possession by Dambala (or by “Saint Budweiser,” as the joke goes).⁴ Folklorists and

intellectuals have played significant roles in the change, sponsoring events like the Sainagua drum festival and arguing for the recognition of *gagá* as local rather than Haitian and thus “foreign” music.

Merengue Típico and the Creole Mainstream

If *palo* drumming represents the Afro-Caribbean side of the Dominican soundscape, the creole mainstream traditionally consisted of a set of social dances typically accompanied by accordion and percussion instruments. These genres included the regional *mangolina*, *chenche*, *carabiné*, and, last but not least, the merengue. The first three of these have essentially died out in their original contexts, but they are the core repertoire of the many dozens of folkloric dance groups, including student ensembles, that do stage shows at various events throughout the country.⁵ The merengue, of course, is the one that went on to achieve not only “national” status but also international appeal.

Although *merengue* (*meringue* in French and English) means whipped egg whites and sugar, the word as applied to music may derive from the term *maringa* of Mozambique. The early history of the merengue is obscure, although Dominican scholars and ethnomusicologist Paul Austerlitz have done their best to reconstruct its origins, which are made more complicated by the way the term “merengue” denoted different genres in different places at different times. As mentioned in Chapter 3, from the 1840s in Puerto Rico, “merengue” was a local term for the creole ballroom genre that was later better known as “*danza*,” related to the Cuban *contradanza/danza*. Evidence suggests that this Puerto Rican merengue/*danza* took root in Santo Domingo, incurring the ire of some local stuffed-shirts offended by its couple-dance format, which replaced collective contradance forms. However, the familiar modern Dominican merengue seems to have developed from a folksier tradition dating from the 1870s, in the densely populated Cibao region, with its metropolis of Santiago (de los Caballeros). By the 1890s, this plebian merengue was played by an ensemble of button accordion, *güira*, double-headed *tambora* drum, and, occasionally, a bass instrument called “marimba.” The marimba used for merengue is not the xylophone of Central America and Mexico but, like the Cuban *marimbula*, an African-derived instrument that consists of a wooden box with plucked metal keys. The *tambora* is a barrel drum rested horizontally on the musician’s lap; the left head, played with the palm of the left hand, is made from a male goatskin, while the other head, made from a female goatskin, is struck with a stick.

Although merengue existed in a few regional styles, it was the merengue of the Cibao Valley that came to be by far the most influential. By the 1930s,

the *merengue típico cibaeño*—loosely, the typical or traditional merengue of the Cibao—had acquired a somewhat standardized, classic form, especially as popularized by bandleaders Toño Abreu and Nico Lora. This style uses the standard ensemble of accordion, *güira*, *tambora*, and marimba. The *tambora* mostly plays a short roll leading up to the downbeat, while the *güira* supplies a lively, scratchy, often mutating counterpoint. The most important instrument is the accordion, which, in the hands of good players, provides a shimmering and constantly varying barrage of crisp, staccato (*picadito*) accompaniment figures (better rendered on button accordion than on keyboard accordion).

Some merengues traditionally started out with a short, march-like *paseo* in which couples would promenade around the floor, leading to a verse section, itself called “merengue,” with a topical text; like the Cuban rumba and *son*, the piece would then segue to an extended call-and-response section. This livelier section was formerly called *jaleo* (hubhub) but nowadays is called “mambo” (there’s that word again!). The *merengue típico*, however, differs from the contemporary *son* in its instrumentation, its simpler harmonies (generally only alternating tonic-dominant chords), and its relentlessly fast tempo. Its choreography is also simpler, consisting of a basic two-step pattern, with or without variations. This *merengue típico* came to thrive as folk entertainment in the Cibao region, performed especially at Sunday afternoon fiestas (*pasadías*) and in red-light bars in Santiago. The name of one of these taverns, the Perico Ripiao (Ripped Parrot—no, not cocaine), was adopted as a sobriquet for the Cibao merengue.

As I shall discuss, while the merengue as a musical form came to be enjoyed throughout the country, the accordion-based *típico* style is mostly popular only in the Cibao and especially in Santiago, which functions as a sort of Dominican Nashville. (Thus, if one listens to local radio while traveling by car or bus from Santo Domingo north to Santiago, as soon as one starts descending from the hills toward the Cibao Valley *merengue típico* starts resounding from various stations.) Today, *merengue típico* is generally played in a style that derives from that of Tatico Henríquez (1943–76), called *merengue típico moderno*, with electric bass replacing the marimba. The *güira* player also pounds out the basic beat on a bass drum while scratching his scraper. The accordion remains at the genre’s heart, however, and the Cibao has continued to produce flashy and innovative players. In the late twentieth century, they included Francisco Ulloa, El Cieguito de Nagua, and even a few women, especially Lidia de la Rosa and the indomitable Fefita la Grande, who show that women as well as men can embody the aggressive feistiness, called *tigueraje* (tigerness), that Dominicans prize.



Merengue típico group, with güira, saxophone, tambora, and accordion (José Quezada). (Photograph by Vicente Fernandez/City Lore.)

While *merengue típico* has something of the status of “country music,” it remains popular and vital, especially in the Cibao. In Santiago, aside from resounding from car stereos and in its customary venues of cockfights and thatch-roofed, open-air clubs, *merengue típico* is regularly performed at dances held in the car washes and gas stations that are founded by entrepreneurial return migrants from New York. And if live salsa bands have been largely replaced by deejays, the *típico* scene remains a bastion of live performance. In the 2000s, bandleaders such as Krissy and Geovanni Polanco have enlivened the form with their flashy, virtuoso accordion playing and new compositions. These songs typically feature snappy instrumental breaks, interludes, and solos that make the form much more elaborate than old-style *típico* songs, which tended just to bounce along in the same style from start to end.⁶ The saxophone and accordion often play pre-composed interludes in tight synchrony; although the two instruments don’t look much alike, they are both reed instruments, such that their timbres blend perfectly.

The Merengue as National Symbol

From the Spanish-American War of 1898 through the invasion of Panama in 1989, the U.S. government has undertaken a series of military interventions

and occupations in the Caribbean Basin designed to establish and maintain economic and political control over the region. From 1916 to 1924, it was the Dominican Republic's (first) turn, as U.S. Marines occupied the country to keep menacing European creditors at bay. The best that can be said about the occupation is that it generated an unprecedented degree of nationalist solidarity, in which Dominicans of all classes came to resent Yankee rule. On the popular level, the occupation provoked prolonged guerrilla resistance and inspired several nationalistic merengues, including Nico Lora's "La protesta," which is still performed today:

The Americans came in 1916, trampling Dominican soil with their
boots . . .
The Yankee intruders, we'll drive them out with machetes.

Of greater lasting significance was the belated adoption of the merengue by the bourgeoisie of the Cibao, which had hitherto shunned it (especially for its erotic lyrics) in favor of dainty waltzes, minuets, and foxtrots. Caught up in the nationalistic fervor, the provincial elite soon came to close their foxtrot and *danzón* parties with salon versions of the local merengue, as played by professional, sax-dominated big bands led by Juan Bautista Espínola, Pavin Tolentino, and others. This trend laid the foundation for the genre's subsequent emergence as a national music.

Another foundation laid during the U.S. occupation was that of military dictatorship, as the Marines set up a National Guard and prepared the collaborator Rafael Trujillo to lead it. In 1930, Trujillo seized the presidency in a coup d'état and commenced a thirty-one-year dictatorship that colored every aspect of Dominican culture, including merengue. Trujillo brutally stamped out dissidence and promoted a culture of fear, sycophancy, and propaganda; even in front of the Nigua city insane asylum, a sign proclaimed, "We owe everything to Trujillo." Meanwhile, "El Benefactor" turned the country into his own private enterprise: By 1961, he and his cronies owned more than half of the nation's assets, and he had become one of the world's richest men—with the tacit support of Washington, D.C. (in whose estimation he qualified as a "staunch anticommunist").

With the backing of the Catholic Church, Trujillo repressed Afro-Dominican religion and culture and revived anti-Haitian phobias. As his own grandmother was Haitian, he sometimes powdered his skin to lighten it.⁷ In 1937, he had some 20,000 Haitians on the border regions massacred and tried to get himself awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for settling the boundary.⁸ While his land expropriations uprooted thousands of peasants, he pro-

hibited large-scale urbanization and even tore up a railway to discourage travel. Under the guise of nationalism, he limited foreign investment (so that he and his family could monopolize the economy) and discouraged international musics like jazz and rock 'n' roll.

Of particular significance was Trujillo's influence on merengue. Trujillo was of humble origins, and he resented the elite sophisticates who had earlier barred him from their social clubs. In turn, Trujillo promoted the Cibao-style merengue, of which he was an enthusiast, as a populist symbol. Merengue groups accompanied him on his campaigns and tours, and hundreds of songs were commissioned to sing the praises of his policies and activities. At parties at his palaces, he liked to dance merengue, shouting, "Viva Trujillo!" as he turned his partner, and he occasionally imprisoned musicians who made mistakes. He required urban dance bands to incorporate merengues into their repertoires. The Santiago-based band of Luis Alberti was brought to the capital (renamed Ciudad Trujillo) as a state ensemble and renamed Orquesta Presidente Trujillo; its 1937 hit "El Compadre Pedro Juan" established the merengue's popularity in the urban salon. Such *orquestas* were heavily inspired by big-band swing jazz, using mambo-like sectional arrangements that highlighted the trumpets and especially the saxophones, which have retained their importance to the present. At the same time, Alberti's occasional use of *típico* elements like the *güira*, *tambora*, and accordion bridged the gap between folk and salon merengues. Meanwhile, Trujillo's brother Petán, another merengue lover, inundated the public with merengue over the radio and television, which he dominated. In effect—and by a 1936 decree—Trujillo turned a horn-based version of the Cibao merengue into the country's national music and dance genre. While the *merengue típico* and *orquesta merengue* remained tied to their separate social classes, the modernized Cibao-style merengue became what is still the single most significant unifying cultural entity in the nation.

The Modern Merengue

In 1961, the Central Intelligence Agency, fearful that Trujillo, like his neighbor Batista in Cuba, might be ousted by a popular insurrection, helped local conspirators assassinate El Benefactor. For months, the most popular merengue in the country was "La muerte del chivo" (The Death of the Goat), celebrating the event. Popular elections held the following year led to a landslide victory for the liberal Partido Revolucionario Democrático (PRD), headed by the intellectual Juan Bosch, who promulgated civil liberties, land reform, and labor-union rights and tried in general to dismantle the dictatorship.

Unfortunately, to Washington, D.C., these reforms smacked of communism, and after a right-wing military coup ousted Bosch in 1963, the administration of Lyndon Johnson endorsed the new dictatorship. By spring of 1965, however, the Dominican people had taken to the streets and were on the verge of ousting the junta. At this point, Johnson sent 22,000 Marines to invade the island, routing the popular forces and supervising rigged elections in which Trujillo's former right-hand man, Joaquín Balaguer (1906–2002), assumed the presidency. (This was called “making the world safe for democracy.”) Thus began the next chapter in Dominican history: a semi-dictatorship that continued, with one inconclusive eight-year interruption, through the late 1990s.

In some ways, the Balaguer regime was a continuation of the previous dictatorship—Trujilloism without Trujillo. The power of the Trujillo elite and the military remained intact, labor unions were smashed, and in the early years, right-wing death squads terrorized the slums. Balaguer maintained his dictatorial power by regularly rigging elections, including those of 1994 (by which time he was eighty-nine years old and blind). In other respects, the Balaguer years constituted a new era, with marked effects on music. One change was the dramatic urbanization of the country, fueled by land acquisitions by multinational corporations like Gulf and Western, which uprooted tens of thousands of farmers. Most of these displaced people flooded into the urban shantytowns, especially in Santo Domingo, whose population doubled in the 1970s. The character of the nation's culture changed accordingly, as a population that in 1960 was 70 percent rural became predominantly urban.

Balaguer, in accordance with the wishes of his backers in Washington, D.C., dismantled Trujillo's barriers to foreign investment and opened the country to multinational corporations. Urbanization thus became coupled with internationalization as foreign businesses, consumer products, and media networks came to pervade the country. The foreign presence was particularly visible—or, rather, audible—in the realm of music, as merengue, which previously had been able to monopolize the music scene, found itself in commercial competition with rock, pop ballads, and salsa. Whereas these were backed by powerful multinationals, as of the early 1960s the Dominican record industry scarcely existed, because Petán Trujillo's dilettantish involvement in records and radio had scared off any would-be competitors while failing to produce more than a handful of records. Merengue and other local musics were thus at a distinct disadvantage in competing with foreign musics. The inroads made by salsa also dovetailed with a long-standing niche popularity of Cuban-style *son*, which Dominican enthusiasts liked to dance in their own fashion.

Until the late 1970s, the merengue was definitely on the defensive, as the airwaves and record stores were dominated by North American pop,

weepy *baladas*, and hard-driving Puerto Rican and Newyorican salsa. By 1980, however, the tide was turning. For one thing, the Dominican recording industry was coming into its own; with Petán no longer intimidating entrepreneurs, several local record companies and sophisticated studios had emerged that were able to produce slick, professional recordings that could stand their ground against the foreign imports. Dominican producers were also better poised to sway local radio deejays with *payola* (which is legal in the Dominican Republic) than were foreign-based competitors. Further, salsa had lost much of its youthful vigor and freshness, and the trend toward bland, commercial *salsa romántica* was well under way.

The most important factor, however, was the emergence of a new, revitalized merengue that managed to combine the sophistication of the big-band salon merengue, the kinetic intensity of *perico ripiao*, and the best and most appropriate influences from its foreign competitors. The most innovative and significant figure in this *merengue de orquesta* was bandleader Johnny Ventura (b. 1940). Starting in the 1960s, Ventura broke from the “sweet” sound of salon big bands like Alberti’s, paring down the ensemble to a lean *conjunto* of two saxes and two or three trumpets. The key instruments were the saxes, which played crisp, staccato arpeggio patterns, interlocking percussively with the newly highlighted *tambora* to produce tight (*apretado*), machine-gun-like composite rhythms. Some of Ventura’s songs perpetuated the merengue’s tradition of social commentary, and his outspoken support for the PRD illustrated how the merengue easily shed its negative associations with Trujillo.

While maintaining some traditional aspects, Ventura enlivened the merengue with a variety of select foreign influences. He incorporated the sophisticated arranging style of salsa and adopted from disco the use of the bass drum, whose steady, crisp “thump-thump-thump” became a standard feature of merengue. Together with his partner and manager, William Liriano, Ventura, inspired by soul singer James Brown’s revue, outfitted his band in flashy costumes and had them perform snappy dance steps on stage, especially in his weekly television show, the “Combo Show.” Some of these dances, like “El pingüino” (The Penguin) of the 1970s, became ephemeral fads. Meanwhile, Liriano aggressively promoted the band on the island’s concert circuit, realizing that this was one arena in which foreign musics could not compete. The band itself was packaged as a commodity, embodying a new image of merengue as glamorous and extravagant but, at the same time, indigenous. In effect, Ventura’s band managed to refashion the merengue as music that combined the best of the local and the international, and the traditional and the modern, while becoming an embodiment of Dominican *tigueraje*. Ventura’s band soon



Johnny Ventura. (Photograph by Fran Vogel.)



Wilfrido Vargas. (Photograph by Fran Vogel.)

became the model for commercial horn-based merengue groups (now called *orquestas*), and he continued for decades to enjoy the status of a Tito Puente–like Dominican music doyen while also having had a parallel political career as a PRD leader.

Also enlivening the scene from the late 1970s was the innovative bandleader Wilfrido Vargas (b. 1949), who enriched the merengue with elements freely borrowed from *zouk*, rap, dancehall, salsa, and disco.⁹ Particularly dynamic were his horn arrangements in songs like “Abusadora,” in which the saxes lay frenetic, bubbling accompaniment lines beneath the verses; indeed, in huffing and puffing throughout the entire song with scarcely a breath, the sax players embodied the image of Dominicans as a hardworking people.

While the merengue provided a vehicle for distraction and dancing, other kinds of music played more sociopolitical roles during the 1970s. Since Balaguer eventually felt strong enough to tolerate a degree of mild opposition and dissent, progressive, left-of-center activists formed community-based “recreation and sport clubs,” where they held meetings, mobilized around local issues, and formed quasi-folkloric groups to perform traditional songs and dances, from the creole *carabiné* to *palo* and *sarandunga*. Local counterparts of protest-oriented Latin American *nueva canción* (new song) groups formed, the most famous of

which was *Convite*, which performed a mixed bag of folk songs, Afro-Dominican music, and original songs by Luis Díaz. Unfortunately, in the 1980s most of this activism ebbed, due less to repression than to cooptation by the PRD during its ineffective 1978–86 rule, popular disappointment with that party, and, on a more general level, the decline of leftist idealism and optimism throughout the Americas during this period.

The Merengue Explosion

By the early 1980s, the merengue, revamped by Ventura, Vargas, and their ilk, had definitively triumphed in its homeland, dominating the TV music programs and the playlists of the country's more than two hundred radio stations. More remarkable, the exuberant merengue went on to invade salsa's homelands of Puerto Rico and New York City, putting salsa on the defensive and writing a new chapter in the history of Latin music.

To a large extent, the merengue was personally carried abroad by the massive wave of Dominican emigrants who had been pouring out of the country and especially into New York City since the late 1970s. While Trujillo's policies had restricted emigration, the Balaguer regime encouraged it. Many political opponents and dissidents were given the option of emigration or "disappearance," and the continued concentration of landownership drove thousands of dispossessed farmers into exile. However, most emigrants were simply energetic and ambitious people motivated by the better economic opportunities in the United States. Because of the expense of emigration, many emigrants have been members of the educated petty bourgeoisie, seeking better opportunities abroad.

In all, far more than 15 percent of the Dominican population has migrated to the United States since 1961, including about 800,000 to New York and more than 300,000 to Puerto Rico. Many came illegally, especially in small, rickety boats plying the turbulent Mona Passage between the island and neighboring Puerto Rico; many boats have capsized in the white-capped, shark-infested waters, with hundreds of lives lost.¹⁰

Once in the United States, some immigrants have ended up on welfare, and a few have enriched themselves as drug traffickers, but most have found honest work. New York City's Washington Heights neighborhood—now nicknamed Quisqueya Heights—became dominated and economically revitalized by "Dominican Yorks," who took over many of the city's innumerable bodegas. On the whole, the Dominicans have distinguished themselves by their aggressive industriousness and their willingness to do hard work for little pay.

As merengue bands followed the Dominican migrants, dance clubs sprang up throughout upper Manhattan and the Dominican neighborhoods of Brooklyn and Queens (Queens is celebrated as the world's most ethnically diverse city area). The sites have ranged from plush venues in uptown Quisqueya Heights to funky, hole-in-the-wall joints in Queens featuring *merengue típico*. But merengue's popularity soon spread beyond the Dominican community to pervade the Latin music scene. In the 1980s, many salsa musicians, promoters, and fans watched with dismay as their favorite clubs and radio stations switched to merengue formats, and barrios came to resound to the beat of the *tambora* rather than the conga. The merengue furor was especially intense in Puerto Rico in the 1990s, when merengue became the most popular music in the island and was even performed, in a somewhat less manic style, by locals such as Olga Tañón. Merengue also went on to become a subsidiary genre in the international studio "On-2" salsa dance network, which thrives in Spain, the Anglo United States, and elsewhere. In effect, merengue, like the Cuban *son*, became an international genre that is part of the cultural patrimony of more than just the Dominican Republic.

Some of merengue's initial success was due to the willingness of the Dominican bands to play longer for less money. Moreover, the Dominican bands, true products of the MTV generation, wear garish outfits and perform flashy and often gimmicky choreography that some salsa musicians scorn as silly. But the fact remains that a large portion of former or would-be salsa fans, whether in New York, Puerto Rico, or elsewhere, simply came to prefer merengue. For one thing, the two-step merengue dance is considerably easier than the basic salsa footwork, and many young Latinos and fumble-footed *rockeros* intimidated by virtuoso salsa dancers can easily boogie to the Dominican beat. Moreover, fads have their own logic, and just as salsa was getting stale, merengue appeared on the scene—spicy, hot, and eminently danceable. While some detractors criticized the modern merengue for its perceivedly glib superficiality, trivial lyrics, and commercial orientation, the merengue's frenetic beat does not lend itself to a wide variety of textual sentiments. After all, merengue, like salsa, is dance music, and lyrical profundity may be less important in that sense than the intricate rhythms and exuberant arrangements.

By the early 1990s, merengue's relationship with salsa had stabilized somewhat. The hard-core *salseros* of the 1980s had to realize that salsa would not be *the* definitive Latin American music, and, indeed, the Caribbean and New York music scenes have been greatly enriched and diversified by the merengue influx. A portion of the salsa audience may have been lost to merengue, but salsa is now holding its own, especially as an increasingly formulaic merengue accommodated itself to commercial success. Nowadays,

New York's Latin radio stations typically alternate merengue and salsa with bachata and reggaeton. In fact, as second- and third-generation Newyoricans forget their Spanish and defect to rock and rap, the ranks of salsa fans have been replenished by Dominican immigrants. Within the New York merengue world, horn-based *orquesta merengue* tends to be preferred in upper Manhattan's Washington Heights community, many of whose constituents hail from urban Santo Domingo. But in Queens, where immigrants tend to be more recent and from the Cibao hinterland, it is *merengue típico* that rules, with several small clubs featuring live music.

The international merengue boom has to some extent inverted the whole Dominican commercial music scene so that its center of gravity, like that of Puerto Rican music, is now in some ways New York City (which Wilfrido Vargas referred to as “a province of the Dominican Republic”). Several major bands are based in New York, and some never bother to tour the Dominican Republic itself. In some respects, New York has become the tail that wags the dog, in accordance with the Dominican Republic's penetration by international capital and, for that matter, the extent to which Dominican political and economic policies ultimately have been determined in Washington, D.C.—that is, by the International Monetary Fund and the U.S. State Department.

By the turn of the millennium, the New York Dominican population, with its relative economic and cultural power, was having an impact on the Dominican Republic in many ways. Returning and visiting Dominican Yorkers have always tried to show their success by arriving with as many gifts, and wearing as much bling, as they could afford. Pocho y Su Cocobanda described such a returnee in “El hombre llegó para'o”:

Everyone congratulated him when he came back from the other side
He came with seven suitcases, he arrived in style.¹¹

Obligatory for returning young men was to wear a lot of gold chains, which could be rented for the occasion. The returnees also came with new hairstyles, playboy shirts, a flamboyant manner, Spanglish diction, and increasingly liberal attitudes toward culture and music. As ethnomusicologist Angelina Tallaj noted, these new tastes have included an openness to Afro-Dominican music and a fondness for hybrid musics that mix merengue and bachata with R&B and hip-hop.¹²

By the second decade of the 2000s, the merengue boom had subsided, especially with the vogue of reggaeton and bachata. In the Dominican Republic, many people even voiced concern that merengue, the supposed icon of national identity, was declining and needed institutional support. Such

enthusiasts generally found little consolation in the emergence of a new incarnation of merengue, the so-called *merengue de calle* or *merengue urbano*, whose biggest star has been Omega (Antonio Peter de la Rosa). In songs like “Chambonea,” he raps over a merengue beat in a deadpan, laid-back style, a bit like a Dominican Tego Calderón or Snoop Dogg.

Around 2015 or so, the vogue of *merengue de calle* seemed to be passing and in some respects giving way to “dembow,” a contemporary urban, lower-class variant of reggaeton (which itself derived its beat from Shabba Ranks’s 1991 song “Dem Bow”). As performed by the likes of El Mayor, Farruko, and El Alfa, Dominican dembow resembles reggaeton but is a bit faster and a bit less “musical,” with sparse, minimalist accompaniment and equally sparse, repetitive vocals, which may be rapped or shouted as well as sung to simple tunes. In keeping with dembow’s unpretentious, stripped-down style, the themes of its videos are chicks, bling, and cars, or sometimes just chicks and bling, or perhaps chicks and cars. Its emphasis on elemental rhythm inspires some people to shake their hips and others to merely roll their eyes.

Merengue Style and Dance

The essence of merengue is its intricate, composite rhythm, which combines frenetic speed with crisp, controlled instrumental parts. Typically, while the *tambora* roll highlights the downbeat of every other bar, the *güira* provides hissing variations on a steady “chick-chicka-chick-chicka” pattern, and the bass plays a steady half-note pulse. Meanwhile, the melodic instruments typically play fast arpeggio ostinatos, as in the excerpt from the *merengue típico*, “Tengo un lio,” by Fefita la Grande shown in Musical Example 16.

Variations on these patterns are common. The bass player, for example, can provide a variety of effects, and in modern merengue the traditional *tambora* roll has given way to a simpler pattern called playing *a lo maco* (like a frog), popularized in particular by Los Hermanos Rosario. At a fast tempo, such variations can make the beat anything but simple. When combined in different ways, different songs and sections of a single song may show considerable rhythmic variety within the basic framework.

The formal structure of the modern merengue often resembles that of the *son* in having an initial “song”-like section (itself called “merengue”) with a text, followed by a longer mambo/*jaleo* section, which, like the *montuno*, contains call-and-response patterns over a repeated chordal ostinato, punctuated by pre-composed horn interludes. In many cases, the harmonies to the entire song consist of alternating tonic-dominant (I-V) chords, so that the first and second parts are not as distinct as in *son* and salsa. Some me-

The musical score is for a Merengue excerpt. It consists of four staves: Saxophone, Accordion, Bass, and Tambora. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The time signature is common time (C). The piece is marked 'M.M. 300' and '300'. The saxophone part features a fast arpeggiated pattern. The accordion part provides harmonic support with chords and arpeggios. The bass part plays a steady, rhythmic pattern. The tambora part provides the characteristic merengue rhythm with a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes.

Musical Example 16: Merengue excerpt.

merengues alternate mambo and verse sections (such as Vargas’s “Abusadora”), and in some the verse section is all but absent.

Saxophones are indispensable to dance-band merengue—unlike in salsa, where they are, at best, optional. Typically, the saxes play fast arpeggio patterns throughout most of the song, effectively perpetuating the role of the accordion in traditional merengue. Their crisp, tight ostinatos are punctuated, often in a responsorial style, by trumpet riffs.

Many songs with more varied chord progressions were not originally merengues. In the 1980s, it became common for bands to take popular songs, especially slow *baladas*, and perform them as merengues, adding snappy *jaleos* and, of course, doubling or tripling the tempo. Wilfrido Vargas did several such cover versions of French Caribbean *zouk* and *konpa* (*compas*) songs. This practice is known as *fusilamiento*, which literally means “firing.” Such borrowing of tunes is hardly unique to merengue; it is, in fact, commonplace in much Caribbean music in general, whether in the case of a Mexican *ranchera* recycled as a bachata or a country-and-western tune reworked in reggae.

The basic merengue dance step is quite simple, consisting of rocking back and forth between the left and the right foot in time with the bass and bass-drum beats, in a pattern called *paso de la empalizada* (stick-fence step). Partners can embrace loosely or more intimately—*brillando hebillas* (polishing belt buckles), as they say. The two-step pattern is considerably easier than the basic salsa choreography. In both salsa and merengue, dancers can combine the basic step with a variety of turns, spins, and breaks. Many merengue dancers, however, restrict themselves to the basic step, so that it often seems that they are barely moving, or are doing so in some sort of viscous medium. Also, the embellishing turns can be done at slow tempo, unlike in salsa danc-

ing, where the delight lies in their dizzyingly rapid and yet smooth execution. Thus, although merengue as music is celebrated as *subido* (fast and intense) its accompanying dance is often *bajado* (cool, subdued, and restrained).

Bachata: From the Rural Tavern to the Global Nightclub

While the merengue was sizzling its way through the Dominican Republic and abroad in the 1960s and '70s, a quite different kind of music was thriving in the countryside, largely ignored by the mass media. The early Cuban bolero—and some say, the term “bachata”—had been brought to the island by Cuban troubador Sindo Garay in the 1890s and had taken root as an informal, guitar-based romantic song. These songs were typically performed either by rural amateurs or by guitar-led ensembles that also played merengue and other genres. By the 1880s, accordion-based groups had become more popular, but the informal guitar ensembles, rather than disappearing, continued as a somewhat marginalized folk tradition. By the 1950s or so, these groups typically consisted of one or two guitars, maracas, and perhaps bongo and marimba, accompanying a solo male singer. Their repertoire consisted of Cuban *sones*, Mexican *rancheras*, local merengues, and, above all, sentimental boleros. The music was predominantly romantic, used by suitors to serenade their ladies, to accompany dancing at rural parties, and to soothe the sentiments of jilted lovers at neighborhood taverns. Many songs were full of ribald double entendres and made no pretensions to bourgeois respectability.

As the Balaguer regime opened the countryside to foreign investment, hundreds of thousands of farmers lost their land to American agribusiness firms and migrated to Santo Domingo. Many ended up living in shantytowns or “Villa Miseria” slums, with their mud alleys, open sewers, rat-infested garbage heaps, and flimsy shacks clinging precariously to the slopes of ravines. This was a world essentially ignored by the Balaguer regime, which preferred to devote its attention and the nation’s resources to projects like the \$250 million Columbus lighthouse monument overlooking the harbor. The shantytown residents may have enjoyed merengue but would have had few chances to hear live performances, which would occur primarily in expensive urban clubs that had restrictive dress codes and were oriented toward the local elite.

As the dispossessed farmers flooded into urban shantytowns, they brought with them their guitar-based *canciones de amargue* (songs of bitterness), as they were then called, and the music came to express the frustrations and longings of male slum dwellers. Disseminated on cheap, poorly produced

45s and cassettes, the music found new homes in tavern and brothel jukeboxes and in boom-boxes in neighborhood *colmados* (mom-and-pop stores with a few folding chairs on the sidewalk for drinking and hanging out). As we have seen, rural music in Puerto Rico and Cuba has enjoyed a certain idealized status in national ideology, but the Dominican lower-class guitar songs enjoyed no such paternalistic support. Dismissed by the bourgeoisie as *cachivache* (trivial, worthless), the music in the early 1970s came to be called *bachata*, the word for a rowdy lower-class fiesta. However derogatory in origin, the term stuck, and by the early 1980s, *bachata* music, though largely shunned by television and radio and marketed mostly by humble street vendors, was coming to rival *merengue* in record sales and popularity. As *bachata* singers like Luis Segura, Leonardo Paniagua, and Julio Angel popularized the genre, its relationship to *merengue* took on aspects of a symbolic class war, pitting the homemade guitar against the noisy saxophone, and the humble *colmado* against the elite club. In those early years, *bachata's* milieu was the sector of society that Dominicans compare to *concón*, the burned rice at the bottom of the pan—the poor who are exposed to the heat of poverty, toil, and oppression and who are unable to develop as well as the rest. Many of the songs in the 1970s and '80s seemed particularly suited to express the frustrations of devalued, discouraged *barrio* men in a milieu where men were often unemployed or dependent on working women and where transient liaisons between men and women were coming to outnumber stable marriages. Many songs expressed these feelings of bitterness (*amargue*), especially insofar as women were becoming perforce liberated by economic self-reliance and the breakdown of kinship relations. Like innumerable boleros and Mexican *rancheras*, the *bachatas* often portrayed the man drowning his sorrows, cursing perfidious women, and offering bitter advice to other men:

I'm going to tell you about women who come to the capital
 After three days she gets so you can't put up with her
 And she starts to walk in the streets alone
 And she even deceives you with your own best friend.¹³

In the 1990s, both *bachata* and its social status changed dramatically. One sort of boost was given by the influential and respected Juan Luis Guerra (who is discussed below), who gave the genre a certain legitimacy when he entitled his 1991 hit album *Bachata rosa* (Pink *Bachata*), even if its ballads weren't really in *bachata* style. More importantly, with the use of better studios, the input of new musicians, and perhaps a natural process of maturation, the genre improved in general quality. The angry, bitter, or

ribald lyrics of the early years became less characteristic, giving way to gentle odes by Raúlín Rodríguez and songs like Joe Vera’s “Por tu amor,” in which he promised to cook, clean house, make coffee, and take the kids to school to please his woman. An iconic hit that marked the transition was Anthony Santos’s sentimental love song “Voy pa’allá” (1991). Santos also popularized a new sound, in which the bongo, *güira*, and bass lay down a funky medium-tempo beat, and the finger-picked acoustic guitar gave way to a flat-picked, squeaky-sounding, amplified-acoustic sound, while still playing very standardized arpeggio patterns.¹⁴ With this new style, Dominican bachata, though perhaps born from the Cuban bolero, had evolved into something unique and new. But meanwhile, if it has lost most of its angry edge, with its emphasis on heartbreak and loss, even its fans may jokingly refer to it as “*corta venas*” music—that is, music to slash your wrists by.

With the turn of the millennium, the spread of bachata was nothing less than phenomenal. An initial step was the move to New York, where young Dominicans easily took to bachata without knowing or caring about its low status in the DR. As one college student related, “I couldn’t believe how when I visited my family in Santo Domingo and put on some bachata, they all shouted at me, ‘Why are you playing that crap? That’s *música de guardia*’” (i.e., music that the lower-class, rural-migrant night watchman would listen to). From around 2002, the Bronx-based band Aventura gave bachata a cosmopolitan polish and pop appeal that made it the sentimental music of choice for Latinos of all national backgrounds and ages. In the aptly titled album *We Broke the Rules*, Aventura managed to combine a New York orientation with themes foregrounding their roots in the rural DR, singing of the migration experience and using both English and rural Dominican slang while branching out to R&B and reggaeton. With Aventura hits like “Obsession,” bachata extended its conquest of the airwaves and nightclubs throughout Latin America and Europe.

In the second decade of the 2000s, bachata continued to thrive through hits by Romeo Santos (formerly of Aventura) and another Bronx native, Prince Royce, who also performs R&B and other genres. As of 2016, Santos’s hit “Propuesta indecente” had garnered around a billion views on YouTube—definitely more than could have been made by a single demented fan. By this time, Juan Luis Guerra had also recorded some genuine bachatas, such as “Tus besos.” Taking bachata far away from its once angry or macho early lyrics, Santos and Royce sing songs of vulnerability, tenderness, and longing in an androgynous (if not downright effeminate) style, endearing them as heartthrobs to a generation of women. Modern bachatas continue to become more sophisticated and varied in their guitar playing, instru-

mental accompaniments, and compositions. Long gone are the days of raggedy cover versions of Mexican *rancheras* with the guitar stuck in the Bach C Major Prelude pattern. Meanwhile, although deejays and sound systems have increasingly replaced live bands in the salsa and merengue clubs, bachata remains a bastion of live performance. Clubgoers still like to hear live bands, and musicians in the audiences may marvel at the delightful and funky interaction that can occur between the bongo and *güira* players.

As bachata matured, it also developed its own dance style. To some extent, this involved adapting salsa-style moves (turns, spins, slides, hair comb, cradle walk, etc.) to bachata's basic medium-tempo one-two-three-tap pattern. But Dominican dancers showed as much choreographic talent and originality as Latinos anywhere, and bachata dancing acquired its own distinct flavor. This included some distinctively Dominican moves, such as a circular flourish of the foot, as if "*dibujando*" or drawing (a circle). Meanwhile, as bachata spread to Europe, professional show dancers expanded the repertoire of moves into what came to be called "Italian style," "Spanish style," and then, collectively, just "bachata moderna," with more complex turns, upper body moves, and—for the women—"booty rolls" and "body rolls." In 2008, a new exhibition couple, Ataca and La Alemana, further enriched the style with moves from hip-hop and other genres. Nowadays, a professional couple might perform during a break at a dance club, or they could be hired to teach a routine to teenagers for a show at a *quinceañera* (sweet sixteen) party. The bachata dance scene, like that of salsa, now features its own studio classes, "socials" and "congresses," and semiprofessional dance teams that perform at various sorts of events.

The way that legions of anonymous Dominicans have developed bachata dance style is one sort of illustration of a collective talent. Meanwhile, outstanding individuals have also done much to put Dominican music on the map, and perhaps no individual has done so more than Juan Luis Guerra.

Juan Luis Guerra

Juan Luis Guerra, like Ruben Blades, is a *sui generis* musician—in a class by himself. On the one hand, his music is too original to be typical, but on the other hand, it illustrates the internationalization and growing sophistication of Dominican music. Guerra's musical education was somewhat unusual by Dominican standards: After training at the Dominican national conservatory, he went on to study at Boston's Berklee College of Music, where he was schooled in jazz and exposed to a wide variety of international musics. When he returned to Santo Domingo, he formed a vocal quartet called 440, which performed original jazz-oriented songs in a style inspired by—or in some

cases, directly adapted from—the U.S. group Manhattan Transfer. The quartet’s music was oriented primarily toward urban cosmopolitans and university audiences, although his subsequent recordings have managed to retain this orientation while enjoying genuine mass appeal.

Guerra’s success derives from both his musical talent and his refined and sensitive lyrics, with which he has taken both merengue and Dominican music as a whole to new levels of profundity and expressiveness. In the early 1990s, Guerra moved beyond the Latin Manhattan Transfer stage, foregrounding his own often strikingly original singing and incorporating diverse styles and influences. The landmark album was his Grammy-winning *Bachata rosa* (1991), containing a mix of merengues, ballads, and unclassifiable Latin songs, all displaying his flair for compelling tunes and original settings. His “A pedir su mano” (To Ask for Her Hand) is a sort of merengue to end all merengues, with its brilliant and eclectic orchestration and searing chorus.¹⁵ In a different vein is the ballad “Burbujas de amor” (Bubbles of Love), whose text is highly sexual, in its way, but the imagery is simply too surrealistic to be vulgar:

I want to be a fish, to rub my nose in your fishbowl
and make bubbles of love all over
Oh, to pass the whole night awake, wet inside you!

Other albums reflect a similar stylistic diversity. In “La cosquillita,” he teams up with accordionist Francisco Ulloa for a *merengue típico*, and in “Los pajaritos” he breathes new life into the 1950s-style Cuban *son*.

Other songs of his might be classified as neo-*nueva canción* in their singer-songwriter lyricism and their trenchant confrontation of social themes. His “Visa para un sueño” (Visa for a Dream), for instance, is a poignant portrayal of the desperate aspirations of visa applicants at Santo Domingo’s U.S. Embassy, while his “Ojalá que llueva café” (Let It Rain Coffee) became an anthem for the nation’s farmers. Some have compared his songs, in their active engagement with social themes, to those of Ruben Blades, and Guerra himself asserted, “The newspaper gives me ideas. When I heard Ruben Blades doing this with salsa, that opened the door for me to think I could do the same with merengue.”¹⁶ And like Blades, he has taken his share of flak, as the video for his song “El costo de la vida” (The Cost of Living) was banned in several countries because of its stark indictment of Latin American poverty. Whether singing about love or an inadequate Dominican hospital (as in “El Niágara en bicicleta”), Guerra’s lyrics are consistently original and incisive.

Guerra’s videos are also strikingly creative and have set new standards

Juan Luis Guerra.
(Adapted by Peter Manuel.)

for the art as a whole in their innovative themes and their combinations of animated effects and street scenes. The video for “A pedir su mano” is a sort of festive tribute to his country’s ordinary people and folk traditions, showing a *gagá* procession, the cane-headed *guloya* dancers of the West Indian–descended “*cocolo*” community, and Guerra himself interacting with diverse humble people of different complexions. “Burbujas de amor” features a sensuous dance by a shirtless black man with a white woman, which may no longer raise eyebrows but certainly would not have been possible in the Trujillo era. In “El Niágara en bicicleta,” he sings while being wheeled through a hospital on a gurney. Needless to say, these are a far cry from the typical reggaeton video that showcases the bling-laden stud fawned over by bikini-clad bimbos.



Around 2000, Guerra became a born-again Christian fundamentalist, inspiring a new turn in his songs and videos, some of which portray a fairytale world in which a (dark-skinned) purse snatcher is attacked by wasps, and nice people go to heaven, where there is no need for hospitals.¹⁷ For secular humanists, however, he continues to put out catchy and original love songs and dance tunes.

Guerra’s success owes nothing to the machinations of the entertainment industry’s promotion machine. He remains wedded to the small independent label, Karen, which he founded, and avoids interviews and generally shuns tours in favor of spending time with his family in the Dominican Republic. The eclecticism and sophistication of Guerra’s music illustrate how Dominican music has come of age, at once transcending and retaining its earthy folk roots and becoming an international art in its own right.

Further Reading

See Deborah Pacini Hernandez, *Bachata: A Social History of a Dominican Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), and Paul Austerlitz, *Merengue: Dominican Music and Dominican Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997).

Haiti and the French Caribbean

Music in the Streets of Port-au-Prince

ON A HOT, sunny January day in Port-au-Prince, my friend Tony, a flute player, invites me to visit a rehearsal of a new popular music group he has just joined. We walk to the street, and Tony lets out a loud “psst” sound, flagging down a local bus. Called a “tap-tap,” our bus is really a half-ton flatbed pickup truck with an elaborately painted wooden frame covering the cargo area. Piled atop our tap-tap are bags of charcoal used for cooking food, some fruit and vegetables, and a young man carrying two chickens. Tap-tap are decorated with paintings of Catholic saints, important people like Malcolm X, movie characters (Rambo was then a popular choice), and other people who display unique and admirable qualities. Slogans painted on the tap-tap, such as “Dieu qui decide” (God Decides) and “Psaume 34” (Psalm 34) serve to protect us from a fatal traffic accident, while other slogans, like “Miami Beach” and “Min Nou!” (Here We Are!), express the tap-tap owner’s taste and personality.

We board the tap-tap on Avenue J. J. Dessalines, the main thoroughfare in Port-au-Prince. Since the vehicle is completely full, we opt to hang off the back of the truck, holding on to the roof rack for balance. We are in a superb position to observe the many types of musical activity found on the streets of Haiti’s capital. Our tap-tap is mounted with large speakers that blare Haitian dance music called *konpa* (*compas*); a few of the passengers sing along with

This chapter was written by Michael Largey.

the recordings. As we pass the Mache Fè (Iron Market), young men peddle soft drinks by beating rhythms on *kola* bottles using their metal can openers. Other vendors use similar techniques to draw attention: The ice-cream vendor uses three bells suspended from a piece of wood to announce his arrival, while the shoeshine man rings a single bell. The meat-pie vendor sells his wares by singing “*pate cho*” (hot meat-pie), and the peanut-brittle seller sings “*tablet*” (praline); both sellers hope to make passersby hungry with their not-so-subliminal messages.

On a street corner, two *twoubadou* (troubadors) perform for shoppers. The singer of the group sits on a large, empty tin can and taps out a rhythm on a small plastic bowl with a piece of wood. His partner beats out rhythms on an assortment of cans, tubs, buckets, and assorted scraps of metal. On the next corner, another *twoubadou*, also known as a *mizisyen ambilan* (walking musician), gives a performance as a “one-man band.” He strums a homemade guitar pasted with photos from discarded magazines while playing a kazoo that has a car stereo speaker attached to its end. Strapped to his legs are two *tcha-tcha* (maracas), and his foot is beating out a rhythm on a *tanbou* (single-headed drum).

Our tap-tap turns up Avenue Delmas, heading toward Pétionville, a suburb of Port-au-Prince. I push the buzzer attached to the back of the truck to signal the driver to stop, and Tony and I jump off the back of the tap-tap. We pay our fare of 85 centimes apiece (about 18 cents) and begin the descent to Tony’s rehearsal. We are the last to arrive, and some of the musicians have already begun to rehearse by the time we finish greeting everyone present.

Tony introduces me to Théodore “Lolo” Beaubrun, the leader of the group; Lolo’s wife, Mimerose; his cousin Daniel “Dadi” Beaubrun; and the rest of the band. Lolo explains that the group’s name is Boukman Eksperyans; it takes its name from the Vodou priest Boukman who in 1791 made a blood pact with a group of runaway slaves to overthrow the French colonial system. Lolo explains that the group’s music derives its inspiration from the Vodou ceremony where worshipers dance to songs and ceremonial drumming meant to communicate with the *lwa* (spirits) of Africa.

Lolo steers me toward a stool in the cramped rehearsal space in the living room. From my vantage point, I can see the entire ensemble, including two female singers, Lolo on keyboard synthesizer, Dadi on the bass and drum machine, and several drummers playing a set of Vodou ceremonial drums from the Rada nation of spirits. Lolo asks the band to rehearse its new number, “Se Kreyòl nou ye,” a song that uses a familiar *yanvalou* rhythm of “short-long-long-short-long-long-long” (a variant of the African-derived standard time line shown in Chapter 1). The words of the song are striking,

since they call for all speakers of Kreyòl (Creole, the national language of Haiti) to take pride in their native language and culture.

Haitian Cultural Crossroads

Haiti, like Cuba, is a place where musical expression reflects the mixture of several different cultural influences. While most historians look at the history of colonial Haiti as a process of replacement of indigenous populations of Native Americans with Europeans and enslaved Africans, in reality the heritages of all three groups endure in present-day Haiti, albeit in different forms and to varying degrees.

Before Columbus's arrival in 1492, Haiti was populated by several Native American groups, including the Taino (the largest group), Carib, and Guanahatabeys (sometimes referred to as Ciboney) peoples. The Taino groups were led by *caciques* (chiefs) and spoke a language called Arawak; other Taino groups existed in nearby Cuba. Within the first twenty-five years of Spanish rule, about 90 percent of the Taino population of the island was wiped out by Spanish guns and diseases. Nevertheless, some Arawak words are still used in Haiti—for instance, “Quisqueya” (the Taino word for the island) and even the word “Haiti” itself, which means “mountainous land.”

The Spanish ruled Quisqueya, which they renamed Hispaniola (Española), from 1492 until 1697, when, in the Treaty of Ryswick, Spain ceded the western portion of the island to France. The French called their new colony Saint-Domingue and turned it into one of the most profitable economies in the Western Hemisphere, leading Europeans to dub it “the pearl of the Antilles.” French colonists, especially those who owned and operated the large sugarcane plantations, brought their European entertainments to Saint-Domingue, opening theaters for musical performances and sponsoring productions of popular French operas. There were more than three thousand European dramatic and musical performances in Saint-Domingue between 1764 and 1791, most of which were imported from the theaters of France.

The colony's economic successes were, however, borne on the backs of Africans brought to Saint-Domingue as slaves. Working long hours at the arduous tasks of harvesting and processing sugarcane into molasses, rum, and sugar, Africans enjoyed few of the popular entertainments available to the French planters. Slaves were forbidden by law from attending French entertainments as audience members, but they were drafted as entertainers for wealthy planters. European accounts from the colonial period indicate that many slaves became adept on European instruments such as the violin, clarinet, and French horn.

While African slaves were familiar with several of the musical traditions of their French captors, most of their music making was based in West African and Central African traditions of music. Slaves were brought to Saint-Domingue from as far north on the west coast of Africa as Senegal and as far south as Angola. Haitian historian Jean Fouchard claims that many Africans were brought to Saint-Domingue from the east coast of Africa, especially Madagascar and Mozambique (whence the word “maringa,” or *mereng*, is also believed to derive). During their perilous voyages as human cargo across the Atlantic, Africans were not able to bring any physical artifacts from home. The drums they made in Haiti, called *tanbou*, were carved from Caribbean wood but used designs from drums made back in Africa. Other instruments, like the *ogan* (a struck piece of metal), were adapted by African musicians in Saint-Domingue. Africans also adapted instruments from Taino music, including the *tcha-tcha* (maracas), which functioned much like the West African *shekere* (gourd shaker covered with a beaded net) and the *lanbi* (blown conch shell), which was an adaptation of the Akan *abeng*, or blown cow’s horn.

In addition to the planter and slave classes, there was a significant population of mostly light-skinned free people of color, called *afranchi*. As the offspring of white French men and African women, the *afranchi* had some legal advantages over the slave classes. *Afranchi* could attend some of the French colonial entertainments and could own land. They were forbidden, however, to hold administrative posts, work as lawyers or doctors, or wear clothing that resembled the styles favored by the wealthy white colonists. Despite the limitations placed on their participation in French planter society, many *afranchi* identified themselves culturally with France.

All of the social groups in Saint-Domingue (French planters, *afranchi* landholders, and African slaves) were interested in breaking free of French governmental control, although their reasons differed. The planters wanted to be free of the tribute they were forced to pay to the French government for the privilege of owning land. The *afranchi*, eager to be rid of the French planters, hoped to gain independence for Saint-Domingue and take over the plantations. The slaves were also eager to be rid of the French, but not so that *afranchi* landowners could merely take the place of the French planters. Some slaves sided with the French government, believing that the recent French Revolution, with its promise of “liberty, equality, and fraternity,” would extend to them. Other slaves believed that their only hope of freedom lay in a complete break from France.

Slave resistance to the French took several forms. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many slaves ran away to inaccessible mountain-

ous areas. These slaves were called *mawon* (from the French word *marron* and the Spanish word *cimarrón*, meaning “runaway slave”). The *mawon* formed communities and practiced small-scale agriculture and hunting. Many *mawon* went on covert trips back to their plantations in efforts to free friends and family members. On some occasions, *mawon* joined forces with Taino settlements that had escaped the extermination campaigns of the Spanish in the seventeenth century. Other slave-resistance efforts attacked the French plantation system directly. In the 1750s, a *mawon* leader named Makandal led an unsuccessful campaign to poison the drinking water of several plantation owners. Later, in 1791, another *mawon* called Boukman Dutty officiated at a ceremony at Bois Caïman, effectively declaring war on the French plantation owners.

The Haitian Revolution, which lasted from 1791 to 1804, brought the colonial period to an end but left political power in the hands of the *afranchi* elite. While French planters were either exiled or executed, the former *afranchi* class, now split into *milat* (mulatto, light-skinned) and *nwa* (*noir*, dark-skinned) factions, assumed control of much of the business of the new country. The vast majority of the former slaves were located in the rural areas and continued to work the land, but enjoyed few benefits from their newly won freedom.

Today, the vestiges of the plantation system endure in the form of social-class and color stratification. Elites, still divided into *milat* and *nwa* groups, vie for control of the country, while the predominantly dark-skinned rural population provides the tax base for the economy. While color prejudice is still felt in modern Haiti, class discrimination is the more pervasive and persistent impediment to social change.

Creolization in Haiti: Language

The different cultural heritages of Haiti have shaped not only the history of the country but also its language and religions. Unlike the Spanish-speaking Caribbean nations, Haiti has its own language, which is not intelligible to speakers of French. Haitian Creole (as it is known in English)—or “Kreyòl ayisyen,” as Haitians call it—is a mixture of several different languages, including French, which makes up most of the language’s vocabulary, various African languages, Spanish, some Portuguese, and, more recently, English. The term “creole” refers to a linguistic phenomenon that emerges when two groups speaking different languages come into contact and must find a way to communicate. The language formed as a result of this contact is called

a pidgin. Normally, pidgin languages are used by people in contact situations: Pidgins tend to exist when different groups trade with each other but return home to speak a different language. When a pidgin language becomes a native language for a group, it is said to be a “creole” language.

Kreyòl was originally a contact language between the French slaveholders and their African captives. It eventually became the native language for the majority of the Haitian population; all Haitians, with the exception of some of those who have grown up outside Haiti, speak and understand Kreyòl.

Despite Kreyòl’s widespread use in Haiti, elite Haitians, most of whom speak both French and Kreyòl, look down on Kreyòl as an “ungrammatical” use of French. As a result, Kreyòl was first recognized as the “national” language of Haiti only in the 1970s, and French is still the “official” language of government and business. Haitian education, which had been conducted almost exclusively in French, began to use Kreyòl as a language of instruction, but only for the first few elementary-school grades.

Elite prejudice toward Kreyòl and its rural speakers has political consequences, as well. Since non-elites have access neither to good education nor to an environment to cultivate the French language, they are effectively shut out of the official domains of government and business. Elites have successfully blocked efforts to reorganize language instruction in Haiti, fearing that an educated, literate populace will organize itself and present a threat to the status quo.

Kreyòl’s continued existence as the principal language of Haitians is due in part to its ability to change to meet the needs of Haitian speakers. Like most spoken languages, Kreyòl is in a constant state of transformation, incorporating new vocabulary and revitalizing older words and phrases to meet new demands. Kreyòl is famous for incorporating words that not only express new ideas but also comment subtly on changes in modern society. For example, in the 1960s, Haitians called the used clothing shipped from the United States *kènèdi*, after John F. Kennedy, the U.S. president who established the Peace Corps. Now that Kennedy is no longer remembered in Haiti as a political figure, used clothes are called *pepe*. After the 1995 “intervasion” of Haiti by U.S. military forces to reinstall Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haitians heard U.S. soldiers calling their patrol colleagues “partner.” As a result, Haitians coined the term “*patnè*” (partner) to refer to a close companion. Other examples of American commercial influence on Haitian language include laundry detergent, known as *fab* (after the popular American brand of soap); toothpaste, called *kòl gat* (Colgate); and cameras, called *kodak*.

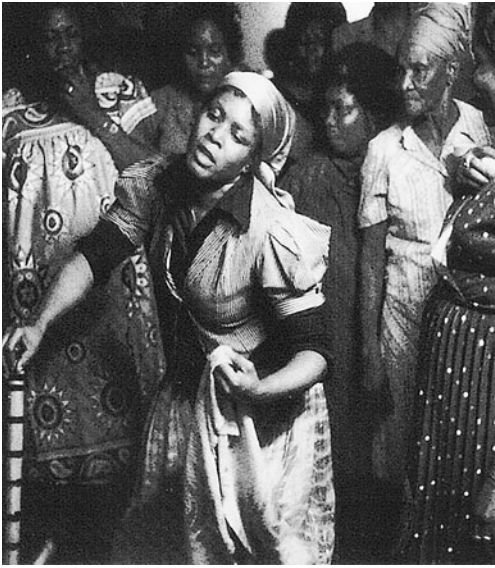
Creolization in Haiti: Religion

Vodou, the Haitian religion that blends several West African spiritual traditions with Roman Catholicism, is similar in many respects to other African-derived religious traditions in the Caribbean.¹ Like the Shango religion of Trinidad, Jamaican Kumina, and Cuban Santería, Vodou uses music, dance, and spirit possession in its religious rituals. Vodou synthesizes the belief in African spirits, called *lwa*, with the Catholic saints, resulting in multiple identities for popular religious figures. The Virgin Mary of Roman Catholicism is frequently associated with the *lwa* of love and beauty, Ezili Freda, while St. Patrick, who is most often associated with driving the snakes from Ireland, is interpreted as a counterpart of Danbala, a *lwa* symbolized by a serpent. Initiates in the Vodou community, called *ounsi*, dance to the music provided by drums, a small iron gong, and a rattle; their goal is to have the *lwa*, who are said to reside in Ginen (Guinea, or ancestral Africa), travel to Haiti and possess the bodies of their Haitian devotees. The *lwa* are said to “mount their horse” during a spirit possession; the worshiper becomes the vehicle of expression for the *lwa*. In a ceremony, people who achieve a spirit possession make gestures that enable others to recognize that a possession is taking place. Often, the worshiper appears to be in a physical struggle, making sudden and vigorous gestures that differ in character from the usual movements of the dance.

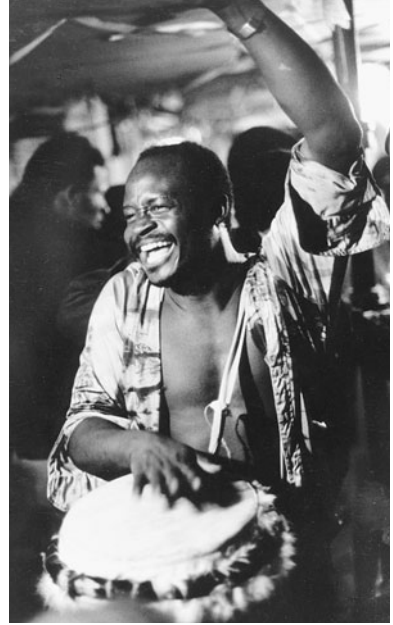
Once the *lwa* has mounted his or her “horse,” the worshiper takes on the personality traits of the *lwa*. A worshiper possessed by Ogou, the *lwa* associated with ironsmithing, war, and the military, often calls for his machete and some rum, while an individual possessed by Ezili Freda might demand gifts of perfume, fine clothes, and jewelry. Other worshipers, recognizing the presence of a *lwa*, may stop and pay their respects to the visiting spirit; some may ask the *lwa* for advice or a favor.

What is necessary for a successful Vodou ceremony is the creation of a sacred space where the *lwa* will feel welcome. The proper spiritual atmosphere is created in part by the ritual drawings of the *lwa* in cornmeal or flour, called *vèvè*. *Vèvè* act as signs to the *lwa* that a ceremony is taking place and that they are invited to attend. Each *lwa* has characteristic *vèvè* that symbolize different aspects of his or her personality. Ezili Freda, associated with love and beauty, has a *vèvè* with a heart design, while Ogou (a counterpart to Santería’s Ogun), associated with iron and war, often has a machete as part of his *vèvè*.

Lwa also have their own music in the form of ritual songs. Ceremonies usually feature a series of songs intended to invite the *lwa* to participate in the ceremony. The first song is always sung to Legba (Elégua in Santería),



Left: A woman possessed by "Gede" at a Vodou ceremony in Brooklyn. (Photograph by Chantal Regnault.)



Right: Frisner Augustin at the Petwo drum. (Photograph by Chantal Regnault.)

Frisner at the Rada drum. (Photograph by Chantal Regnault.)



the *lwa* who guards the crossroads. His songs usually feature the phrase “Papa Legba, ouvri bayè pou nou” (Father Legba, open the gate for us), a plea for Legba to give the worshiper access to the world of the spirits. Other songs follow in a prescribed order, each devoted to a particular *lwa*. Songs are in a combination of Kreyòl and *langaj*, a ceremonial language derived in part from ritual language used in some West and Central African religions. *Langaj* is a “deep” form of ritual language that defies direct, singular translations.

Lwa are organized according to *nanchon*, or “nations,” which take their names from geographic locations or ethnic groups in West and Central Africa. Lois Wilcken has called Vodou *nanchon* “confederations,” recognizing the coalescence of different African spiritual practices into a single worship service.² Ceremonies often salute the *lwa* of Rada, Petwo, Nago, Ibo, and Kongo with their songs and dances. Each *nanchon* probably had its own musical ensemble at one time, but today the major *nanchon* use either Rada or Petwo instruments.

The Rada *nanchon* uses an ensemble of three *tanbou* (drums) called *manman* (mother), *segon* (second or middle), and *boula* (or *kata*), as well as a struck piece of metal known as *ogan*. The ensemble is similar in function to the *tumba francesa* and *batá* ensembles of Cuba in the sense that in each it is the largest, lowest-pitched drum that leads the group. The *manman* is the largest drum and is played with a single stick and one bare hand. The master drummer plays the *manman*; he (most drummers are male) directs the ensemble and determines when the musicians will move to another rhythm or song. The *segon*, slightly smaller than the *manman*, plays rhythmic patterns and can vary the pattern slightly, but not as much as the lead drummer. The *boula* plays a steady rhythmic pattern and helps keep the other drummers coordinated. The drums used in the Rada ensemble are made from hardwoods and are covered with cow skin and tuned with pegs that are driven into the body of the instrument. The Petwo *nanchon* uses two drums made of softer wood than Rada drums; the goatskin heads are fastened to the body of the instrument with cords rather than pegs and are always played with the hands.

Lwa have a reciprocal relationship with their devotees. Spirits provide good harvests, plentiful rain, and good mental and physical health in exchange for their followers’ sacrifices. These sacrifices can either be a live sacrifice of an animal or *manje sèk* (dry food—i.e., not consecrated with the blood of a live sacrifice). Often sacrifices accompany an important celebration such as an initiation or yearly feast. When such animals as chickens, pigs, bulls, and goats are sacrificed, their meat is consumed by the religious

community. For large celebrations, such as the annual festival at Souvenance during Easter week, many animals are sacrificed, ritually offered to the *lwa*, and prepared for those present to eat.

Vodou ceremonies can vary in size from a handful of people in a private home to an assembly of hundreds as part of a festival. In addition, small ceremonies can occur within the context of a much larger religious event. For example, I once witnessed a Vodou ceremony made up of just six people during the *Vyèj Mirak* (Virgin Miracle) festival that is held every year in Saut d'Eau, Haiti, in mid-July. Worshipers came to Saut d'Eau to bathe in a sacred waterfall for physical and spiritual healing. An *oungan* and three *ounsi* who were dressed in the blue denim clothes and straw hats associated with the Vodou spirit Azaka walked up beside me and lit several small candles on the ground. The *oungan* saluted the cardinal points with a long wooden staff in his left hand and a bottle of *kleren* (raw rum) in his right hand. One of the *ounsi* took the bottle when the *oungan* finished his initial salute and poured a little rum on the ground before taking a swig herself. Each *ounsi* carried a differently colored flag, which they swirled in the air as the *oungan* bowed before them. Several onlookers came forward and danced as the *oungan* and *ounsi* sang a song—no one played drums or even clapped as they sang. Once the participants were finished singing, they extinguished their candles and walked off. The entire ceremony lasted about ten minutes.

Ceremonies can be held outdoors—as the previous example shows—or indoors in a formal or informal *ounfò* (temple). At a ceremony I attended in Flatbush, Brooklyn, dozens of worshipers crowded into the basement of an apartment building. Three drummers, an *ogan* player, and several singers provided music in the cramped space while several *manbo*, or female Vodou priests, called spirits from Ginen to join us in New York City for the ceremony. The ceremony began with prayers in French from the Roman Catholic liturgy. Around 11:00 P.M., the ceremony was in full swing, and each *manbo* took turns being spiritually possessed by different *lwa*. Legba (the guardian of the gate between the spiritual and materials worlds) was the first spirit called to the ceremony and later Azaka (a spirit associated with agricultural work), and Danbala (the spirit associated with snakes) possessed different *manbo*. When one of the *manbo* was possessed by the warrior spirit Ogou, she took a mouthful of rum that was laced with hot peppers and sprayed it through her lips above the heads of the worshipers; the sting of the peppers made my eyes water. Finally, the spirit Gede—who is most often associated with death and sexuality—mounted his “horse” and engaged some of us in the ceremony in playful banter. Gede asked us to contribute cash to offset the expenses for “his” ceremony. As I reached into my wallet and he helped

himself to a twenty-dollar bill, Gede mockingly praised my “generosity” to the amusement of those around us.

Ask anyone from the United States what comes to mind when they hear the word “voodoo” and the responses will range from creepy to comical: Voodoo dolls, zombies, black magic, superstition, cannibalism, and devil worship are but a few of the popular ideas associated with Haitians and their religion. Movies like the James Bond adventure *Live and Let Die* and the more recent *Angel Heart* and *The Serpent and the Rainbow* satisfy a taste in the United States for lurid depictions of black Haitians in so-called primitive orgiastic rites. These attitudes about Haitians are founded on racism and perpetuated by ignorance about Haiti, its people, and its culture.

While it is tempting to think that such images of Haitians are a relatively recent phenomenon, U.S. discomfort with its Haitian neighbors dates back to the early days of the Haitian Republic. In the decades after 1804, when Haiti became the first independent black republic, southern whites in the United States were concerned that the example of a successful slave insurrection would inspire a similar revolt on their plantations. Since the early nineteenth century, then, white U.S. fiction about Haiti has been concerned with the depiction of Haitians as savages, consumed by a thirst for white blood. Negative stereotyping of Haitians by white writers has persisted to the present in the form of movies and books that transform the religion of Haitians from a healing ceremony into a satanic ritual. Readers should be aware that despite the pervasiveness of pejorative images about Vodou, the fictionalized version of Haitian religious practices has little to do with Haiti, Vodou, or reality in general.

Carnival and Rara

During the week before Ash Wednesday, several Caribbean nations celebrate what is collectively known as Carnival. Trinidad is perhaps the most famous for its celebrations, complete with huge masquerade bands, fantastic costumery, and festive dancing and music making. The celebration can last up to a week before Ash Wednesday, but the preparation for the event takes months. Many participants in the festivities, especially those involved in the construction of costumes, begin their work the previous year.

In Haiti, the celebration of Carnival (*Kanaval* in Kreyòl) is also accompanied by parades featuring floats called *cha madigra*, popular music provided by Haitian dance bands mounted on the backs of flatbed trucks, and masses of dancing revelers moving through the streets. The *cha madigra* are usually sponsored by local businesses, which hire young women to sit atop the

floats and wave to the crowd. Haitian companies such as Freska (a popular toothpaste firm) and Royal (a margarine producer) use the opportunity to plug their products and to associate themselves with their Haitian audiences. Since Haiti is predominantly an import market, local producers have to compete with less expensive U.S. and French brands of merchandise. Carnival and its association with Haitian traditions give local manufacturers a forum for promoting their goods as “authentically Haitian.”

Foreign products also sponsor floats and masqueraders; the aspirin manufacturer Bufferin hired a group of masqueraders to ride papier-mâché horses emblazoned with the Bufferin logo back in the late 1970s. Non-Haitian products can also be the target of ridicule by Carnival participants. In the film *Divine Horsemen*, filmmaker Maya Deren included a group of masqueraders carrying signs for Ex-Lax, a product that is the butt of many jokes in the United States, as well.

The association of Carnival and commercialization dates back to the 1920s, when the Haitian government became active in the promotion of the celebration. During the American occupation of Haiti (1915–34), the government of Louis Borno was sensitive to the criticism that it had sold out to American interests. Because Carnival is also a time for voicing social criticism, the Haitian government is frequently the target of Carnival songs and jokes. By making Carnival more of a commercial venture and downplaying the critical nature of Carnival song lyrics, the government, with the tacit support of the elite members of Haitian society, hoped to keep Carnival under official control. By involving Haitian manufacturers in the celebration, attention could be focused away from criticism of the political regime.

Carnival is also a time for competition among rival groups of masqueraders, dancers, and musical organizations. With the advent of electronic sound amplification, popular music bands today ride through the streets of Port-au-Prince playing for enthusiastic crowds. Bands congregate near the customs office and engage in a mock battle; each aims to capture the attention of the crowd and, in so doing, push the competition out of the limelight.

Public behavior during Carnival is very different from that of everyday life. In Port-au-Prince, masses of people crowd the main streets, pressing up against one another in an effort to see the masqueraders and musicians pass by on the *cha madigra*. During one Carnival celebration, I had the opportunity to witness Carnival crowd dynamics firsthand when I was having a drink at a bar in Port-au-Prince called the Rond Point. Located at a crossroads near the French Institute of Haiti and the American Embassy, the bar was one of the meeting places for competing bands. The management of the Rond Point had already removed the plate glass windows from their frames

so that exuberant dancers would not fall through the sheets of glass. As the crowd swelled, my friends and I decided to go outside and experience the Carnival atmosphere up close. As we reached the street, the press of people made it impossible to move; people were so tightly packed together that individuals moved involuntarily with the motion of the crowd. At one point, I was lifted off the ground and carried several feet.

In most Caribbean countries with a Carnival tradition, Mardi Gras, the “Fat Tuesday” before Ash Wednesday, is the final day of festivities. On Wednesday morning before the Lenten season begins, the Carnival paraphernalia are burned, the musical instruments are “put to sleep” until the following Carnival season, and people return to their routines. In Haiti, Carnival is immediately followed by a festival that lasts until Easter Sunday and is known as Rara.³

Rara refers to the street celebrations held in Haiti from the beginning of the Lenten season until Easter Sunday. While the most intense Rara activity is usually during the week before Easter, each Sunday during Lent revelers roam the streets of Haitian cities, towns, and hinterlands in search of an audience. Léogâne, a town nineteen miles west of Port-au-Prince, is especially well known as a center for Rara music. Music is provided by the *bann rara* (Rara band) on homemade instruments such as the *kònè* (a pressed zinc trumpet that can measure more than three feet), the *vaksin* (a large, single-note bamboo trumpet played in groups of three or more), the *tanbou* (single-headed, animal-skin-covered drum), the *graj* (a metal scraper similar to those used in Dominican merengue bands), the *kès* (*caisse*, snare drum), and *tcha-tcha* (maracas), as well as any struck object carried by dancing participants.⁴ Rara bands in Léogâne also play brass instruments such as trumpets, trombones, baritone horns, and sousaphones (called *elikon* or *kontrabas*), which has caused some people to call Léogâne Rara too much like Carnival. Léogâne residents are quick to point out, however, that despite the overwhelming volume of the Rara bands’ brass sections, it is always possible to hear the core instruments of Rara: the *tanbou*, the *vaksin*, and the *graj*. Usually, members of the Rara band who are not playing the instruments listed above provide rhythmic ostinatos on soft-drink or beer bottles (the local brand, Prestige, is popular, but its stubby neck makes it difficult to handle; many participants go for the longer-necked Dutch import Heineken or a Coke bottle.)

Like their counterparts in Carnival celebrations, Rara members also engage in boisterous behavior during their sojourns into the streets. Song texts often refer to political topics or events in recent history; many texts are downright obscene. Often, the ribald nature of the texts masks a deeper



Two *vaksin* players using PVC tubes, along with a Petwo drummer and others. (Photographs by Michael Largey.)

meaning in the form of political satire directed at the regime in power. I have heard that one Rara song about a woman who decided to straighten her pubic hair with a hot comb was directed at Michèle Bennett, the wife of the former Haitian dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier. As Elizabeth McAlister notes, Rara has tended to be dismissed as a form of “rural Carnival” in which pent-up farmers “blow off steam” in a drunken orgy. This view has been perpetuated by elite Haitians who see the celebration of Rara as a dangerous, lower-class phenomenon. But Rara should also be seen as a religious celebration in which the normally stationary practice of Vodou is taken to the street. Rara bands often fulfill religious obligations during their nocturnal processions. The Rara band *Ti Malis Kache* (The Rara of the Clever Children in Hiding, usually called *Ti Malis*) from Léogâne always performs a Vodou ceremony under a large *mapou* tree before it begins its processions on Good Friday. Band members and the Rara band’s instruments are given a ritual bath steeped in leaves collected by a *doktè fèy*, or leaf doctor. The bath serves to protect the musicians and their instruments from the dangers of the street processions. Since many bands take to the streets in Léogâne during Rara, competition can be fierce and, at times, physically dangerous. Exuberant musicians and fans clash when their favorite bands meet on the street. For bands that have long-standing feuds, these encounters have sometimes been memorialized in song. For example, in 1954 the members of *Rara Laflè di Woz* (Rose Flower Rara) attacked the village of Kansay, the home of *Ti Malis*. According to the story from *Ti Malis*’s point of view, several band mem-

bers were killed, and their property was stolen or burned. Ti Malis members wrote a song titled “Senkantkat” (Fifty-Four) that commemorates the attack and excoriates the members of Lafè as “pig thieves.” “Senkantkat” continues to be a popular song in Ti Malis’s repertoire, even though the attack took place more than fifty years ago.

Rara bands pride themselves on their ability to fill the streets with dancing and singing participants. If band members spread out too much in their procession, the “full” feeling of the march dissipates, and the band runs the risk of *kraze*, or breaking down on its route. However, a band that keeps its members too close together may be described as *rèd*, or hard, unable to move from its position on the road. Automobile traffic is frequently slowed or blocked during Rara season; angry motorists beep their horns and run the risk of enraging the Rara crowd. Drivers who dance in their seats are waved through the crowd because their movements tell the Rara band that its musical message has gotten through. In many parts of Haiti, impatient motorists pay a small toll to hurry their safe passage through the Rara throng.

At first encounter, a large group of people dancing and singing their way through the streets may seem like an undifferentiated mob. While the informal membership of the procession can and should swell dramatically during the Rara celebration, the principal members of the *bann rara* constitute an organized, hierarchically structured group. The patron of the Rara is the *prezidan*. He or she usually purchases the more expensive instruments, costumes, flags, and celebratory paraphernalia for the members. The *kolònel* (or colonel) leads the band in its street marches and can be recognized by the whip and whistle that he or she uses to move the dancers along their route. Male dancers and baton twirlers, known as *majò jon*, dress in multicolored scarves somewhat reminiscent of the Jamaican “pitchy-patchy” character of *jonkonnu*. They work with the female dancers, known as *renn* (queens), to bring as many spectators into the procession as possible. *Renn* frequently work in pairs, engaging male audience members with friendly, mocking, and vaguely suggestive dancing.

Renn are also responsible for collecting tolls from participants. One Sunday afternoon during Lent in Haiti, I was enjoying a pizza with a friend at a street-level cafe. We didn’t pay much attention to the growing volume of a nearby *bann rara*, so before we knew what was happening, we were surrounded by a group of thirty or more. The two principal *renn* danced at the front of the group, asking us to join in the procession. We answered that we would love to participate, but unfortunately our pizza had just arrived and we were going to have to eat it before it got cold. One of the *renn*, sitting in my lap, acknowledged that cold pizza would be a terrible waste, so she and her compatriots took our slices and continued down the street. We couldn’t

help but laugh at our situation: We had paid the price for refusing to participate in the Rara celebration.

Mizik Twoubadou

First-time travelers to Haiti might have their initial encounter with Haitian music on the tarmac of the Port-au-Prince airport. Often, the airport authorities hire musicians to perform Haitian folksongs, other popular songs from elsewhere in the Caribbean, or an occasional arrangement of some current American song hit for the entertainment of the arriving passengers. These musicians, called *twoubadou*, can also be found in large restaurants, playing requests for patrons for small donations, or performing outdoors for celebrations. Troubadours perform in small ensembles, usually featuring a guitar or two, a pair of maracas or a *graj*, a *tanbou*, and a large lamellaphone with three to five keys called *manibula*, *maniba*, or *malimba*, depending on the geographic region.

As Gage Averill points out, despite the relatively recent development of *mizik twoubadou* in Haiti, most Haitians assume that the genre is indigenous, presumably because of its association with rural (and poor) musicians. Derived from the *guajiro* traditions of Cuba and related to the *jíbaro* musical tradition of Puerto Rico, *twoubadou* music was brought by itinerant Haitian sugarcane cutters who traveled back and forth to Cuba to harvest the seasonal crop. The instruments in the ensemble are portable, since most *twoubadou* had to carry all of their possessions back and forth between Haiti and the sugarcane fields abroad.

Migrant labor has played an important role in Caribbean history since the era of colonial domination. Cash crops such as sugarcane and coffee require labor-intensive processes to get goods from the fields to the market. Haitians have been part of a network of migrant labor since the late eighteenth century, when Haitian workers routinely traveled to Cuba to participate in the sugarcane harvest. Haitian migrants have also shaped the musical styles in the areas they work. *Tumba francesa* is the Cuban term for Haitian-derived recreational drumming and dancing; the style is still practiced among expatriate Haitian cane cutters. In the Dominican Republic, Haitian sugarcane cutters, who live in cane-harvesting camps called *batey*, celebrate Rara, albeit in a slightly altered form. Called *gagá*, the Dominican version of Rara features the same emphasis on colorful costumes, revelry in the streets, and political satire in the form of street theater. Gagá, like Rara, has ties to the Vodou religious system, except the *lwa* associated with the Gagá festival have identifiably Dominican attributes.

Mizik twoubadou has always had a following in Haiti, especially in small nightclubs where combos of two guitars, maracas, *tanbou*, and a pair of vocalists serenade dancers with Haitian, Cuban, and Brazilian music. Perhaps the most famous contemporary exponent of the *twoubadou* style among popular entertainers in the late twentieth century was Jean-Gesner Henry, better known as Coupé Cloué (1925–1998). Nicknamed for the soccer moves *coupé* (cut) and *cloué* (nail), Coupé Cloué was renowned for his sexually suggestive lyrics. Recently, commercial artists have embraced the *twoubadou* sound, releasing several albums in recent years that foreground the guitar and the rhythms of Cuban music. One of the more successful releases is *Haitiando*, a three-CD series of Cuban music translated into Kreyòl and sung to the music of the two-guitar ensemble. The *Haitiando* series makes the often forgotten connection between Haitian and Cuban music explicit with its translations of popular Cuban songs into Kreyòl.

Haitian Dance Music

Dancing is an important part of Haitian life.⁵ As we have seen in the case of Vodou, the religious experience of spirit possession is usually accompanied by dancing, singing, and drumming. Carnival and Rara celebrations feature exuberant dancing and movement in the streets. Dancing is also a social activity, used for celebrations such as church socials and informal parties, as well as evenings out with friends. In small restaurants, social dance music is provided by the relatively small *twoubadou* groups, while large clubs with big dance floors often feature dance bands reminiscent of the American big bands in size.

Social dance music has been one of the most heavily creolized music forms in Haiti. European dance forms such as the contradance (*kontradans*), quadrille, waltz, and polka were introduced to white planter audiences during the colonial period. Musicians, either slaves or freed people of color, learned the European dance forms and adapted them for their own use.⁶ One of the most popular African-influenced dance styles was the Haitian *mereng* (*méringue* in French), related to the Dominican merengue. Along with the *carabinier*, the *mereng* was a favorite dance style of the Haitian elite and was a regular feature at elite dances. The Haitian expression “Mereng ouvri bal, mereng fème bal” (The *mereng* opens the ball, the *mereng* closes the ball) alludes to the popularity and ubiquity of the *mereng* as an elite entertainment. In nineteenth-century Haiti, the ability to dance the *mereng*, as well as a host of other dances, was considered a sign of good breeding.

Like other creolized dance styles, the *mereng* was claimed by both elite and proletarian Haitian audiences as a representative expression of Haitian cultural values. Elite Haitian composers, many of whom were trained in Europe and wrote in a European-influenced style, used the *mereng* as a vehicle for their creative talents. Composers such as Occide Jeanty, his father (Occilius), Ludovic Lamothe, Justin Elie, Franck Lassègue, and Fernand Frangeul wrote *mereng* for solo piano and sometimes for small groups of wind instruments. Often, these elite *mereng* were named for people, such as Occide Jeanty's "Maria," or events in the composer's life—for example, François Manigat's "Eight Days while Staying in Cap (Haïtien)."

The *mereng* is based on a five-note rhythm, or quintuplet, known in French as a *quintolet* and in Spanish as a *cinquillo* (see Chapter 2). The *quintolet* is unevenly subdivided, giving an approximate feeling of "long-short-long-short-long." While the concert *mereng* tended to use the syncopated version, Haitian piano soloists, like Ludovic Lamothe, tended to play the *quintolet* more like five even pulses, giving the *mereng* a smoother, subtler feel.

Occide Jeanty's "Maria" was written for the Musique du Palais, the official presidential band for the Haitian Republic. Jeanty was chief director and composer for the group and wrote most of the band's performance repertoire. The *quintolet* in "Maria" is the syncopated version, appearing first in the saxophones and horns, then answered by the flutes, clarinets, and trumpets. Most *mereng* for concert band followed this pattern, keeping the *quintolet* figure moving from low to high register, thus allowing the melody to alternate the *mereng* rhythm with sustained, heavily vibrated notes. The percussion parts also alternate the musical pulse and the *quintolet* rhythm, giving the *mereng* an additional lilt.

Mereng were also used by proletarian audiences during Carnival time, especially in the nineteenth century. Unlike the elite *mereng*, intended for use on the dance floor, the Carnival *mereng* were directed at the elite members of Haitian society, either criticizing unpopular people in power or ridiculing their idiosyncrasies. The formulaic insults of the Haitian Carnival *mereng* bore some similarity to the early-calypso *picong*, or "stinging," style.

While the *mereng* remained a popular dance form for Haitians well into the twentieth century, other musical forces made their influence felt in Haitian dance music. American big bands gained popularity in Haiti in the early twentieth century due to the presence of U.S. Marines from 1915 to 1934, the growing popularity of radio, and the back-and-forth travel of elite Haitians to France. Haitian bands incorporated American jazz into their repertoires, performing popular tunes for American as well as Haitian audiences. One

Haitian president, Nord Alexis, was so fond of the “new American” style that he hired Ford Dabney, the popular American jazz-band leader, in 1904 for a three-year stint as an official musical adviser to the Haitian presidential band.

After the U.S. invasion of Haiti in 1915, some Haitians viewed the popularity of music from the United States as a threat to the vitality of Haitian music, specifically the *mereng*. While Haitians in the countryside formed resistance militias to repel the American Marines, elite Haitians, located mostly in urban areas, chose to show their displeasure with the American occupation with forms of “cultural resistance,” including music, dance, literature, and visual arts. Rejecting the culture of the invading Americans as vulgar and uncouth, some Haitian intellectuals recommended turning to the rural roots of Haitian culture—specifically, the Vodou religious ritual. The Haitian physician, ethnographer, and politician Jean Price-Mars wrote *Ainsi parla l'oncle* (So Spoke the Uncle) in 1928, exhorting Haitians to explore the folktales, music, and religion of the working rural masses. Price-Mars believed that research into the folklore of the Haitian countryside could inspire a national artistic movement that would challenge European domination of aesthetic judgment.

There were several musical responses to Price-Mars’s call for a national Haitian music. Classical composers like Justin Elie, Ludovic Lamothe, and Werner Jaegerhuber wrote orchestral and chamber music using either Vodou melodies or tunes inspired by Haitian religious ritual. Others, like the leaders of popular dance bands, introduced the drum, scraper, and melodies from the Vodou ceremony into a big-band format. Perhaps the most famous of these “Vodou jazz” groups was Jazz des Jeunes (Youth Jazz), which used Vodou rhythms such as the *kongo*, *ibo*, and *yanvalou* in musical arrangements that were based on dance-band formats. Teamed up with singer Lumane Casimir, Jazz des Jeunes cultivated a sound and look that appealed to the Haitian public; band members dressed in “folkloric” garb of colorful cloth, while dancers moved to the Vodou-influenced rhythms. Jazz des Jeunes was also active in the promotion of a “noirist,” or pro-black, political platform in support of Dumarsais Estimé, the first dark-skinned Haitian president who was not a puppet of the light-skinned Haitian elite. In addition, folkloric dance became popular in the 1940s as elite Haitians reconsidered their relationship to cultural practices influenced by Vodou. In 1941, the Haitian government sent a troupe of folkloric performers led by Lina Fussman-Mathon to the National Folk Festival in Washington, D.C. Despite the fact that Vodou ceremonies were forbidden in Haiti at the time, the Haitian government enthusiastically supported this staged version of Haitian ceremonial music and dance.⁷

Latin music, especially from Cuba, was also a shaping influence on the development of Haitian dance music. *Twoubadou* music, mentioned earlier, was an important Latin-influenced genre that found a ready audience among Haitian dance bands in the early twentieth century. With the arrival of the phonograph and radio in Haiti during the 1920s, more Haitian audiences were listening to the sounds of Cuban *son* bands such as the Sexteto Habanero, Septeto Nacional, and Trío Matamoros. Haitian bands adapted the sounds of the Cuban trios, using the two-guitar, maracas, and single-headed-drum ensemble. In the 1940s and '50s, large Latin bands grew in popularity throughout the Caribbean. Arsenio Rodríguez, the blind Cuban *tres* player, toured several Caribbean islands during the 1950s with his band, featuring an expanded brass section.

Haiti's closest neighbor, the Dominican Republic, exerted its musical influence over Haitian music through its exportation of the Dominican merengue dance. While the Dominican Republic had several different styles loosely referred to as merengue, the most popular in the 1950s was that of the Cibao region, promoted by the Trujillo regime as a symbol of Dominican national culture (see Chapter 5). Dominican radio stations, playing the Trujillo-praising merengues in a big-band format, reached the radios of Haitian middle- and upper-class audiences. Orchestras under the directorship of Luis Alberti and Antonio Morel were staples on the Dominican radio stations received in Haiti.

The influence of the Dominican merengue on Haitian popular music did not, however, mean that Haitians were eager to embrace the politics of the *merengue cibaëño*. Dominicans and Haitians have had a rocky relationship since the invasion of the Dominican Republic by Haitian military forces in 1822. While the political tension between the two countries has been expressed by overt military action, such as Trujillo's massacre of tens of thousands of Haitian cane cutters in 1937 and the more recent Dominican legislative efforts to disenfranchise Haitian migrants, Haitians and Dominicans also fight for their national dignity using the provenance of the merengue as a weapon. Intellectuals from both countries have written extensively on how the merengue originated in their homeland. Haitian historian Jean Fouchard's book *The Méringue, the National Dance of Haiti* was written in part to counter Dominican claims that the current popularity of the merengue was due to the Dominican interpretation of the rhythm; Fouchard thought the Haitian *mereng's* influence on the more recent Dominican version was the reason for the dance's success. To Fouchard's ears, only the reinstatement of the original Haitian *mereng* could save Haitian orchestras from adopting the "foreign-sounding" Dominican merengue.

Despite intellectuals' bickering over the origins of the merengue, Haitian musicians were eagerly adopting the Dominican style to their bands. Nemours Jean-Baptiste and his group, the Ensemble aux Calebasses, altered the merengue beat slightly and in 1955 named their invention *konpa dirèk* (*compas direct* in French), or "direct rhythm." Weber Sicot, a former saxophonist in Nemours's band, formed his own group, Cadans Rampa de Weber Sicot, and introduced a variation on the *konpa dirèk* beat that he called *kadans ranpa*, or "rampart rhythm," a reference to the "ramparts" from which Sicot would challenge his new rival for Haitian musical supremacy. The musical rivalry of the two orchestras worked as a promotional device. Fans of both bands formed clubs that adopted official colors and flags for their musical "teams."

In the early 1960s, the British invasion that swept the United States came to Haiti in the form of rock music. Children in upper-class Haitian families with access to radio and phonographs formed small, electric-guitar-based combos that they called *yeye*, a not-too-subtle reference to the "yeah, yeah, yeah" lyrics of the Beatles that took audiences in the United States by storm in the early 1960s. (The term "*yeye*" was also used in France in the mid-1960s when the singer France Gall performed teenage bubble-gum pop.) When these *yeye* bands added *konpa dirèk* repertoire to their playlists, the resultant sound was called *mini-djaz*—"mini" referring to the latest American craze of miniskirts, and "*djaz*" being the Kreyòl spelling of "jazz." *Konpa dirèk* bands, or simply *konpa* bands, began to scale down their numbers to compete with the smaller, more flexible *mini-djaz*. Groups like Tabou Combo, subsequently one of the most popular *mini-djaz*, started as a small, neighborhood group in Pétiyonville, the elite suburb of Port-au-Prince. Other groups that came from Pétiyonville include D. P. Express (the D. P. is from the band's former name, Les Difficiles de Pétiyonville), and Les Frères Dejean.

Lyrics for *konpa dirèk* tended to focus attention on either the rivalry between bands or relationship trouble. Often, the words had double entendres, either in a suggestive, sexual manner or in a more veiled social critique. Tabou Combo's "Mario, Mario" derides class prejudice against musicians, calling for the sympathies of the audience to favor Mario, a musician *san fanmi* (without family or without connections), in his pursuit of Miss Entel (or Miss So-and-So). Another Tabou Combo hit, "Konpa ce pam" (Konpa Is for Me), praises *konpa* as an important vehicle of communication among black people in the African diaspora.

Kolonizasyon fe tout moun depandan
Sa pale franse, angle, panyòl.

Men yon gwo fason pou nou kominike
Lè mizik frape, tout moun vibre.

Colonization makes all people dependent
It makes them speak French, English, and Spanish.
We have a way for all to communicate
When the music sounds, everyone starts moving.⁸

Politics and the Haitian Diaspora

In 1957, Dr. François Duvalier was elected to the Haitian presidency by a narrow margin. Although Duvalier was not a seasoned politician, he was a trained physician and was well known among Haitian voters as one of the people responsible for the eradication of the tropical disease yaws in Haiti, thus earning him the sobriquet “Papa Doc.” Duvalier campaigned on a “noirist” platform, calling for an end to the political control of the country by the Haitian light-skinned elite. After the election, however, it became clear that Duvalier had no intention of reforming Haitian government. After a series of bloody purges designed to eradicate his political opposition, Duvalier declared himself president for life in 1964.

Duvalier’s rule was characterized by violent repression of dissent, torture of political rivals, and the establishment of a secret police force called the Volunteers of National Security (VSN), more commonly known as the Tonton Makout. Duvalier feared the power of the regular Haitian army and started the Tonton Makout to protect himself from a coup d’état. The Makout secret police were an unpaid militia with presidential authorization to extort money from local citizens. Often the local magistrate, called *chef de section*, was also a Makout who routinely demanded bribes in exchange for protection.

The VSN was given the nickname “Tonton Makout” to evoke a sinister image intended to intimidate the Haitian populace. Tonton Makout, or “Uncle Strawbag,” was the bogeyman of Haitian folklore who stalked small children and swept them up into his bag. Blue denim uniforms and dark sunglasses were the trademark of the Tonton Makout, images borrowed from Vodou religious imagery: Blue denim is the cloth of Kouzen Azaka, a Vodou spirit associated with agriculture, while dark sunglasses belonged to the Gede spirits who guard the cemetery and preside over the dead. Duvalier associated himself with the Vodou image of Baron Samedi, the chief guardian of the cemetery and most sinister of the Gede spirits.

Most Haitians who lived through this period have stories to tell about being terrorized by Tonton Makout. Many have relatives who were “disap-

peared” by the VSN; others relate stories about local Makouts who wielded their power over their neighbors. I once had a run-in with a Makout in the National Cemetery in Port-au-Prince. A Haitian friend had taken me to see François Duvalier’s mausoleum; a Makout with an ancient bolt-action rifle was guarding the tomb. When we approached the grave, the Makout pointed his rifle at us and told us to fetch him a bottle of rum and a pack of Comme Il Faut cigarettes. My friend said, “*Wi, msye*” (Yes, sir), and we scurried off to make our purchases. On our way to the corner store, I asked my friend what would happen if we didn’t comply with the Makout’s order. He told me that we could risk evading his request but that if the Makout found out who we were, the reprisals for refusing to buy him booze and smokes could be very serious. It was a risk that neither of us wanted to take, since the reputation of many Makouts was to punish any form of disobedience with violence. Tonton Makout were understood to be personal emissaries of Duvalier. Refusing a Makout’s order was tantamount to defying the Haitian dictator himself.

A popular joke from the early 1980s captures the feelings of dread most Haitians had of Duvalier. A woman had a sick child, so she took him to the *oungan* (Vodou priest) and asked the priest to cure the child. The *oungan* told the woman, “Place a picture of Satan on the child’s forehead at midnight tonight, and when the child wakes up, your son will be cured.” The woman went home and looked for a picture of Satan, to no avail. Since all Haitian homes at the time had a photograph of Duvalier on the wall, the woman placed his picture on her son’s head at midnight. When she awoke the next morning, she found, much to her horror, that her son was dead. Distraught, the woman went back to the *oungan* and told him what happened. The *oungan* asked, “Did you put a picture of Satan on the boy’s forehead, just as I told you?” She responded, “Well, not exactly. I put a picture of Papa Doc on him instead.” “Oh my God,” the *oungan* gasped. “The medicine you used was too strong!”

Duvalier ruled Haiti as a dictator from 1964 until his death in 1971. Before he died, he altered the Haitian Constitution, allowing him to pass on the presidency for life to his nineteen-year-old son, Jean-Claude Duvalier. Known as “Baby Doc,” Jean-Claude’s rule of Haiti was characterized by a continuation of the exploitative practices of his father. In 1980, Jean-Claude married Michèle Bennett, a wealthy socialite and daughter of a corrupt light-skinned businessman. The marriage alienated Jean-Claude from his power base and set the stage for a more repressive period in Haitian politics.

Upper- and middle-class Haitians began leaving Haiti in large numbers in the early 1960s, settling in the United States, Canada, France, and

Zaire. Most of the Haitian emigrants settled in urban areas such as New York City (especially Brooklyn, Queens, and Manhattan), Boston, Montreal, and, more recently, Miami. Expatriate Haitian communities continued to grow throughout the Duvalier reign, creating a large and culturally active Haitian network outside the country. Haitians living in the United States have become an important source of revenue for families still living in Haiti, sending millions of dollars home to family members annually. Their remittances make a major contribution to the economy of Haiti. Haitians abroad became known as the “tenth department,” an addition to the nine departments, or states, in Haiti proper.

Songs of protest against the Duvalier regime first developed in the Haitian diaspora, especially in New York. The anti-Duvalier, pro-democracy cultural movement that arose in the United States and Canada among expatriate Haitians was known as *kilti libète* (freedom culture). Farah Juste was perhaps the best-known patriotic singer from the period just after Duvalier’s death. Her early work with Soley Leve (Rising Sun) firmly established her as an outspoken critic of the Duvalier regime. When she started her solo career in the early 1970s, her credibility and popularity kept her a regular feature of musical presentations sponsored by Haitian organizations in the diaspora.

Within Haiti, other politically motivated singers were starting to speak out against the excesses of the Duvaliers. Manno Charlemagne and Marco Jeanty were perhaps the earliest protest singers to actually record in Haiti in 1978–79. After Baby Doc’s marriage to Michèle Bennett, several *mini-djaz* groups joined the growing numbers of critical musicians willing to voice their dissatisfaction with the Duvaliers. Songs such as “Libète” by Magnum Band lamented the deaths of Haitian *bòt pipèl* (boat people) who took to the seas in small boats in hopes of reaching the United States.

At the height of the boat-people crisis, many Haitians expressed their frustration with the Duvalier government by telling the following joke. One day, Jean-Claude Duvalier wondered why so many people were leaving Haiti by boat. He decided to find out for himself, so he dressed as a peasant, putting on a straw hat, sandals, and old clothing, and walked to the wharf. He noticed that the wharf was full of people (in Kreyòl, the wharf is described as “*nwa ak moun*,” or “black with people,” since Haitians are black). He talked to the captain of a boat and negotiated a price for safe passage to Florida. “You have to pay three thousand dollars tomorrow morning when we set sail,” barked the captain, “and three thousand when you arrive in Florida.” Jean-Claude agreed and returned to the National Palace. The next morning, he walked to the wharf and found, much to his surprise, that it was empty (in Kreyòl, “*lari a blanch*,” or “the road was white”—that is, without black

people). Jean-Claude asked the captain where all the passengers were. The captain replied, “Well, your Excellency, when they heard that you were leaving, they decided that they didn’t need to go.” When telling this joke, most Haitians stand knock-kneed and imitate Duvalier’s nasal voice saying, “How did you know it was me?”

As the political pressure against the Duvaliers mounted, the dictatorship showed signs of weakening in the early 1980s. Jean-Claude, Michèle, and a retinue of Haitian military leaders left Haiti on February 7, 1986, aboard a plane furnished by the U.S. government. The ouster of the Duvaliers was followed by a period known as *dechoukaj* (or *dechoukay*), the “uprooting” of the dictatorship. The Kreyòl verb *dechouke* means to pull out a plant by the roots to ensure it will not grow back later. The homes of exiled supporters of Duvalier were stripped of their contents; even door frames, plumbing, and roof joists were taken to wipe away the traces of the former regime. Members of the Tonton Makout were captured and subjected to vigilante justice by irate local crowds.

Songs provided another, albeit less violent, outlet for the collective frustration of the Haitian people. Immediately after the fall of the Duvalier regime, the Frères Parent released the album *Operation Dechoukaj*, which featured the full side of a twelve-inch LP for the title track. The group’s denunciation of the Tonton Makout included a “score of Makout—zero, the Haitian people—double score!” as well as a forecast that the departed dictator Duvalier would not be welcomed in hell by the Devil. Other artists used familiar Haitian images to urge their expatriate listeners to return to Haiti and help restructure the society. Carole Démesmin, a Vodou *manbo* (female priest) and popular singer, released the song “Tounen lakay” (Come Home, or Return to the House) on her *Lawouzé* album, urging Haitians to return home for the rebuilding of the country. She sings, “*N ap bat tanbou jiska soley leve*” (We’re hitting the drum until the sun rises), referring to the anti-Duvalier movement, Soley Leve, of the early 1970s. The group Sakad’s “Rebati kay-la” (Rebuild the House) also likens the Haitian state to a house badly in need of repair.

Contemporary Haitian Popular Music

The *mini-djaz* and *konpa dirèk* styles of the 1960s and 1970s were supplemented in the 1980s with the emergence of the music of the *nouvel jenerasyon* (new generation). Actually, the *nouvel jenerasyon* style was part of a long association between Haitian musicians and the more avant-garde sounds from American jazz. Gérald Merceron, a lawyer and self-taught musician, organized his own record company and produced several albums with the

help of the musical director of Radio Métropole, Herby Widmaier. Calling their musical creations “*la nouvelle musique haitienne*” (the new Haitian music), Merceron and his friends Lionel Benjamin, Carole Démesmin, and Widmaier mixed several genres on their *Bokassa grotraka* album, including an arrangement of the Haitian folksong “L’Artibonite” for full orchestra. Merceron’s experimentation with Brazilian, Central African, and American jazz and avant-garde styles set the stage for others to incorporate new sounds into the *mini-djaz* dance-band format.

The *nouvel jenerasyon* sound is difficult to summarize because it is more of an attitude toward music than a strict genre. Ralph Boncy, a Haitian poet and amateur musicologist, characterized the *nouvel jenerasyon* as a cultural movement and identified such attributes as the importance of Kreyòl names for Haitian musical groups, a return to the music of the countryside for inspiration, increased emphasis on the text as a literary product, and standardized song lengths. A good example of the *nouvel jenerasyon* sound is “Tout moun ale nan kanaval” (Everyone Has Gone to Carnival), a love duet in which Emeline Michel and her singing partner, Sidon Joseph, lament the loss of their relationship. The relaxed tempo and sparse instrumentation of this song are in marked contrast to the sometimes frenetic guitar and constant percussion that drive the *mini-djaz* sound:

Everyone has gone to Carnival.
 I stay by myself, it’s not too bad. I don’t want to go dance.
 You know what I’m thinking about.

Emeline Michel has emerged as one of the most popular *nouvel jenerasyon* singers. She achieved notoriety outside Haiti for her up-tempo song “AKIKO” (pronounced *Ah-Ka-Ee-Ka-Oh*), which was a radio hit on world music programs. Michel combines *konpa*-oriented dance numbers with songs that have a wider appeal outside Haiti. Her “Kotow moun” (Where Are You People?) asserts that, despite external differences between people from different cultures, “*istwa nou mele*” (our histories are tied up with each other). The song features a “shout-out” to various places in and out of Haiti where Haitians live (Gonaïves and Martinique), as well as places that are associated with the African diaspora (Soweto, Brazil, and Senegal) and places that have no particular association with Haiti (Rotterdam, Australia, and Singapore). She also sings contemplative songs like “Pè letènèl” (Eternal Father) that refer to the dangers of life in Haiti in recent years. The song was inspired by her experience of being carjacked in Haiti along with the *zouk* singers Jocelyne Béroard and Tanya Saint-Val.

Beethova Obas is another popular *nouvel jenerasyon* singer whose spare style and emphasis on lyrics connect him with the recently revived *twoubadou* style. Obas was the first winner of the M Renmen Ayiti (I Love Haiti) song contest in 1988, sponsored by American Airlines. His song “Planet la” (The Planet) reminds listeners that the welfare of humanity is dependent on the continued prosperity of planet Earth.

Ever since the emergence of *mini-djaz* in the 1960s, middle-class Haitian musicians have been drawn to the popular-music business in Haiti, despite pressure from their families to follow a path toward a more “respectable” profession. One such band is Zèklè (Lightning), which formed in the 1980s and featured synthesized keyboards and sophisticated lyrics. More recent bands that appeal to a middle-class Haitian audience include Carimi, whose hit “Ayiti (bang bang)” laments the political changes in Haiti, especially the increased influence of the United States in Haitian affairs. Without mentioning specific politicians, the lyric claims that the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency and Federal Bureau of Investigation “are taking over the country and controlling me.”

Other contemporary singers are best known for their participation in dance music, especially songs associated with Carnival. T-Vice has been a staple of Haitian dance music since the 1980s, when the group was known as Miami Top Vice (after the popular television show *Miami Vice*); later, it shortened its name to Top Vice and eventually to T-Vice. In 2002, T-Vice had a popular Carnival hit, “Elikoptè” (Helicopter), in which the group’s members described themselves as returning to Haiti in a helicopter in time for Carnival so that they could play their music to “3 million people with their hands in the air.”

In the mid-1990s, “Sweet Micky” (Michel Marthelly) captured audiences’ attention with his use of English in “I Don’t Care,” a song that called for Haitians who were dissatisfied with the situation in Haiti to “*debake*” (leave). The refrain for the song, “I don’t care / I don’t give a damn / I don’t give a shit,” captured the sentiment among many Haitians that the problems of the country were simply beyond their control. Interrupting his career as a *konpa* singer, Marthelly ran for president of Haiti and was elected in 2011; amid much controversy and criticism, he stepped down in 2016.

Mizik Rasin, Rap, and Ragga

Ever since Jean Price-Mars’s invitation to Haitian artists to make use of their Vodou heritage, musicians have tried to bring the sounds of ceremonial music into their works. In the 1940s and ’50s, groups like Jazz des Jeunes

and Orchestre Saïeh sang songs that borrowed the rhythms and lyrical style of both Vodou and Rara. At a time when actual Vodou ceremonies were banned in Haiti and elite Haitians disapproved of all things associated with Vodou, Vodou jazz thrived among middle-class black audiences in Haiti.

Inspired by the successes of *Jazz des Jeunes*, Haitian musicians in the waning days of the Duvalier regime incorporated the sounds of Vodou and Rara into their music. Although the term “Vodou jazz” was coined to describe the music of early bands like *Jazz des Jeunes*, later bands used the formula of folkloric themes, Vodou-influenced rhythms, and dancers to revitalize the Vodou-jazz idiom. In the middle of the 1980s, the band Foula, under the direction of lead drummer “Aboudja” Derenoncourt, fused American-influenced jazz and a battery of Vodou drummers to create a new sound in *mizik rasin*, or “roots music.” After the fall of the Duvalier regime in 1986, several other groups joined the *mizik rasin* scene, including Sanba Yo, Sakad, Boukman Eksperyans, RAM, and Boukan Ginen.

As we saw in the introduction to this chapter, the group Boukman Eksperyans is named for the slave leader who incited the slave insurrection in the late 1700s. The group and especially its leader, Théodore “Lolo” Beau-brun, were outspoken critics of the military regime that deposed Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1991. During Aristide’s exile, Boukman was the target of government reprisals for fusing Vodou rhythms with politically critical lyrics. The song “Jou nou revolte” (The Day We Revolt), from the 1992 album *Kalfou danjere* (Dangerous Crossroads), both recalls the day Haitians revolted against oppression in the revolution against the French and foretells the revolution that is to come when the military is overthrown and Haiti’s elected government is restored. Boukman’s earlier album, *Vodou adjae*, contained fewer references to direct political action but emphasized the importance of maintaining the Vodou heritage of Haiti. Songs like “Se Kreyòl nou ye” (We’re Creole) ridiculed the Haitian elite’s disdain for the country’s national language, saying that “some Haitians would rather speak French, English, or Spanish rather than Kreyòl.”

As Gage Averill has noted, Boukman Eksperyans’s 1990 Carnival song “Kè m pa sote” (My Heart Doesn’t Leap, or I Am Not Afraid) played a role in the downfall of the military junta that held power in Haiti from 1988 to 1990. Using the Haitian concept of *pwen* (point) to make an indirect criticism of the regime in charge, Boukman’s lyrics lamented the desperate situation in the country and, invoking the warrior spirit Ogou Badagri, called for the spirits to help make a change. Shortly after antigovernment protestors used “Kè m pa sote” as a theme song, the government resigned.

The group Boukan Ginen was formed by Eddy François when he left

Boukman Eksperyans in 1990. The group's name, which translates as "African Fire Pit," reminds listeners that the *mizik rasin* sound traces its roots back through the African ancestry of all Haitians. In its song "Afrika," Boukan Ginen calls on Haitians to return symbolically to Africa and to recognize the importance of African culture to black people in the Americas.

Some *mizik rasin* groups go beyond invoking the importance of African ancestry and use actual Vodou ceremonial music in their performances. Rara Machine's 1994 *Voudou nou* (Our Vodou) CD features a song called "Badè." As Elizabeth McAlister has pointed out, Rara Machine adapted this chant from a prayer chant at La Souvenance, a well-known center for Vodou religious activity near Gonaïves, Haiti. The chant is sung in Kreyòl and *langaj*, the language of the spirits. "Badè" begins with a *lanbi*, or blown conch shell, and shakers that emulate the sound of the *ason*, or sacred rattle.

Most *mizik rasin* groups rely on Kreyòl lyrics and Vodou rhythms for their characteristic sound. One group that incorporates English lyrics into its Vodou-influenced style is RAM, the brainchild of Richard A. Morse (whose initials make up the band's name). Morse is the son of Emerante de Pradines Morse, a famous Haitian singer and the daughter of the legendary "Kandjo" de Pradines. Morse is also the owner of the Hotel Oloffson, a place made famous by Graham Greene's novel *The Comedians* (1965) about François Duvalier's regime. Before the decline in tourism to Haiti in the 1980s, the Oloffson was a popular destination for wealthy foreigners: Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones was a frequent guest in the 1970s. Morse revived the practice of putting on performances of folkloric dance and assembled a music and dance troupe. Morse's wife, Lunise, is a skilled Haitian folkloric dancer and the leader of the hotel's biweekly Haitian dance performance. RAM achieved international popularity with its 1993 hit "Ibo lele: Dreams Come True," which was featured in the soundtrack to Jonathan Demme's Oscar-winning film *Philadelphia*, starring Tom Hanks and Denzel Washington.

The success of groups like Boukman Eksperyans, Boukan Ginen, and RAM outside the local Haitian recording market has inspired groups outside Haiti to explore the sounds of Vodou rhythms. Once such group, Simbi, is based in Sweden and sings a mixture of traditional songs, other *mizik rasin* music (e.g., Simbi covered Boukman Eksperyans's "Pwazon rat"), and its own original compositions written in Kreyòl. On its *Vodou Beat* CD, the group sings a traditional *chan* (song) to Simbi, a Vodou *lwa* associated with water. The music for its song "Simbi" includes funk bass and an energetic baritone saxophone line that turns this ceremonial lyric into a swinging dance number.

While *konpa*, *nouvel jenerasyon*, and *mizik rasin* appeal to many Haitians young and old, several genres—namely, African American–derived rap

and Jamaican-style raggamuffin (or “ragga”)—have been adopted by younger Haitian singers. One of the earliest Haitian *rapè*, or rap artists, was George “Master Dji” Lys Hérard. Master Dji released his hit “Sispann” (Stop or Suspend) as a call to end the political violence after the aborted election of 1987, in which Haitian voters were massacred at the polls on Rue Valliant in Port-au-Prince. Hérard’s collaboration with other Haitian *rapè* on *Rap and Ragga: (Match la Rèd)* intersperses more of the lover’s style of rap, as in “Manmzèl” (Mademoiselle), with politically charged music, such as “Conscience noire” (Black Conscience), by Supa Denot and T-Bird.

As Haitian rap has become popular, especially with young Haitian audiences in Haiti and abroad, Haitian *rapè* have reached out to constituencies in the diaspora with music and lyrics that reflect their new, transnational identities. Papa Jube (pronounced *Ju-bee*) is a New York-based *rapè* whose work self-consciously fuses different Caribbean styles. His “Konpa ragga” combines the *konpa* dance beat with a chanting style that is similar to Jamaican ragga. Other rap artists, like Original Rap Staff, align themselves more closely with African American hip-hop styles. Original Rap Staff’s “Whose Style Is This?” from 1990 rhetorically challenges African American rap artists by asserting that its Haitian version of hip-hop is an improvement over the original. By mixing Kreyòl with rap-inflected English, Original Rap Staff lays claim to the growing West Indian audience. In a humorous twist, the lead singer in “Whose Style Is This?” proclaims, “Mwen soti Ayiti” (I am from Haiti) in a New York accent, thus substantiating his claim that he speaks for Haitian rap audiences everywhere.

More recent Haitian rap artists include 2Goutan and Gray Nouvo Ne, whose single “BJBK (Byen jwenn byen kontre)” from 2013 features English-inflected Haitian Kreyòl that reflects the transnational character of most Haitian rap music. In “Byen jwenn byen kontre” (Meet Your Match), 2Goutan (whose name translates as “Nasty” or “Disgusting”) sings, “Mwen son grenn vakabon ki soti latibonit / Underground kid ki fe rap ti komik” (I’m a hustler who comes from the Artibonite Valley [in Haiti] / Underground kid who performs clever raps). Grey Nouvo Ne, who began his career with the hip-hop group RockFam Lame a, released a single in 2013 titled “New York, New York,” in which he distinguishes New York from Haiti, claiming that while he depends on New York for “job e kob” (a job and money), Haiti is the place he identifies as home.

One Haitian artist who has successfully crossed over into the U.S. recording market is Wyclef Jean. Wyclef came to prominence as part of the group the Fugees, with Lauryn Hill and a fellow Haitian artist, Prakazrel “Praz” Michel. In his 1997 solo album *Wyclef Jean Presents the Carnival*,

Featuring Refugee Allstars, Jean intersperses lyrics in English and Kreyòl and doesn't provide translations of the Kreyòl lyrics for his U.S. audience.

In "Jaspora" (Diaspora), Jean laments the situation of Haitians living abroad, observing that "jaspora pa respecte jaspora" (expatriate Haitians don't respect one another). In "Yelé," he begins with a Kreyòl dialogue in which the singer tells his friend that he was robbed of his new Fila sneakers while walking through Flatbush, Brooklyn. The friend asks, "Did you shoot him?" and the singer says no, he was reminded of a psalm that his father taught him in which people need to "chache Bondyè" (search for God).

When an earthquake that registered 7.0 on the Richter scale hit Haiti on January 12, 2010, Wyclef Jean used his fame in Haiti and the diaspora to help coordinate relief efforts for Haitian earthquake victims. He organized the Hope for Haiti telethon and performed with a retinue of Haitian Rara musicians, telling the television audience, "Earthquake, we feel the earth shake, but the soul of the Haitian people will never break." (Unfortunately, Jean's charity Yele Haiti failed to deliver on its promises on earthquake relief and was closed in 2012.) Other Haitian artists have commemorated the Haitian earthquake, including B.I.C. in "Pwen final" (Final Point), in which he exhorts Haitians to celebrate the lives of those who perished in the temblor.

Haitian rap reflects the complexity of the Haitian experience in the twenty-first century. Haitians in the diaspora, especially in the United States, exert a strong influence on the musical tastes of young Haitians. As the earlier examples illustrate, Haitians continue to grapple with issues of identity, loss, and hope as they assert themselves in a cosmopolitan music market.

Music in the Lesser Antilles: Martinique, Guadeloupe, Dominica, and St. Lucia

The musical soundscape in the French, or former French, Lesser Antilles is similar to Haiti's, since both areas rely heavily on radio for the dissemination of local music.⁹ Martinique, Guadeloupe, Dominica, and St. Lucia all have Carnival traditions in which masked revelers take to the streets during the week before Mardi Gras. While foreign music like calypso and soca enjoys a brief popularity during the Carnival season, the islands of the Lesser Antilles have their own musical traditions that are enjoyed during the rest of the year. According to the ethnomusicologist Dominique Cyrille, there are three distinct French Caribbean dance repertoires: a rural dance tradition that draws on African cultural antecedents; a creolized repertoire that includes *biguine*, *maziouk* (or mazurka), and waltz, which was danced in quadrille sets or sep-

arately; and a contemporary repertoire that includes *zouk*.¹⁰ The Martinican musician Dédé Saint-Prix and his group *Avan Van* helped resuscitate *mizik chouval bwa* (“wooden-horse” music or “merry-go-round” music), which features a bamboo flute, a *ka* drum, a djembe drum, a bass, and *tibwa* (from the French *petit bois*, or little sticks, played on a piece of bamboo).¹¹

The rural traditions of *gwoka* (big drum) in Guadeloupe and *ka* (drum) in Martinique are two practices that fell out of use in the mid-twentieth century only to be revitalized in the 1980s.¹² *Gwoka*, which refers both to the drum used and the accompanying dances, is similar to Puerto Rican *bomba*, with its “conversations” between dancer and lead drummer. People gather on the weekends at a *léwòz*, or all-night party, in which drummer and singers provide call-and-response music for dancers. Two large drums, called *boula*, play steady rhythms while the higher-pitched *makè* drum improvises over them. Like other musical forms that emerged from formerly enslaved African people, *gwoka* was looked down on by French elites who preferred the more European-identified quadrille and *biguine*. By the time Guadeloupe and Martinique were absorbed into France in 1946 as overseas departments, many French elites regarded *gwoka* as a rustic holdover from slave society.

An 1837–38 drawing, “French Set-Girls,” depicting the revelry of Afro-Haitians resettled in Jamaica. (Adapted by Peter Manuel from an engraving by I. M. Belisario.)





Gwoka musicians at a Saturday afternoon jam session in Poite-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe, in 2003, playing *boula* drums in similar straddling fashion. (Photograph by Ken Bilby.)

In the 1960s, a political separatist movement gained momentum in Guadeloupe and set the stage for the emergence of a musical style that reflected a new-found sense of Guadeloupean identity. This new style was dubbed *gwoka modènn* (modern *gwoka*) by jazz-trained Guadeloupean guitarist Gérard Lockel. Blending jazz harmonies with *gwoka* rhythms, Lockel was one of several musicians who tried to fuse traditional *gwoka* with other contemporary forms.¹³ His “Chant lendependans” (Independence Song) tells Guadeloupeans that they should struggle to win their liberty.

Popular *gwoka* groups in Guadeloupe today include Indestwas Ka and Kan'nida, both of which bring this music of the Guadeloupean sugarcane plantations to the world stage. In the song “Kreyòl,” Kan'nida sings, “Kreyòl, pa janm bliye Kreyòl” (Kreyòl, don't ever forget Kreyòl), expressing a pan-Caribbean solidarity with other Kreyòl-speaking parts of region that share the legacy of plantation slavery.¹⁴

Creolized dance forms emerged from the contact between slaves and slaveholders. These include the Martinican *bèlè*, which features dancing and group singing, often led in a call-and-response format with a song leader. According to ethnomusicologist Julian Gerstin, the *tanbou bèlè* is played

transversely (lying on its side) with the drummer using the heel of the foot to control the pitch. In addition, *bèlè* drummers play one-handed rolls using their thumb and ring fingers.¹⁵ The *bèlè* dances (including *bidjin bèlè*, or “béguine”; *bèlè*, *bèlè pitché*, *gran bèlè*, and *bèlè marin*) all use the choreography known as *quadrilles* (*kwadril* in Kwéyòl).

The *quadrille*, a set dance similar to the Haitian *kontradans*, is related to dances popular during the early colonial period. In Martinique, as elsewhere, Afro-Caribbeans inserted their own aesthetic sensibilities into the dance, despite the *quadrille*’s constrained dance movements, relatively static rhythmic patterns, and connection to European-derived dance traditions. *Quadrilles* and other European-derived dances might be played by a variety of ensembles, generally pairing a melodic instrument like the accordion with various percussion instruments. The *jing-ping* ensemble of Dominica shown here features an accordion, a *syak* scraper (like a *güira*), a *tambou* frame drum, and a tube, called *boumboum*, which is blown like a trumpet, filling out the ensemble with bass timbres. The *quadrille*’s popularity waned in the countryside during the mid-twentieth century, but cultural activists have promoted the dance as an important part of island heritage.

Unlike Haiti, which has been independent since 1804, two of the islands of the Lesser Antilles, Martinique and Guadeloupe, are overseas departments of France. These islands, along with St. Lucia and Dominica, have predominantly black populations, descended from African slaves. St. Lucia and Dominica are independent nations and have a greater legacy of English colonialism; English is the language of state for both countries, but people on both islands speak French-based creole languages with a high degree of mutual intelligibility.¹⁶

The musical styles of the four Antillean islands under consideration here are also mutually intelligible, due to the long process of musical cross-fertilization in the area. *Zouk*, a form of dance music that emerged in the 1980s, is popular throughout the region. It can be seen as a synthesis of several popular Caribbean musical styles, including *biguine*, *cadence-lypso*, Haitian *konpa*, and several popular music styles from the United States.

A significant antecedent for *zouk* is *biguine*, a musical style from Guadeloupe and Martinique and a favorite among dance orchestras from the 1930s to the 1950s. The basic *biguine* rhythm, played either on the *tibwa* or the drum set, is a variant of the *cinquillo* rhythm found in Haitian *mereng* and in the cymbal part of *konpa dirèk*. During the 1930s, *biguine* orchestras played for dances held in a variety of locations, including dancehalls, church parties, birthday parties, and private affairs. During the 1940s and 1950s, as radio connected the islands of the Caribbean and touring musicians

from other islands visited the Lesser Antilles, Guadeloupean dance bands absorbed aspects of Cuban dance music, Haitian *konpa dirèk* and *kadans ranpa*, and jazz from the United States.

Zouk also traces its ancestry to *cadence-lypso*, or *cadence*, the local dance music from Dominica. *Cadence* is popularly believed to be a fusion of the Haitian *kadans ranpa* and calypso from neighboring Trinidad and Tobago. Exile One, a Dominica-based group led by Gordon Henderson, experimented with calypso fusion in the early 1970s and created a calypso-influenced dance music that used Kwéyòl lyrics. Like the politically inclined calypso, *cadence* lyrics often included social commentary on local events or reflections on issues of identity. The Midnight Groovers are another popular Dominica-based band that uses Rasta-inflected lyrics to target social issues that face Caribbean peoples.

Claiming its fundamental rhythmic organization from the *cinquillo*-based genres of *konpa dirèk*, *kadans ranpa*, and *biguine*, *zouk* has moved away from the big band ensembles once popular in Guadeloupe and Martinique in favor of a sparer, more electronically influenced sound. Most successful *zouk* bands feature synthesizers, digital samplers, and drum machines programmed to imitate such popular local percussion instruments as the *tibwa*.

The first major *zouk* group to emerge was the Guadeloupe-based ensemble Kassav'. Deriving its name from cassava, the starchy root that is a part of the Caribbean diet, Kassav' released its first album in 1979 and has continued to be a powerful force in the popular-music scene in the Lesser Antilles. While most commercial popular music in Guadeloupe and Martinique had previously been in French, Kassav's lyrics are in Kwéyòl, emphasizing the group's connection with its local audience. The band also regularly features dancing as part of its live act to promote audience involvement.

In 1984, Kassav' released its first international hit, "Zouk-la sé sèl medikaman nou ni" (*Zouk Is the Only Medicine We Have*). As Jocelyne Guilbault has observed, the song is "the perfect example of a song based on the greatest economy of means to produce a maximal effect."¹⁷ Using only bass, drums, electronic keyboard, and spare vocals, the song asserts that *zouk* is necessary for people's survival in a harsh world.

In its 1985 hit "An-ba-chen'n la" (*Under the Chain*), Kassav' sings about the importance of bringing its musical message to others and increasing outsiders' awareness of the Antilles and its people:

We must often leave our country
In order to bring our music to others.

It's time for everyone to know that the Antilles exists
 And that it is love that commands us.

The Kassav' member Patrick Saint Eloi wrote "An-ba-chen'n la" after visiting a museum in Senegal in which artifacts from the slave trade were on display.

Other popular *zouk* artists include Eric Virgal, known for his renditions of *zouk love*, or the more romantic, slow-tempo ballad; the late Edith Lefel; and Joelle Ursull, the first Antillean representative for France in the 1990 Eurovision contest. The group Malavoi performs *zouk*, as well as the older genres of *biguine* and quadrille and the foreign styles of merengue and *son*. While Malavoi shares its producer, George Debs, with Kassav', the group maintains an eclectic repertoire with an unusual array of acoustic instruments, including violins. Malavoi's lyrics often portray Martinique as a focus of nostalgic longing and painful memories. In its 1983 song "Malavoi," the band sings about the *malavoi* variety of sugarcane, which, due to its high sugar content, was the preferred product for the slave plantations. The sweetness of the highly prized cane contrasted with the bitterness felt by those workers who harvested it as slaves.

Several contemporary *zouk love* artists have either collaborated with non-Caribbean artists or performed musical crossover hits that connect with other parts of the world. Fanny J (Fanny Jacques-André-Coquin), who was born in French Guiana, was featured with U.S. singer Jason Derulo in the French-language version of his hit "Whatcha Say" in 2010. In 2013, *zouk love* artist Stony released "Dança kizomba," an English-language version of an Angolan dance style made popular by Cape Verdean musicians who emigrated to Paris in the 1980s.

In the late 1980s and '90s, while *zouk* took on a new life in Cape Verde and its diaspora communities (and was often combined with or mistaken for Angolan *kizomba*), it seemed to stagnate in the French Caribbean itself, leading some artists to turn toward other alternatives for their musical inspiration. Two contemporary singers who have turned toward Rastafarian-oriented "roots" music are Kali and Pôglo. The Martinique-born Kali (Jean-Marc Monnerville) came from a family of musicians and trained for a musical career in France. His early career featured fusions of *zouk* with Jamaican reggae; eventually he found inspiration in some of the earlier genres of *maziouk* and *biguine*. The 1988 recording *Racines* (Roots) features Kali on banjo, an instrument that evokes the old-fashioned musical trends he drew on for his new style. Kali was chosen to represent Martinique in the 1992 Eurovision song competition, and while he did not win, he dispelled audiences' impression that the French Caribbean produced only *zouk*.

The singer, painter, and poet Pôglo (Eric Lugiery) infuses his songs with Rastafarian imagery to emphasize the connection between the struggles of black people around the world. His song “Lèspwa” (Hope) evokes the Rasta colors of green, gold, and red and calls on listeners to turn to Jah, or God, to achieve “the victory of kindness over violence.”

Other “roots” musicians in Guadeloupe include the group K’Koustik (or Acoustic Ka), who bring together electric guitar and bass with the *boula* and *makè* of the *gwoka* tradition. Without making direct reference to Guadeloupe’s status as a colony of France, K’Koustik’s song “Gwadloupéyen” (Guadeloupean) encourages the people of Guadeloupe to “*pran kouraj pou nou resève peyi a nou*” (take courage so that we can save our country).

In recent years, Jamaican dancehall has become a favorite of French Antillian audiences. Admiral T (Christy Campbell) is a Guadeloupean dancehall artist who blends the spare, bass-heavy sounds of Jamaican dancehall with a distinctively Kwéyòl sensibility. According to ethnomusicologist Laura Donnelly, in Admiral T’s first album, *Mozaik kreyol* (Kreyol Mosaic), he eschews the slackness and violence of some Jamaican dancehall for a style that emphasizes Kwéyòl solidarity. In the title track from the album, Admiral T proclaims:

Creole is me, is you, it is all of us
 We eat in Creole, we think in Creole
 Creole is our culture and we are proud of it
 We are Creole, and Creole we will remain.

As the senior French Antillian exponent of dancehall, Admiral T has encouraged younger musicians, such as Kalash from Martinique and Saïk from Guadeloupe.¹⁸

Other responses to *zouk*’s stagnation included the creation of a new dance-oriented style called *bouyon*. Taking its name from a soup or stew in which flavors intermingle as they simmer on a slow fire, *bouyon* combines aspects of 1970s *cadence-lypso*, *zouk*, *soca*, and Dominican *jing-ping*, which features accordion, a scraper, a large frame drum, and a bamboo trumpet similar to the *vaksin* of Haitian Rara. In 1988, the band Windward Caribbean Kulture (WCK) began experimenting with *cadence-lypso* and *jing-ping*, using electronic instruments to imitate the sounds of the acoustic *jing-ping* ensemble (in much the same way that *mizik rasin* groups in Haiti programmed drum machines to produce Vodou-inspired rhythms). With its second album, *Culture Shock*, WCK coined the term “*bouyon*” for its new style. More recent *bouyon* artists include Ncore, whose 2012 hit “Deja

buile” (I Drunk Already) extols the pleasures of the “*bouyon* party,” and Asa Bantan, whose “One Man” features dysfunctional gender relations, exhorting women to “stop fight over one man / stop make noise over one man / how you look good, and you cyan get a next man?”

From *bouyon* to *zouk*, French Caribbean artists have produced music that selectively retains aspects of Antillean identity while incorporating new sounds and technology. Maintaining a balance between its need for international and local appeal, French Caribbean musical genres continue to stimulate their audiences with cultural ideas set to a dance beat.

Further Reading

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Jamaica

IF THE CARIBBEAN REGION as a whole is remarkable for the global musical impact it has had, the “big sounds from small islands” phenomenon is nowhere more striking than in the case of Jamaica. With its mere 2.8 million people, its history of colonial exploitation and neglect, its low average standard of living, and its famously crime-ridden and dystopian ghetto culture, Jamaica would seem an unlikely candidate to produce music of any significance. And yet, in roots reggae and its modern successor, dancehall, Jamaican music has taken the world by storm. Since the 1970s, Bob Marley’s name has become a household word everywhere from Gambia to Grozny, whether listeners enjoy roots reggae for its spirituality, its message of liberation, or merely its infectious beat. And since the 1980s, the stentorian incantations of Buju Banton, Beenie Man, and others have resounded in European, Asian, and African locales where their intelligibility seems highly unlikely, but their intensity and rhythmic drive manage to transcend language barriers. Meanwhile, roots reggae and dancehall have been avidly cultivated as local styles by peoples as diverse as New Zealand Maoris, native Hawaiians, Japanese hipsters, and urban youth in Malawi, who find in it a way to set their own languages to an insistent, powerful, and rhythmically driving beat.

The power and popularity of Jamaican music are all the more remarkable when one considers its relative lack of historical depth. Unlike Cuba, Jamaica did not host a lively creole music culture in the nineteenth century, and indeed, one could argue that it didn’t develop a vital creole music until the 1960s. Further, if Cuban popular styles like the *son* and its offspring, salsa,

can be seen as evolving in a continuous lineage from neo-African musics like rumba and earlier African ancestors, the neo-African musical legacy in Jamaica has been much weaker, and its contribution to the evolution of reggae is slight. Reggae history and prehistory don't really begin until the 1950s, with the imitation, whether skillful or amateurish, of American R&B. And yet this historical shallowness somehow became an asset rather than a limitation, as within a generation or two Jamaicans had developed techniques of recording, performing, composing, and dancing that were utterly new, unique, and powerful.

African Traditions in a Difficult Climate

In Chapter 1, I contrasted the music cultures generated by settler colonies with those of plantation colonies. Settler colonies, as I noted, were those such as Cuba and Puerto Rico, which attracted substantial numbers of European immigrants. By the mid-nineteenth century, the descendants of those settlers had become sufficiently Caribbeanized such that they cultivated local music and dance styles like the contradance, which were cherished symbols of island identity. Further, the settler colonies, even as plantations were grafted onto them, hosted fluid social milieus such as that of nineteenth-century Havana, where one could find neo-Yoruba music in *cabildos*, classical European music in concert halls, and all manner of creolized vernacular music in dance venues.

The plantation colonies—with Jamaica as a quintessential example—were far less conducive to the emergence of creole music, or even to music culture in general. The British developed Jamaica and its smaller Antillean colonies as work camps, in which a small white population administered the slave-based production of sugar and other products. The resident Europeans were few in number—less than 10 percent of the population—and consisted primarily of planters, administrators, soldiers, and assorted hustlers, mountebanks, and scoundrels. They thought of themselves as Brits (or as Scotsmen, Welsh, and so on) rather than “Jamaicans” and felt no urge to cultivate local music forms. For their part, people of African descent in Jamaica, until emancipation in the 1830s, consisted overwhelmingly of plantation slaves. While some owners tolerated neo-African dancing and drumming, the plantations on the whole were culturally repressive, especially as owners increasingly banned any African-sounding expressions after Tacky's Rebellion of 1760 and the Haitian Revolution starting in 1791.

Other factors contributed to making Jamaica less hospitable to neo-African or even creolized African arts than was, for example, Cuba. Most slave

imports to Jamaica took place in the 1700s, and imports stopped altogether in 1807, unlike Cuba, where the majority of slaves were brought in the nineteenth century. The British—like southern American slave owners—never tolerated institutions such as the Cuban *cabildos*, in which free people of color and even urban slaves could reconstitute versions of their ancestral African religions, songs, and dances. In general, the blue-eyed, inbred northern Europeans seemed particularly intolerant of anything that was distinct from their own Protestant culture, and they were markedly successful at indoctrinating generations of Afro-Jamaicans to share their scorn for everything suggestive of blackness or Africa. In 1820, a British chronicler related how the “Creole Negroes” were forsaking African-style drumming for European music, and visiting writer Anthony Trollope echoed this observation in 1859: “The West Indian negro knows nothing of Africa except that it is a term of reproach. If African immigrants are put to work on the same estate with him, he will not eat with them, or drink with them, and regards himself as a creature immeasurably superior of the newcomer.”²¹ Such attitudes intensified after emancipation as village communities came to nucleate around Protestant churches whose ministers denounced African traditions as barbaric. Accordingly, Caucasian notions of “good hair” and “good noses” went unchallenged until Afrocentricity came in the idiosyncratic form of Rastafari; even today, however, many Jamaicans, including reggae star Vybz Kartel, have continued to bleach their skin.

Although such conditions have prevented neo-African musics in Jamaica from surviving in as widespread and as rich a form as in Cuba and Haiti, the Jamaican soundscape does include various inheritances from African music. During the slavery period, several writers attested to the vigor of such traditions and the evident tolerance of them on the part of some planters. One absentee landlord, visiting his plantation, described the various festivities of his “Eboes,” including “the drums, rattles, and their whole orchestra of abominable instruments,” to whose accompaniment “they all sang, danced, shouted, and, in the violence of their gesticulations, tumbled over each other, and rolled about upon the ground. . . . Altogether, they shouted and sang me into a violent headache.”²² (He doesn’t seem to have enjoyed the music.) Other chroniclers described the slaves’ instruments, including the *banjar* lute (related to the banjo), the *abeng* cow-horn trumpet, the *cotter* and *gumbay* drums, and the *benta*, a monochord made of a long bamboo log, played with a gourd and two sticks to accompany songs at wakes.

Most neo-African musics tended to die out along with the African-born slaves (“salt-water Negroes”), but distinctive traditions did survive among two particular sorts of communities. One of these was the Maroons, the



A benta being played in Islington, St. Mary, Jamaica, in 2002.
(Photograph by Ken Bilby.)

resourceful descendants of runaway slaves whose earliest communities date from 1655, when the British seized the island from the Spanish. The Spanish left little cultural legacy aside from toponyms like “Ocho Rios,” but during the British invasion they freed their slaves, who fled to the rugged hills of the interior and established independent settlements. In subsequent decades, the communities were augmented by more runaways, and the Maroons waged guerrilla warfare against the British. In 1739, the two groups signed a treaty under which the Maroons were granted autonomy as long as they chased and captured any new runaways. It was a Faustian bargain for the Maroons, but it did allow them to perpetuate some of their reconstituted West African traditions. In 1796, the British finally seized some of the townships and packed their troublesome inhabitants off to Nova Scotia, and thence to Sierra Leone, but other Maroon villages were left intact.

Today, residents of the Maroon towns of Moore Town, Scott’s Hall, and Accompong occasionally perform the “Kromanti dance” (or Kromanti Play) ceremony, which takes its name from the West African coastal fort through which many Jamaica-bound slaves were transported. As Kenneth Bilby has documented, Kromanti dances—performed at healing ceremonies, burials, and occasional public events—include recreational “jawbone” songs and

more serious “country” songs, during which ancestral spirits are invoked, a chicken may be sacrificed, duppies (ghosts) are attracted, and spirit possession, or *myal*, may occur. Kromanti dance music features vigorous drumming and call-and-response singing, with lyrics variously in English, patwa, and a Kromanti ritual language based mostly on Akan.³ Somewhat like the big-drum music of Carriacou, songs and rhythms are associated with “tribes,” such as “Ibo,” “Mandinga,” and “Sa Leone” (Sierra Leone), although there may be no particular features traceable to such namesakes in Africa. In recent decades, these traditions have declined greatly, and Maroon communities have become increasingly integrated into mainstream rural Jamaican society, especially as holy-roller Seventh Day Adventist and Jehovah’s Witness ministers rail against surviving Africanisms. However, every January the “Leeward” Maroons of Accompong present their unique rites and dances in a festival attended by tourists and the general public.

A related and somewhat more vital tradition is Kumina, a neo-African religion that appears to derive from the roughly eight thousand Africans who came as indentured workers in the mid-1800s. Most of these Africans (or their parents) had earlier been liberated by the British from Spanish and Portuguese slave ships and deposited in Sierra Leone, regardless of their regional origins. Induced by the British to resettle in Jamaica, they found themselves in an impoverished outpost where they had little hope of advancing, and where local blacks disparaged them as scabs and backward obeah-people. One Kumina song expressed their longing to return to Africa, invoking in the “Guinea bird” a reference to both Africa (Guinea) and the flightless guinea fowl:

Wah me da go do [What am I going to do?], poor me Guinea bird-oh,
wah me do go do, oh me wan go home-oh.⁴

In the eastern Jamaican hills of St. Thomas parish—and among those who have migrated down to Kingston—one may still encounter Kumina ceremonies that feature drumming, dancing, goat sacrifice, and spirit possession. Such ceremonies may be held for various reasons but generally seek to establish contact with deceased ancestors through possession trance. Bilby has traced to Congolese sources many aspects of Kumina, including the words to many songs and invocations and the practice of playing a drum while laying it on the ground and straddling it.⁵ While many Jamaicans have no exposure to or interest in Kumina, a Kumina drumbeat formed the basis for the “Poco Man Jam” riddim that was recycled into the “Dem Bow” beat, which went on to form the basis for reggaeton rhythm.

Particularly remarkable is the way that Jamaica, rather than being a mere recipient of African traditions, actually contributed to African music long before the reggae era. Most notable were the peregrinations of a rectangular, stool-like frame drum called the gumbay (gumbe, goombay), which, though deriving its name from Africa, was invented in Jamaica, presumably in the 1700s. As Bilby has documented, the Maroons who were exiled to Nova Scotia, and thence to Sierra Leone, introduced the drum to West Africa, where it came to be widely adopted.⁶ Then from the 1850s British colonists were bringing Jamaican military bands to Ghana and elsewhere, where they came to be freely imitated by locals and formed the bases for what evolved into brass-band highlife.

Other Vernacular Traditions

Aside from the declining Kumina and Maroon traditions, other kinds of traditional and syncretic music have thrived in the Jamaican soundscape, which certainly comprises much more than Bob Marley and Beenie Man.

In the pre-Beenie nineteenth century, as the neo-African dances died out, creolized Afro-Jamaicans increasingly took up the jigs, reels, and quadrilles they had learned by watching white folk amuse themselves. Even before emancipation, talented slaves had learned to play such tunes on homemade fiddles, fifes, and banjos to accompany the dances of both their white masters and their own peers. While these tunes were thoroughly European in character and, in many cases, origin, they could be subtly creolized by rhythmic syncopations, slides and slurs, and other features. As suggested in Chapter 1, the adoption of these “colo” songs and dances has lent itself to different interpretations and could have had various meanings for its diverse participants. To Jamaican blacks alienated from ancestral African social dances, the new jigs and reels were good, clean fun, and the quadrilles—suite dances typically of five sections—demanded proper execution (not to be spoiled by a *faux pas*, or false step) and could serve as vehicles for social prestige and distinction as well as “jollification.” As the dances became traditional in their own way, even the Accompong Maroons adopted them as emblematic of their distinctive identity.⁷ Nowadays, however, these dances are found only in rural areas and would be regarded by most people as boring relics from the era before Jamaicans developed their own reggae-type dances.

A very different kind of neo-traditional music can be found in the Afro-Protestant sects such as Revival Zion and Pukumina (Pocomania, Poco). Revival Zion, which emerged in the nineteenth century, is a syncretic sect that combines African-derived spirit possession with elements of Baptist religion,

including nineteenth-century American “Sankey” hymns. These hymns are sung in a thoroughly Afro-Jamaicanized “trumping” style, with a leader’s strong voice wafting over the responsorial singing and hyperventilated “groaning” of the congregation, often to the accompaniment of a military-style drum trio. Similar music can be heard at nine-night wake ceremonies, which can culminate in a spirit possession by the deceased’s duppy, which then is able to depart peacefully instead of hanging around and causing trouble. Nowadays, such events may feature a “duppy band” consisting of a singer accompanied by electric bass, keyboard, and drum set. However, invocations of duppies, ecstatic drumming, and the like are disparaged by Evangelical Protestants, Rastas, and educated urbanites.

Brief mention can be made here of another kind of traditional music—namely, children’s game songs, which can, of course, be found in different forms throughout the Caribbean. One familiar such song is “Emmanuel Road,” which, though originally a work song, now accompanies a game in which kids pass rocks along to the rhythm of the song:

Go down Emmanuel Road gal and boy fi go bruk rock stone (gal
and boy)
And we bruk them one by one (gal and boy)
Bruk them two by two (gal and boy)
Bruk them three by three (gal and boy).⁸

By the early twentieth century, Jamaica had developed its own form of creole folk music, called mento (probably from Spanish *mentar*, to mention), or sometimes, “calypso,” reflecting affinities with its better-known Trinidadian cousin. Mento tunes, many of which were purely instrumental, could be played variously on banjo, fife, guitar, fiddle, harmonica, a “rhumba box” (like the Cuban *marimbula*), and assorted percussion instruments. The tunes derived variously from work songs, quadrilles, reels, the odd Cuban song, and anonymous folk tradition. The lyrics could be whimsical, as in the description of low-income housing in “Dry Weather House”:

Some of dem rooms is so small
You cyan [can’t] turn around in dem at all
When you want to turn around you got to go outside
Then you turn your back and go back inside.

From the 1940s, local entrepreneurs Stanley Motta and Ken Khouri released a few records of mento, and some makeshift bands performed them along-

side calypsos for tourists. By mid-century, however, mento was already seen by most Jamaicans as rural old-timey music.

It could be said that as of the 1950s, the Jamaican soundscape, though variegated, was not as rich as that of comparable Caribbean islands. During the same decade, the Cuban mambo and chachachá were in full flower, Cortijo's group was rocking Puerto Rico, tourists were thronging to Trinidad to hear steelband and calypso, and merengue bands were playing throughout the Dominican Republic, while in Jamaica—well, not a helluva a lot was happening. There was not even such a thing as “Jamaican popular music.” The point, however, is not to criticize Jamaican culture, but to highlight just how extraordinary was the musical revolution that was about to take place.

Ska: From Imitation to Creation

Although Jamaica of the 1950s did not have its own commercial popular music, it did have increasing numbers of urban young people who wanted to enjoy popular music, and especially to dance, and who needed some sort of music to dance to. They also wanted to feel modern and cosmopolitan, and the country mento played by some toothless fogeys on homemade banjos was not going to do the trick. Instead, young Jamaicans developed a fondness for black American R&B. This was not the catch-all “rhythm 'n' blues” category of later decades, but the bouncy, shuffle-beat, guitar-and-horn-based dance music heard in clubs and juke joints throughout the southern United States, and especially in New Orleans, whether from big names like Sam Cooke and Fats Domino or legions of lesser-known performers. This music was a bit hard to come by in Jamaica. There were no record stores to speak of, and few Jamaicans owned record players, in any case. Nor were there local bands that could perform at dance venues or established, affordable clubs with proper amplification setups. And so arose that entity which has continued to be a focal institution in Jamaican music culture until this day: the sound system.

A mobile sound system (or simply a “sound”) comprised various components. First there was the equipment: one or two turntables, a powerful souped-up amplifier, and speakers, generally in cabinets large enough to raise a family in. In the competitive atmosphere that soon arose, the amps and speakers had to be loud enough to fill a “yard” (usually some empty urban lot) with sound, overpower any rival systems, make the bass vibrate in one's chest, and cause ripples in a cup of coffee two or three villages away. Then there was the personnel: the owner; the selector, who would put on the records; a deejay or “mike man,” who would hype up the crowd by shouting and jabbering between—and, increasingly, during—songs; a posse of armed

thugs to protect the equipment from attack by rivals; and a miscellaneous coterie of higglers, hustlers, street vendors, and the like, who would follow the sounds around and constitute part of its general informal economy. And last, there were the records to be played, many of which were exclusive songs possessed by only the individual systems. In the 1950s, these were generally R&B songs that the system owner would obtain from visiting sailors or, more often, from record-buying trips to the U.S. South or, perhaps, Harlem. Fans would throng to dances held by the top sound systems just to hear their favorite songs, which were unavailable elsewhere, and whose performers might even be unknown to them. Rival sounds would scramble to figure out what these hit records were, but a spy sent to look at the record being played would generally discover that the system owner had scratched off the label and scribbled his own identifying code on it. As we shall see, even after the R&B era passed, the tradition of sounds playing exclusive recordings has continued to be a basic feature of the music scene.

In the competitive Kingston yard scene, the top three sounds were those of Clement “Coxsone” Dodd, Prince Buster, and Duke Reid. Reid, a former cop who knew his way around the underworld, was not above having his “enforcers” shoot up a rival sound system or burst into a dance, stabbing, punching, and kicking, and thus began the tradition of competitive violence that

The selector Loydie Coxsone with a young deejay 'pon da mike.
(Courtesy of UrbanImage.tv/Bernard Sohiez.)



Guarding the sound system.

(Courtesy of UrbanImage.tv/
Bernard Sohiez.)

has plagued the Jamaican music scene ever since. However, thug-gery alone could not sustain a sound system, which relied above all on having the best records and a steady stream of new tunes. Alongside these three sounds were several dozen others, such as those of King Edwards the Giant and Admiral Cosmic, each trying to “flop” (outshine) the others in terms of decibels and the quality of their record collections.

Such, one might say, were the relatively inauspicious beginnings

of the Jamaican popular music scene, based on consumption of an imported product rather than creation of a new one or elaboration of some deep local folk music. Yet by the 1960s, creation had begun, in the form of R&B-style records produced by a few sound systems, initially for their own use at their dances. The incentive was the need for new tunes, in a period in which R&B production in the United States was fizzling out as tastes were shifting toward soul and rock 'n' roll. Jamaican soundmen like Dodd and Reid knew what kind of music their audiences liked, and in 1957 they started occasionally assembling ad hoc groups of musicians in makeshift studios to record songs on individual acetate discs. In 1959, Dodd began pressing more copies of such recordings and releasing them to the public, and the Jamaican commercial recording business finally got off to a start, however humble and tentative.

The early Jamaican records were mostly R&B “boogie” tunes, whether straight cover versions of American songs, instrumental or vocal adaptations of them, or, occasionally, originals in the same style. Many of these were fairly amateurish, but others reflected an incipient professionalism and musicality. Some of them also began to acquire a slightly distinctive flavor as musicians put extra emphasis—whether through sax honks or clipped guitar strums—on the offbeats (see Musical Example 17). By the early 1960s, a lively local record scene had emerged, with producers like Leslie Kong joining Dodd and others in marketing 45s of artists such as Derrick Morgan, Toots and the Maytals, the Skatalites, and the young Jimmy Cliff and Bob Marley. As the





Musical Example 17: The ska rhythm.

music started to acquire its own jerky character, it also acquired a name—ska—and a somewhat goofy calisthenic dance style, in which you spread your legs, bend over a bit, and pump your arms up and down. Skatologists have since argued about whether the genre’s jumpy rhythmic twist derived from mento’s banjo strum, Revival Zion hand clapping, Rasta funde drumming (as imparted by Count Ossie [Oswald Williams]), military band music (learned by orphans at the Alpha Boys School), or just an exaggeration of a feature already overt in American R&B. Whatever its origins, this local dance and music phenomenon’s emergence coincided with independence in 1962, as the British decided there was no more money to be made from its Caribbean colonies, and the Federation of the West Indies formed in 1958 fell apart.

Many ska records, however prized by fetishists, were forgettable and forgotten, but a few others stood out. A particularly catchy and popular hit of 1963 was “Simmer Down,” by the teenage Bob Marley. This record was the first of innumerable others to be aimed at the “rude boys”—unemployed young men with nothing to do but hang around, look tough, and get involved in petty or not-so-petty crime. Marley could offer his admonition not as some disdainful “uptown” snob, but as a ghetto “yute” from the same yard milieu:

Long time people dem used to say
 What sweet [to] nanny goat had a [gave it a] runny belly, so
 Simmer down, oh, control your temper.

Rudies, even if raised in the urban shantytown, would recognize the proverb’s image of the nanny goat heedlessly eating whatever rubbish was before it, and then paying for its indulgence with a case of the runs. With such songs, ska was clearly moving away from its R&B roots in both style and subject matter. It was also becoming firmly associated with the Kingston ghettos rather than the uptown bourgeoisie of the city’s hilly neighborhoods, who literally and attitudinally looked down on the squalid shantytowns and whatever racket their annoying sound systems made.

Outstanding in a different way was “My Boy Lollipop,” singer Millie Small’s bouncy ska-style cover version of an obscure R&B song. Produced in England by Chris Blackwell, a white Jamaican-born entrepreneur, the 1964 tune became a novelty hit and sold 7 million copies in the United States and the United Kingdom. Although perhaps not a major opus in the history of Western music, it was the first Jamaican music to be noticed outside the island and earned the young songstress ephemeral celebrity status.

By the latter 1960s, a lively music scene was in place. Producers like Coxson Dodd were churning out 45s, which consumers could hear on jukeboxes, the radio, and home phonographs, and, above all, at sound-system dances. Since Jamaica, unlike the Spanish Caribbean islands, had no strong tradition of dance bands, Jamaican popular music was already taking shape as a studio art form, recorded by singers and studio musicians but seldom performed live. Although almost every young man aspired to be a singer, live gigs were infrequent, and producers paid their artists so little for recordings that they might as well have done it with a change dispenser worn on the belt. And if a singer protested to a producer like Dodd, the paternalistic smile would fade from Dodd’s face, and he might flash his gun or have his enforcers teach the bwoy a liddle lesson. Many singers got no more than the ability to occasionally exclaim, when the jukebox was playing, “Is me dat, pon da hi-fi dere!”

Patwa for Beginners

“Liddle,” for anyone who doesn’t know, means “little” in the colloquial Jamaican idiom generally known as patwa (patois). Though sometimes dismissed as “broken English,” it is better seen as a valid creole language that consists of variants of standard English (such as “liddle,” and “dung” for “down,” and “dem” to indicate a plural, as in “da yute dem out a’ control”); a few West African words (such as the Ibo *unu*, meaning “you all”); idiosyncratic uses of English words (e.g., “make/mek” to mean “let” or “let’s,” as in “mek we have a liddle fun now”); and distinctive grammatical forms, which would include “mi run” (I run), “me a go run” (I will run), “me run did a run” (I was running), and “me cyan believe it” (I can’t believe it). Standard English is the language of schools, the radio, Parliament, and uptown conversation, but in the street and the yard one mostly hears patwa, which, at a fast clip, can be unintelligible to the American visitor. The language had no legitimacy until the 1950s–60s, when the much-beloved Louise Bennett (“Miss Louise,” 1919–2006) called attention to its colorful expressivity through stage and TV performances of her patwa poetry.

Around 1966, the bouncy ska beat gave way to an entirely different rhythm: the slowed-down, ganja-friendly chick-a-chuck-a-chick-a-chuck-a of “rock steady,” which shortly thereafter settled into classic “one-drop” beat of reggae—called so because the bass drum “drops” the downbeats, sounding only on beat three. The result, schematized in Musical Example 18, is a remarkably sparse but effective composite. Exactly how and under what inspiration this crucial development happened is even more enigmatic than the onset of the ska beat, but the result was the advent of an entirely new and original rhythm that carried reggae throughout the world. None of the top producers—whether Dodd, Reid, or Lee “Scratch” Perry—knew the difference between a seventh chord and a spliff, but they all knew how to twiddle the mixer knobs (of which there weren’t very many before the 1970s) and how to coax and guide their musicians to get just the sound they wanted. Particularly celebrated was Perry’s Black Ark Studio, covered with graffiti and full of ganja smoke, where the eccentric producer, often dancing and jumping in front of the mixing board during sessions, generated hundreds of hit records until he decided to burn down the building in 1978. By 1970, a mature, distinctive reggae style was in place, record studios were beehives of activity, British labels—especially Chris Blackwell’s Island Records—were poised to take interest, and music history was about to happen.

Roots and Culture: Downtown Triumphant

The 1970s were a momentous decade for Jamaica. They were a period of great sociopolitical upheaval and of the full flowering of reggae—or, more specifically, of the style that retrospectively came to be known variously as roots reggae, classic reggae, or foundation reggae (as opposed to dancehall). The 1970s can also be seen as the period in which various trends in Jamaican music came to fruition. One of these was a process of maturation, in which Jamaican popular music, after getting off to a rather late start, quickly acquired a remarkable level of sophistication and expressive power. While much 1960s ska consisted of little more than tentative cover versions of American R&B tunes (with that certain Jamaican rhythmic twist), by the early 1970s, top reggae artists like Bob Marley and producers like Lee Perry were in complete control of their idiom, fully endowed with both inspired ideas and the technical ability to realize them.

A concurrent trend was the intensifying international dissemination of Jamaican music, which, unlike Cuban music, had enjoyed no particular foreign presence until “My Boy Lollipop.” In 1968, a bigger impact was made by the independent, black-and-white feature film *The Harder They Come*, which

merged the figure of a famous rude boy with that of an aspiring reggae singer, played by the real-life singer and composer Jimmy Cliff. The film became a cult classic in the United States and the United Kingdom, and Cliff's LP by the same name soon became a standard fixture in Anglo-American record collections, alongside Led Zeppelin and the Beatles.⁹

The biggest international stardom, however, was enjoyed by Bob Marley (1945–81), especially after he signed with Island Records in 1972. To American and British youth who had come to feel that rock had lost its countercultural edge, reggae and especially Marley's music seemed like a fresh sound—tuneful, rhythmically compelling, idealistic, and somehow untainted by commercialism. Marley and the Wailers went on to attain global appeal, successfully touring the United States, Europe, and Africa and inspiring fans and imitators everywhere from Senegal to Sri Lanka.

Perhaps paradoxically, the international vogue of reggae paralleled a process of indigenization in which Jamaican popular music became in many ways more distinctly Jamaican. By the 1970s, cover versions of American songs had given way to original compositions, and reggae had acquired such a distinctive sound that it couldn't be regarded as simply a spinoff of American music. Jamaican listeners could also recognize that some reggae songs drew freely from Revival Zion hymn singing, Rasta *nyabingi* music, and the strumming of mento musicians who had migrated from the hills to Kingston.

Much Jamaican music had become local in lyric content as well as in style. Local producers, who emerged from the sound systems, aimed for the largest record-buying market, and in Jamaica this meant the struggling masses of ordinary citizens. Thus, it was not long after the appearance of ska that popular music in Jamaica began to reflect the social tensions caused by the glaring divisions between elitist, bourgeois, uptown society and disenfranchised but increasingly self-conscious and assertive downtown youth.

The musical notation consists of three staves. The top staff is a grand staff with a treble clef, showing a piano accompaniment with chords and single notes. The middle staff is a bass line with a bass clef, showing eighth notes and rests. The bottom staff is a kick drum pattern with a treble clef, showing quarter notes and rests. A '8va' marking is present above the bass line.

Musical Example 18: The basic “one-drop” reggae rhythm.

Many ska songs of the 1960s spoke of the shantytowns, of the travails of the “sufferers,” and, ambivalently, of the rude boys who, in a milieu of poverty and instability, sought respect in street-corner machismo.

Rasta and Revolution

Linked to these trends was the rapid growth of the Rastafarian movement, especially among poor urban youth. The roots of Rastafari lie in the teachings of Marcus Garvey, an early advocate of black pride and mobilization. Born in Jamaica in 1887, Garvey attracted some notoriety as a labor activist there and among Panama Canal workers and left Jamaica for the United States in 1916, hoping to seek a more receptive audience for his evolving creed of Afrocentricity and black self-reliance. In the United States he founded the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which urged black people to take pride in their African ancestry and bypass white domination by developing their own networks of support and sustenance and, ultimately, by “returning” to Africa. He founded a steamship line, the Black Star Line—at its peak consisting of four ships—which sought to establish trade links between black communities in the Americas and, eventually, Africa. The UNIA attracted tens of thousands of followers, along with the interest of the FBI, which regarded Garvey as a troublemaker. The young J. Edgar Hoover, who would later persecute Martin Luther King Jr. so effectively, set out to neutralize Garvey, who was imprisoned in 1925–27 for financial irregularities and then deported. Back in Jamaica, he continued to preach and developed a small but devoted following; he later moved to England and died in poverty in 1940.

In 1927, Garvey reportedly gave a speech urging followers to “look to Africa, where a black king will be crowned.” And lo, in 1930 it came to pass, as one Ras Tafari Makonnen, with great pomp and circumstance, declared himself emperor of Ethiopia, taking the name Haile Selassie. Ethiopia, although it had no cultural connections to the slave trade or to black America, had already enjoyed a certain visibility among African Americans. It was the only independent country in a black Africa otherwise carved up by European colonial powers; it was also predominantly Christian and makes an appearance in the Old Testament. Thousands of Jamaicans began worshipping Selassie as God, the returned Messiah, and Garvey as his prophet. The fact that both Garvey and Selassie (a devout Christian) disowned this belief made little difference to the growing number of Jamaicans who, alienated both from orthodox Christianity and neo-African religions like Kumina, sought an alternative faith that celebrated rather than disparaged their Af-

rican ancestry. A Rasta ethic and lifestyle came to coalesce in the Pinnacle commune led by Leonard Howell, and the breakup of that community in 1954 served to spread the faith as brethren relocated in cities, paving the way for the dramatic growth of the movement in the 1970s.

Rastafari evolved in many respects as a reinterpretation of Old Testament beliefs, taking inspiration from the tale of the “chosen people” taken in bondage from their home, Zion, to Babylon, where they lay and wept. “Babylon” thus encompassed Jamaica, the New World, and the entire “shitstem” of white neocolonial domination (even if enforced by black cops, or “Babylon bwoys”). More implicitly, it was a state of mind to be transcended. Rasta preached going “back to Africa,” which could be interpreted in a figurative sense, of reorienting one’s sense of identity, or literally, as in the case of the hundreds of gullible Jamaicans who purchased steamship tickets to Africa in the 1950s, only to find they had been duped by scam artists. The Old Testament was also the source for dietary restrictions on alcohol, salt, pork (or all meat), and shellfish. For its part, the flaunting of long dreadlocks derived both from the tale of Samson and Delilah as well as from a desire to invert traditional racist notions of “good hair” (straight) and “bad hair” (matted and kinky). In Rasta imagery, the biblical lion (of Judah) became the quintessential animal role model, perhaps in contrast to the humble Anansi the spider, the African-derived trickster figure. Although Rastas celebrated ganja (marijuana) as a vehicle of spirituality, they also cultivated an ethic of clean and healthy living, represented in its own way by Marley and friends, who could often be seen jogging around Kingston and playing soccer.

Despite its idiosyncratic Afrocentricity, Rastafari had little to do with the real Africa, and instead envisioned that continent more as an imaginary utopia. Rastas had little use for the surviving aspects of West African culture in Jamaica (as could be found in Kumina) and instead looked over the heads of their West African cousins to focus on remote and culturally unrelated Ethiopia. Perhaps most important, however, was the way that Rasta, for all its contradictions, enabled or even obliged Jamaicans to confront and challenge the hair-straightened, Anglo-Saxon, colonial mentality that had dominated local ideologies for so long. For all its mystifications, Rastafari seemed to channel the yearning for dignity, for black liberation, and for a way to regain the cultural wholeness that was lost when Africans were uprooted, enslaved, and dumped on some poor Caribbean island. Hence, while Rastas never constituted more than a small minority of Jamaicans, many others felt inspired by aspects of their image.

Reggae became closely linked to Rasta, most visibly in the image of Marley, and the two movements thrived together, preaching spiritual ren-

ovation, chanting down Babylon, and predicting its fall (“Babylon, your throne gone down”). As the British-based group Steel Pulse sang:

I curse the day they made us slaves
 How can we sing in a strange land? . . .
 One God, one aim, one destiny
 Rally round the [UNIA] flag, the red, gold, black, and blue
 The right direction: Africa, Africa.

Hard-core Rastas shunned sociopolitical activism, regarding politics as a corrupt cesspool that would be swept away in the impending apocalypse. Progressive politicians like Michael Manley and internationally oriented artists like Marley implicitly presented a more moderate form of this creed, in which anticipating the fall of Babylon reflected a fundamental optimism cohering with the general spirit of the 1970s. Like their counterparts in other recently independent countries, many Jamaicans felt that they were poised to throw off the yoke of neocolonial (especially American) domination, allying themselves as need be with the Soviet bloc and other Third World countries. In 1972, Manley (1924–97) and the People’s National Party (PNP), riding a crest of mass mobilization and enthusiasm, came to power with a moderate socialist platform of demanding better payments from the multinationals mining Jamaica’s bauxite, distributing that wealth to the poor, and seeking assistance from any quarter, including accepting doctors from nearby Cuba. Manley courted the Rastas and reggae fans in general, and several reggae songs praised the PNP and its idealistic commitment to the “sufferers.” Echoing in worldly terms the impending fall of Babylon, many PNP supporters thought that Jamaica and the Third World could at last overcome imperialist domination. Innumerable reggae songs focused on a set of inter-related themes of shantytown life, social justice, Rastafari, socialism, and a general sense of optimism, as in Marley’s “Small Axe,” which portrays him felling with his hatchet the huge tree (of imperialism? Babylon? exploitative record companies?).

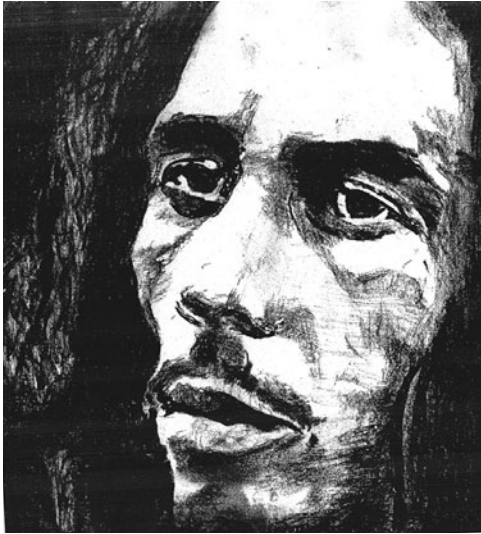
Bob Marley, the Tuff Gong

Further mention should be made of Marley, who was certainly roots reggae’s best-known and most gifted exponent. Born in 1945 to an absent white father and an Afro-Jamaican mother, he grew up in the countryside until he moved with his mother to Kingston’s Trenchtown slum, which was as gritty as its name suggests. From his early teens, he was strumming on a cheap

guitar and recording R&B tunes with his chums Bunny Livingston/Wailer and Peter Tosh. Groomed by singer Joe Higgs and producer Coxsone Dodd, he soon emerged as the most creative of the three. After a string of ska 45s, in the early 1970s he was taken under the wing of Chris Blackwell, who encouraged him to beef up the Rasta look, foreground the electric guitar, add the gospel-sounding female backup trio (the I-Threes), and start producing nicely packaged LPs rather than singles. Blackwell also had Marley form a proper, self-contained touring band, like a rock group, which was otherwise a rare entity in a Jamaican scene that consisted of singers, studio musicians, and sound systems. Under Blackwell's astute guidance, in the latter 1970s Marley was actively touring the United States and Europe and enjoying excellent record sales, to some extent being packaged and perceived as a slightly exotic Jamaican rock band.

Much as Marley tried to avoid the Babylonian "shitstem" of Jamaican politics, many islanders associated him with the socialist PNP, both for his eloquent songs about "sufferers" and his agreement to perform at a massive concert in Kingston in 1976 that had morphed into an implicit PNP rally. The day of the concert, gunmen burst into Marley's Hope Road house and sprayed him and others with bullets, managing miraculously only to wound him. He triumphantly performed the concert but subsequently left the island to avoid its spiraling political and gang violence.¹⁰ In 1978, he returned to Jamaica for a "One Love" concert promoting a (short-lived) truce between Michael Manley and Edward Seaga, leader of the rival Jamaican Labour Party (JLP), and their murderous gangs. Marley made local history by calling the two leaders from the audience to join him on stage and hold hands. Two years later, he took his band to Zimbabwe, at his own expense, to perform at the historic inauguration of that country's hard-won independence. However, at the peak of his popularity he developed melanoma. Through some combination of poor advice, carelessness, and a Rasta-based refusal to undergo the recommended surgery, he allowed the cancer to metastasize and succumbed to it in 1981.¹¹

Marley's enduring status and popularity could be regarded as resting on two interrelated dimensions of his persona. One was the sheer repertoire of tuneful, soulful songs he bequeathed to his nation and to the world. Compositions like "Redemption Song" and "No Woman No Cry" have become like folksongs, or even unofficial anthems in Jamaica, and they still resound in clubs and are enjoyed by young West Indians two generations later. But Marley's memory has also been cherished for his image of idealism and spirituality, which stand in sharp contrast to the values celebrated in modern dancehall. Marley's standard attire was jeans and a T-shirt rather than bling



Bob Marley. (Adapted by Peter Manuel.)

and designer suits. While residing at Hope Road, he would give away much of his earnings to the dozens of people who would line up every day, seeking help to pay for a child's tuition, for medical treatment, or for a roof for a collapsed shanty. Nor was he like the legion of subsequent deejays who, skilled at talking out of both sides of their mouths, would denounce vio-

lence in an interview and then sing about the pleasure of blowing someone's head away with a Glock, or who would sing about peace and love in one song and advocate butchering gay people in another.

Sadly, Marley, like other successful Jamaican artists, was unable to distance himself from his roots in the snake pit of the slum and the seamy Jamaican music scene. He never shook off the legions of former ghetto sidekicks, who almost got him killed in the 1976 shooting; his earnings were siphoned off by corrupt managers and hangers-on, and he resorted to having his Trenchtown homeboys beat up local radio deejays to get them to play his songs. The violence and "comess" continued after his death, with the scramble for his inheritance provoking ongoing lawsuits and several murders. It could also be said that his worship of Haile Selassie represented a search for the father he never had, and that his foggy Rasta mysticism could offer little valuable guidance to Jamaicans confronting the harsh realities of ghetto life. In retrospect, he seems like someone who was never quite in control of his situation, but who managed nevertheless to convey an enduring vision of hope and idealism.

The End of an Era and the Dawn of a New One: From Reggae to Ragga

The 1970s were the heyday of roots reggae, with Marley, Jimmy Cliff, Peter Tosh, Toots and the Maytals, and other groups enjoying healthy local and foreign record sales and concert careers. Yet by mid-decade their music, al-

though respected on the island, was already regarded by most young Jamaicans as a distinctly “international” and already somewhat old-fashioned style. Unlike in the Spanish Caribbean, few live bands performed in Jamaica, where roots reggae had evolved largely as a studio art form, whose leading exponents were generally on tour “a’ foreign.” Instead, when young Jamaicans went out to dance on a Saturday night, they danced to the beat pumped out by that distinctly Jamaican entity: the sound system.

As we’ve seen, the basic elements of the sound systems had dominated Jamaican musical life since the 1950s: a towering bank of speaker cabinets; a “selector” with his two turntables, choosing from crates of 45s that included not only familiar hits but also exclusive, custom-ordered specials; the throng of devoted followers, who were not above attacking members of a rival “sound”; the miscellaneous hawkers, hookers, and hangers-on; and, increasingly in the 1970s, the charismatic figure of the deejay. Originally, the deejay’s role was to hype up the crowd by shouting into the mike between songs. But from the late 1960s on, Count Machuki, Dennis Alcapone, and U-Roy were popularizing a more active style, in which they shouted and rhymed throughout a song, energizing the dancers and adding a new element to the familiar record being played. From 1970 on, Duke Reid was dusting off the instrumental tracks to his earlier recordings and having U-Roy record his “chats” over them, in some cases right before showcasing it at a sound-system dance. As one Reid fan recalls:

And bwoy he’d make a big fuss coming in through the gates when he had new tunes. Everybody would see him arrive, with the records under his arm or he holding them high in the air just to let everybody know these were straight from the studio. And then when he play them he make sure they get a big build-up—he’d take the mic and announce, “*Right! A brand new recording dis! You hearing it for the very first time!*”¹²

In the next few years, it became common for a 45 rpm record to contain an original reggae tune on the A side, and the instrumental version on the B side, over which deejays would jabber (or “voice”), in a half-sung, half-rapped karaoke manner, at sound-system dances. As the jabbering grew more stylized, with clever rhymes and rhythmic flow set to simple tunes, the art of dancehall was taking shape. More or less the same process happened in rap, although not until around 1980; Jamaica, far from copying the United States, was now leading the way in the art of the deejay and in the use of the turntable as a musical instrument.¹³ If the international market and local radio

promoted Marley and roots reggae, in the 1970s, it was the young deejays like U-Roy, Big Youth, and innumerable aspiring stars who entertained dancers in ground-level Jamaica itself, chatting about the pleasures and vicissitudes of street life and “bigging-up” (praising) the sounds, their audiences, and themselves. The deejays’ local rather than international orientation was also reflected in their use of Jamaican patwa rather than the “King’s English” more common in roots reggae.

Besides hits and their B sides, the records played by the sound systems often featured a new genre called “dub,” consisting of innovative remasterings of contemporary hits.¹⁴ In the early 1970s, recording engineers like King Tubby and Augustus Pablo started manipulating filters, faders, and other effects to reshape recordings, cutting vocal tracks and bringing them back in snippets, and adding reverb and echo in a dreamlike, seemingly random fashion. Though produced on a mixing board in the studio, dub was meant to be heard “live” at the sound-system dance, where dancers and listeners would revel in the surrealistic deconstruction of familiar songs, now presented as perpetually mutating rhythm tracks conceived and ideally consumed under the spiritually medicinal effect of ganja. Sound-system operators would often appear at the studio of King Tubby or another mixologist on the morning before a show, requesting a fresh dub for the evening’s entertainment. Together with the deejays, the constant flow of fresh dub versions provided to sound-system shows a sort of spontaneity that more than made up for the absence of live bands. Meanwhile, the dub records enjoyed their own market appeal, sometimes even outselling the records on which they were based.

Dub, as a remastering genre, should not be confused with dub plates (discussed later), rub-a-dub-dancing, or dub poetry. The socially conscious lyrics of dub poetry existed in both written and aural form—in the latter case, performed with reggae beats. Among its major practitioners were Oku Onuora, Mutabaruka, Michael Smith, Jean Binta Breeze, and the London-based Jamaican poet Linton Kwesi Johnson.

Meanwhile, as the 1970s progressed, events conspired to crush the PNP’s heady aspirations to chop down the tree of imperialist domination with its small axe. The formation of OPEC and the quintupling of oil prices in 1973, while constituting a bonanza for nearby, oil-endowed Trinidad, hit the Jamaican economy like a steamroller, and the prospect of getting more money from bauxite sales turned out to be illusory. Washington, D.C., which resented Manley’s playing footsie with Cuba, discouraged American tourism and started funneling weapons via the CIA to Manley’s rival, Edward Seaga (“CIAga,” according to graffiti), and his ghetto gangs of JLP “shottas.” As

Manley found himself unable to fund his social welfare projects, rivalry between the two parties escalated into bloody gang warfare, culminating in the deaths of more than seven hundred people in the 1980 elections.

In that election, frustration with the PNP's failures led to victory for the business-friendly Seaga—just as the elections of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher marked decisive right turns in the United States and the United Kingdom. The mood of the Jamaican public seemed to change overnight. No longer at the forefront was the vision—whether socialist or Rasta—of overthrowing imperialism, casting down Babylon, or returning to Africa. For its part, roots reggae, linked to this declining spirit of messianic optimism, suffered further setbacks. Lee Perry burned down his studio in 1979 and drifted off into occultation; Marley died in 1981, and Peter Tosh was murdered by robbers in 1987. Youth interest had already shifted decisively from roots reggae to the artful chantings of the deejays, which in the mid-1980s came to be called “dancehall.” In a situation where denouncing the government could be mortally dangerous, the deejays retreated to the politically safe topics of sex and boasting.

The Dancehall Era

In considering the dramatic contrasts in style and aesthetics between 1970s roots reggae and the dancehall of the next decade, it is tempting to regard Jamaican music as having completely reinvented itself in the early 1980s. Such a view, however, would be inaccurate. For one thing, roots reggae did not fizzle out entirely. Indeed, it took on a new life overseas, in the form of British-based bands like Aswad and Steel Pulse, and in the music of African bandleaders like Alpha Blondy of Ivory Coast and Lucky Dube of South Africa. Further, Jamaicans like Beres Hammond, Barrington Levy, Gregory Isaacs, and Frankie Paul perpetuated the style, and the 1970s threnodies of Marley and others continued to enjoy popularity as “classics.”

Moreover, as we've seen, dancehall did not evolve overnight but can be seen as the logical evolution of the deejay/sound-system music that had dominated the island's dance-music scene throughout the 1970s. Perhaps the main change was that what was once, like early rap, a primarily live art form now came to be widely marketed on records, especially in the early 1980s by a new crop of deejays. The most prominent of these was Yellowman, an albino orphan who deserves credit for successfully promoting himself as a “Bedroom Bazooka” sex idol (“the girls dem a mad over me”). By the end of the decade, with the emergence of deejays like Ninjaman, Super Cat, Shabba Ranks, Buju Banton, Spragga Benz, and others, the modern idiom of dancehall was in full flower.

The stylistic differences between roots reggae and dancehall are so pronounced that it seems odd that they both are referred to as “reggae.” The trademark “skank” rhythm of classic reggae persisted in many 1980s dancehall songs, but by the end of the decade that beat was just one possible rhythm among many, and most rhythms were faster and more intense. Some say the jittery, aggressive new style reflected the cocaine with which Seaga’s gangs had flooded the ghetto. It also reflected the ongoing collapse of the Jamaican economy, as Seaga’s right-wing policies failed and the Reagan administration opted not to reward him for his U.S.-friendly tilt. The Ur-format of guitar, bass, organ, and drums also became obsolete, especially after the vogue of the 1985 hit “Under Me Sleng Teng,” with its purely synthesized accompaniment (according to some usages, the trademark of “ragga”). Even the language of the two genres differed, with the biblically flavored English of roots reggae contrasting with dancehall’s thick patwa. Moreover, much roots reggae generally used conventional “song” format, with original compositions with flowing melodies, changing chord progressions, and verses and refrains. Dancehall, by contrast, typically features the deejay intoning verses in what is often a short, repetitive tune (“chune”) superimposed over a “riddim” (rhythmic accompaniment), which generally consists of a repeated, digitally generated ostinato. Unlike in rap, the verses are usually sung in a simple, repeated melody rather than spoken, but deejays are in some respects classed differently from roots-reggae-style “singers,” and if a deejay like Shabba Ranks intones quite out of tune with the tonality of the riddim, no one seems to mind.

The riddims themselves have acquired a special importance and have a unique role in the music system. Rather than being originally composed for each song, most riddims are recycled—like many other things in low-income Jamaica. The reuse of riddims, indeed, had begun in the 1960s, as producers found they could remix old materials from their vaults to provide backing for new releases, thus reducing their dependence on session musicians and arrangers. Nowadays, a dozen or so riddims may be in vogue at any given time. Many of them used to derive from the B sides of Coxsone Dodd’s Studio One roots-reggae classic songs, such as “Nanny Goat,” but by the latter 1980s, most were original creations of producers. The riddim could be named after the original song that popularized it (hence the “Sleng Teng” riddim), or more often it is given a name by its producer (such as “Diwali,” “Washroom,” “Sewage Breath,” or “Mad Ants”). In case this is confusing: the title “Sleng Teng,” for example, denotes the 1985 song and also the riddim used in that song and, subsequently, in many other songs; “Diwali,” by con-

trast, is the name not of a song but of a riddim (which is used in various songs, such as Sean Paul's "Get Busy"). Typically, a producer (such as Lenky Marsden), having created a new riddim (or an imitative "re-lick" of an existing one) contracts deejays to "voice" over it and handles the marketing of the resulting recording himself. A deejay can voice (both live and on record) the same verses over different riddims, and conversely, he could record and sing different voicings over the same riddim. In a dance club, the selector typically plays a medley of songs using the same riddim—a technique called "juggling." (The use of a digitally generated ostinato invites comparison with hip-hop, but in rap there is no custom of recycling beats or riddims in innumerable different songs. More directly derivative of the riddim method is the "track-and-hook" approach to American pop production, in which the same backing track will be used for songs such as Beyoncé's "Halo" and Kelly Clarkson's "Already Gone.")

Some elders from the roots-reggae era criticize the "riddim method," as does one Internet commentator: "Ppl who hav never had any experience playin instruments just experiment w Fruity Loops [software] til dey get a pattern, den sample a chune from somewhere and call it a riddim." While others complain that the reliance on preexisting riddims is uncreative, it should be noted that many deejays are very prolific, often recording thirty or forty songs a year. Accordingly, each week as many as two hundred singles are released on the Jamaican market. The reliance on preexisting riddims is also democratic in the sense that both the established star and the newbie are competing, as it were, on the same turf; no one can hide behind the producer's talent. Digital recording also democratizes the scene, as there is no need to spend big bucks to hire musicians and rent fancy recording studios. A talented producer can generate his riddims at home on his computer, using software like Ableton, and the deejay can record his voicing wherever someone has a laptop and a decent microphone. Hence, Jah Cure was able to release two new albums while serving time in prison for rape. In some cases, a deejay will record his vocal part a capella, without even hearing the riddim to which the producer will set his "chune."

In Jamaica, most recordings, as produced in small but well-equipped home studios, have consisted of seven-inch vinyl singles, but especially due to local piracy artists certainly aspire to get material on CDs put out by foreign labels, such as VP Records (New York) or Jet Star. But in the era of free downloading, only the top few artists can make much money selling recordings, although Internet sales, ringtone deals, and royalties from streaming sites like Pandora can garner some pocket money for the bigger deejays. But

vocalists continue to flood the market with records, if only as promotion for concerts and tours—especially tours a’ foreign, which is where the money is to be made.

While aficionados appreciate the talent and importance of behind-the-scenes producers, and the sound systems are the key institutions in dances and clashes, there is no doubt that in the realm of recorded music, as well as at special concerts, the focus is on the deejay or artist. The best command catchy tunes, clever, pithy verses, strong voices, and an electrifying performance style. Their voices have variously included the booming baritone of Shabba Ranks, the dour monotone of Cutty Ranks, the smooth and silky tone of Sean Paul, the gruff, almost spooky howl of Elephant Man, and the gravelly, orchestrally rich rasp of Buju Banton, Sizzla, and Capleton. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the hottest stars were Beenie Man, the more gangster-oriented Bounty Killer, and Buju Banton. Banton was perhaps the most powerful vocalist of all and seemed to be developing a particularly transcendent, empathic, Rasta-tinged lyricism when he was busted in the United States on a drug charge in 2009 and imprisoned.

Tellin’ It like It Is, from “Consciousness” to “Slackness”

If dancehall differs dramatically from roots reggae in style, it also articulates a broad range of values, some of which contrast markedly with those of classic reggae. Revivalist Rasta ideals of casting down Babylon and returning to Africa have persisted in the “conscious” dancehall of Capleton, Sizzla, Luciano, and others, but most other aspects of dancehall culture seem antithetical to those of the 1970s generation. While Marley celebrated spiritual values over materialism, modern deejays sport gold chains and drive luxury cars. And in contrast to Rasta’s pieties and invocations of Africa, most dancehall foregrounds the perversities of street-level reality: the violence, the struggle for respect, and the pleasures of dancing and, last but not least, of sex.

The diverse values of dancehall culture, like those of classic reggae, are evident in the public personas of the stars, the music videos, the dress and behavior of fans, and perhaps most overtly, the song lyrics. To be sure, listeners may often ignore the lyrics, especially on the dance floor, and as in rap, the main emphasis even of the verses may involve less their semantic message than their driving delivery and the artful, rhythmically compelling play of rhymes, alliterations, and other devices. Hence, one might enjoy listening and dancing to Sizzla sing what sounds like “*Pum, papapum pum, pum pa-*

papum pum” without knowing or caring that he is singing, “Pump up her pum-pum”; the flow and drive are more important than the literal meaning, which here is just the default topic of sex. But there is no doubt that lyrics are an important dimension of dancehall, just as they are in rap, constituting both a uniquely expressive art form and an articulation of a worldview. Given the thousands of songs released each year, it is not surprising that many of them reflect a delightful creativity, exploiting the prodigious expressivity of Jamaican patwa. They also cover a broad range of topics, in striking contrast to genres like bachata and post-1970s salsa, which are exclusively about romance and seldom seem to transcend the “I can’t live without you” clichés. Many might be classified simply as “topical” in their documentation of the vicissitudes of Jamaican daily life, from Super Cat’s “Boops,” about how ghetto girls need sugar daddies, to Lloyd Lovindeer’s 1988 “Hell of a Blow-Job,” regarding, of course, Hurricane Gilbert.

Gal Tunes and Slackness: Women’s Liberation or Degradation?

Like popular music everywhere, dancehall has its share of tunes about male-female relationships, although sentimental love songs are far outnumbered by those that portray “slackness” (lewdness, ribaldry), as opposed to “consciousness” or “culture.” Slackness, far from being new, could be found in traditional mento, and it certainly persisted in classic roots reggae—from Marley songs like “Bend Down Low” and “Lick Samba” to Clancy Eccles’s “Open Up!” (You pussy sweet, gyal!). In the roots-reggae period, slackness was to some extent overshadowed by more spiritual songs. But in the early 1980s, when Yellowman would ask his audience what they wanted, consciousness or slackness, the crowd’s gleefully shouted answer would be unanimous and for many yards represented an explicit rejection of the etiquette of the uptown bourgeoisie, as well as of the dead-end fantasies of the Rastas. Hence, the paeans to pumpum, the sexual braggadocio, and the anatomical details of “Titty Jump.” As one Jamaican student pithily wrote in a term paper, “Dancehall artists sing about everything from politics to punanny. Mostly punanny.” The very name “dancehall” ultimately derives from its slackness, which has kept much of it banned from the radio and hence relegated to the dance venues. Indeed, in 2009 even “beeped” songs (i.e., with the obscenities beeped out) were banned from Jamaican radio, since they left so little to the listener’s imagination; many deejays now release two entirely different versions of a song in order to have one that can get airplay. But ultimately more important than the degree

of slackness in dancehall may be the *kind* of slackness and the *ways* that men and women are portrayed—a topic that needs further comment here.

A foreign critic looking for instances of what at least looks and sounds like sexist objectification in dancehall culture could write volumes. Videos typically portray the male stud surrounded by scantily clad models; CD compilation covers look like porno; and lyrics routinely objectify women as punnannies rather than personalities. The portrayal of sex is often violent and aggressive. “Me ram it and a jam it till the gal start to vomit,” sings one deejay, while Buju chants, “Gal me serious, haf to get ya tonight, haf to get your body even by gunpoint.” Other songs have titles like “Bedroom Bully,” “Kill the Bitch,” “Bus Juice in Har Head,” and “Kill Her wid de Rammer,” and deejays like Beenie Man (in “Yaw Yaw”) boast about how many women they impregnate. In songs like Popcaan’s “Mi a di Man,” the sexism could not be more explicit:

Yu cyan gimmi no chat because a mi a di man
 Cyan throw me outa no apartment complex
 Some man a mek [let] gyal a tun dem inna fool
 My teacher no teach me dat inna skool
 Cyan mek mi eye full a water like pool
 Di Bible say a man fi rule.

General Pecos voices the same sentiment:

Some fall inna di trap an tun house-husband
 mi radda service ooman like a gas station.

Given such an ideal among men, it’s not surprising that some 80 percent of Jamaican children are born to single mothers.

Perhaps more benign is the image of having a “trailerload a’ girls,” which, while indeed a reality for a few stars, could be seen as catering to the most adolescent male fantasies. Several songs by male deejays, perpetuating a rich Afro-American art of witty insults (as in the “dozens”), mock women for their perceived imperfections, as when Elephant Man sings:

Tanya Stephens, Lady G, Lady Saw wi love dem,
 Saw knee knock, G have a belly problem,
 Tanya Stephens foot big like Captain Bakery bread dem.

The ambivalence in such verses can also reflect how dancehall culture is contradictory and in many ways celebratory in its portrayals of women. Rasta-

fari, as articulated by reggae singers, kept women in the background and had a certain streak of misogyny, with Peter Tosh calling women “instruments of the devil” and Marley saying, “Woman is a coward, man strong.” But dancehall, for all its frequent vulgarity, foregrounds women, and especially their sexuality, in a way seldom encountered in classic reggae. Hence, Beenie Man’s “Slam” praises the sexual prowess of ghetto gals, and songs like his “Girls Dem Sugar” and Buju’s “Gal Ya Body Good” eulogize women with a hefty “Coca-Cola bottle shape.” Songs like “Tight Pum Pum” may objectify women, but they also praise them—or, at least, parts of them—and women are well aware that their sexuality and desirability can enable them to exert a sort of power over men. Women at dances who strut their stuff in batty-riders (tight shorts) and “bare-as-you-dare” outfits revel in the desire they can stimulate, as articulated in songs like Red Rat’s “Tight Up Skirt”:

Hey you girl inna tight up skirt, ya mek me head swell til me blood
vessel burst
Hey you girl inna de tight up shorts, ya speed up ten more beats to me
heart
Hey you girl inna de tight up blouse, every time you pass me you
get me aroused.

As Carolyn Cooper points out in her book *Sound Clash*, the lyrics of several songs by Shabba Ranks, for all their slackness, encourage men to respect their women and urge women to demand good treatment from their men. The specific favors in question can be more pragmatic than sentimental, as when he enjoins women, in inflationary times, “Aren’t you gonna raise the price of your pussy, too?” Similarly, in “Flesh Axe” he tells men:

Every woman need mega cash fi buy pretty shoes an pretty frock
Woman love model an dem love fi look hot
She can’t go pon di road and look like job lot
Every woman a go call her riff-raff look like a old car mash up an
crash.¹⁵

Only a few female artists have come around to challenge the fraternity of male deejays, and their songs present different sorts of women’s perspectives. The message of Ce’cile’s “Respect Yuh Wife” is as straightforward as its title suggests, and equally assertive is Tanya Stephens, who, mocking her ex’s “toothpick,” tells him, “Well you used to work me once but you can’t

touch me no more.” Often the images are more controversial, as in the case of Lady Saw, who until her retirement embodied some of the contradictions of dancehall as a whole. Saw was a powerful and talented singer who could “ride the riddim” as well as the best male deejays. She sang in different styles about a variety of topics but was best known for songs like “Stab out the Meat,” in which she described her lovemaking in a “TMI” level of detail. In her stage shows she was liable to grab the nearest man, throw him to the floor, and simulate sex with him. From one perspective, such antics constituted a soft-core porn show, aimed at an audience of hooting and hollering men. From another view, though, she presented the image of an empowered woman, in full control of her sensuality, demanding that her man be strong and “solid as rock,” and clarifying that while she is not a dominatrix, “mi star mi own show an run mi program.” Far from being a passive boy toy, she sang:

When me waan me man me just demand me ride
take out me whip and like a jockey me a glide.

While constituting a certain sort of female role model, she was not above portraying her empowerment as coming at the expense of other women, as in “I’ve Got Your Man.”

With Lady Saw’s effective retirement, the Queen of Slackness crown passed to Spice (Grace Hamilton), who has perpetuated some of Saw’s themes in her own way. In her songs there is plenty of porn and pleasing her man, but like Saw, she is often on top, literally, as when she tells her man:

Yes a so mi like it, bring yo buddy [central forelimb],
come yuh mek mi ride it / Ride it like a bike it.

Like a Jamaican Nicki Minaj, she highlights her posterior, and that of other women (of different races and physiques), in some of her hit videos (such as “Back Bend”) but manages nevertheless to convey a sense of female exuberance and solidarity, with men being either irrelevant or absent. Hence, many female YouTube viewers voice their enthusiasm:

Thin & fat, black & white . . . I love that Spice is honoring all types of beauty! they used to say black women and their body’s were nasty, shameful and ugly. now black lady’s are coming back out and shaking everything they were born with and proud of their culture and heritages.

Nevertheless, exhibitionist twerking and wining may not be every woman's idea of portraying self-respect, and whether Spice and Saw are liberating or degrading to women may depend on one's point of view.

The general status of women in Jamaican society suggests another perspective on dancehall. Many Jamaican women remain economically dependent on men, but they are proverbially strong rather than submissive. Moreover, there is a strong tradition of women's independence (bred in part by generations of absent fathers). Many women have been owners of small farms since the 1800s, and many operate market stalls. More significantly, for several decades women have constituted about two-thirds of college students and graduates and have come to rival men's dominance in urban white-collar professions. From one perspective, the up-front sexual politics of dancehall represents a sort of grassroots negotiation of positions in a changing society.

Voices of the Ghetto, from "Reality" to Shotta Songs

While much of roots reggae sang of a fairy-tale Africa where faith in Jah would solve all problems, most dancehall songs are firmly grounded in the material world of daily life, whether the pleasures of punanny or the vicissitudes of the urban ghetto. Buju Banton's "Deportee: Things Change" gives some idea of the realism typical of dancehall lyrics. This song portrays the fate of a young man who makes it "a' foreign," living the good life with "Benz and Lexus" and girls massaging his shoulder and pouring his coffee. But he has ignored his family and friends at home, only to be deported as a criminal, and arrives broke and friendless:

Yuh neva used to spen' no money come a yard
 Yuh wretch you, yuh spen' di whole a it abroad
 Squander yuh money now yuh livin' like dog
 Boy get deport come dung [down] inna one pants . . .
 Mama dung inna di hole, an' 'im don't buy her a lamp
 Not a line, not a letter, nor a fifty cent stamp.

Unlike some roots-reggae songs that ethereally praise a mythical Africa or bewail Babylon, "Deportee" portrays, with specific, concrete imagery, the ups and downs and moral failures of a real-life individual who seeks success in Brooklyn or Notting Hill rather than Ethiopia.

About a quarter of Jamaicans live in squalid slums such as Kingston's Trenchtown and Dungle. There may be no communities in the Caribbean Basin so dismal as these, with their endemic poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, drug addiction, violent crime, corrupt and thuggish police, and despotic rule by drug dons. Many songs have portrayed the challenges of "yard" life with empathy and eloquence and can be seen as perpetuating, albeit with more detail, the orientation of ska and roots reggae toward the shantytown "sufferers," as in Bounty Killer's verses:

Born as a sufferah, grew up as a sufferah
 Struggle as a sufferah, make it as a sufferah
 Fight as a sufferah, survive as a sufferah
 Yutes inna di ghetto, well di most a dem a sufferah.

In songs like "Untold Stories," Buju Banton seemed to be taking up the mantle of Bob Marley in his poignant depiction of the travails of the underclass:

What is to stop the youths from getting out of control?
 Filled up with education yet don't own a payroll
 The clothes on my back has countless eyeholes.

Ever since the CIA supplied its JLP gangs with guns in the 1970s, violence has plagued the ghettos. Random street crime, coupled with ongoing turf warfare between neighborhood "corner crews," has made Jamaica one of the most violent societies on earth, averaging around three murders a day. If rude boy songs were overshadowed in the 1970s by paeans to Rasta spirituality, in the 1980s rude boy culture came back to the music with a vengeance, exerting a fascination that, as with gangster rap, extended well beyond the ghetto itself. Many songs simply "tell it like it is," portraying, in a noncommittal stance, the need to be tough in order to survive:

I'm from a place where dog eat dog
 Mi know 'bout living weh hard
 From me born me see people ah starve
 Vendor get beat by sarge . . .
 That's why me never drop me guard
 Nah be a victim of di sarge.
 (Popcaan, "Gangster City")

However, far more numerous are the songs that explicitly glorify violence for its own sake, appealing to some primordial Neanderthal or schoolyard bully sentiment that may be latent in many young men, and that is encouraged by the milieu of violence, fear, and instability in which slum children grow up, and by the links between many singers and the local dons, who are lionized in songs and by mike men at dances. Given dancehall's penchant for realistic imagery, many songs present an almost cartoonish orgy of flying marrow and splattering brains, sometimes with a sort of grotesque humor:

Dem nuh got no guns like mine, no KG-Nine
 A coppershot a buss dem big head and bruck spine
 Me gun will tear yuh like a tablecloth . . .
 People find yuh body piece piece and think a chicken parts.
 (Vybz Kartel, "Guns like Mine")

Mek mi start it first hole a shot inna yuh head
 Yuh neck pop like thread
 Steam ah come out ya face like hot butter bread.
 (Vybz Kartel, "Rifle Shot")

Lef u jaw red like you gyal kissing on you cheek . . .
 You vomit up green like chicken patty meat.
 (Aidonia, "Laugh and Shot Dem")

De shotgun vomit, yuh head shot slam it.
 Inna boy head shot truck in, brain truck out.
 Rifle shot butt out tongue and teeth bruk out . . .
 Off ah boy face bone di skin strip off
 Head top liff off, ah full clip mi half.
 (Vybz Kartel and Aidonia, "Deadly Alliance")

Bwoy and chop! chop him up until yuh see di tripe.
 (Demarco, "Sort Dem Out")

Reveling in the "shotta" (shooter) image, the deejays clarify that they kill for nothing more than prestige or nihilistic pleasure.

At the age of two me kill five policeman . . .
 when me rob di bank an kill a woman, . . .

a mi rob di church an kill di pastor man,
 a don't care a damn, mi a heartical badman.
 (Ninjaman, "My Weapon")

Mi bust mi gun and mi proud, aim fi yuh head not di crowd
 We run di corner, run di lane, we run di block an di road.
 (Demarco, "Sort Dem Out")

Well di 45 in concert dem soil gunman shirt it jus can't work
 bwoy now ya dead an inna bush you a smell
 Hey ya run inna me gun and me sen ya to hell.
 (Bounty Killer, "Gun Down")

The glorification of guns and violence may be primarily rhetorical, especially insofar as it expresses the theatrical rivalry between deejays. As Shabba sings, "When me talk about gun it is a lyrical gun, a lyrical gun dat people have fun."¹⁶ Even many young women enjoy the hard-edged, raw nature of the gangsta talk. One college student and amateur dancer told me, "Me and my crew only dance to shotta songs." Another fan articulated his rationale on an Internet forum:

As dancehall fans we like going gangsta . . . which do not mean we are violent ppl . . . it just a vibe. a gangsta song can give you a feeling no other type of song can . . . not saying its a better feeling but it is cloud9 in its own right. as a child growing up, gangsta tunes were my "quick fix" and i av built up a liking for a few that i think has reached the heights in "gunness" . . . in terms of lyrical content, graphic imagery, riddim and melody.¹⁷

Unfortunately, the violence and criminality in dancehall culture represent much more than aesthetic metaphor. In addition to Buju Banton, several deejays have racked up jail time (including Ninjaman and Vybz Kartel, for murder, Mavado, for assault, Busy Signal, for theft, and Jah Cure, for rape and robbery). Meanwhile, the list of prominent artists murdered, whether in robberies or for unknown reasons, includes Peter Tosh, Tenor Saw, Mickey Simpson, King Tubby, Henry "Junjo" Lawes, Prince Far-I, Carlton Barrett, Hugh Mundell, Panhead, Dirtsman, Junior Braithwaite, and Bogle. Some of the murdered deejays may have done their own share of gunman songs, but other victims, like dub producer Tubby and choreographer Bogle (Gerald Levy), were simply devoted creative artists. One need only watch YouTube

posts of Bogle to appreciate how exuberant, original, and joyous his dancing was, and by the same token, how senseless and tragic was his murder in 2005—probably by some petty shotta who had verses like “me gun buss boom!” running through his head.

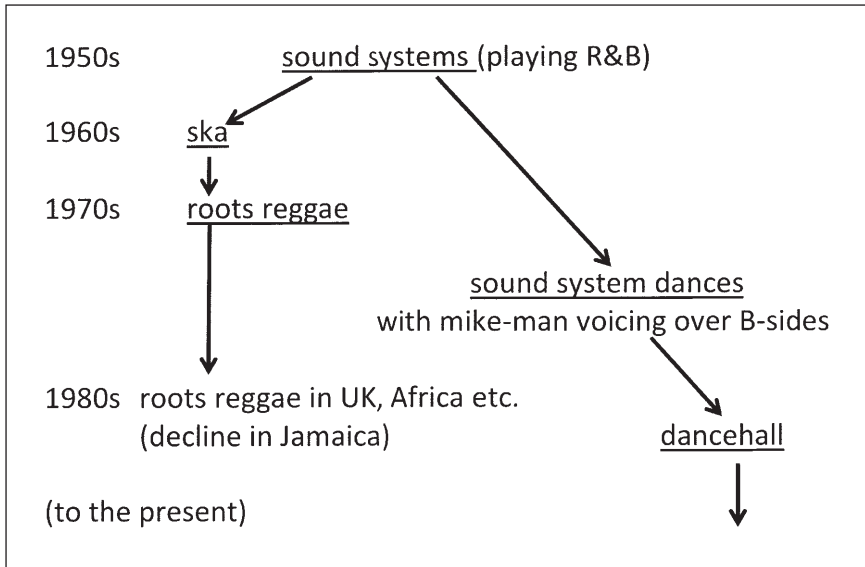
Dancehall’s celebration of violence, of course, only intensifies upper-class fear of and contempt for ghetto culture. It also stigmatizes the majority of Jamaicans who are hardworking, law-abiding citizens. Accordingly, many songs—including by the same deejays who peddle shotta songs—call for unity, peace, and an end to street violence. Buju Banton, grieving the loss of Panhead and Simpson, sang in “Murderer”:

Murderer! You insides must be hollow
How does it feel to take the life of another?

Others, like Shaggy, simply stay clear of ghetto imagery altogether. Shotta songs are banned from Jamaican radio (even in their bleeped versions), and newspaper editorials and even some dancehall fans denounce the violence in their own way, as in this Internet forum post:

Mi nah listen nuh badman song nuhmore . . . all a dat get delete . . . if people love hear gun man songs why complain when a 5 yr old child head get shot off? . . . and unu wonda why the small islands dem barring so many of our artists . . . dem song need fi stop.¹⁸

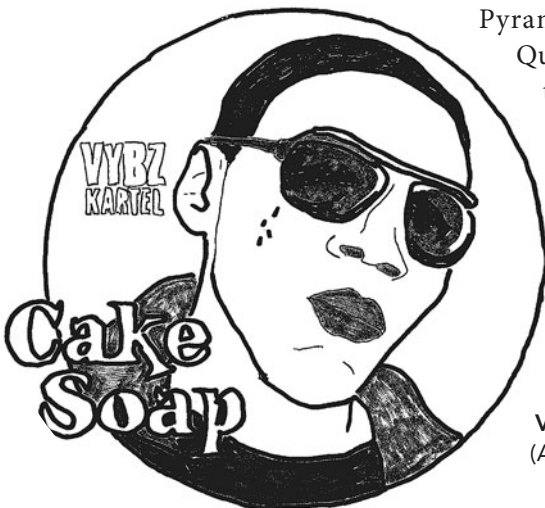
The contradictions of dancehall ethics and aesthetics are especially clear in the figure of Vybz Kartel (Adidja Palmer), who more than anyone else dominated the scene from the early 2000s until his imprisonment. Kartel was prolific and his output, diverse; like some other deejays, he has his share of tender love odes, “tight punanny” songs, and avuncular warnings to the yute dem to stay out of trouble, but these songs are outnumbered by shotta songs like “Real Badman.” While some Jamaicans are proud to be black, Vybz is among those who bleach their skin, with the result that, depending on one’s perspective, he looks either fashionable or like some bobo duppy. The energetic and enterprising Vybz also sponsored various consumer products, including Dagging Condoms and a line of cake soap. Not content to merely talk the gangster talk, he also chose to walk the walk and became a mid-level drug don. His spree ended in 2014 when he was sentenced to life in prison for murder—specifically, the beheading of an errant underling named Lizard. Knowing this bio and reading the lyrics to songs like “12 Gauge,” one might assume that he is just another sociopathic ghetto rhymester, but



Jamaican musical flows—the distinct evolutions of roots reggae and dancehall.

there is a problem with that: Vybz is also an astoundingly compelling and powerful singer. He could sing the alphabet and make it sound expressive, and even a nun might be unable to resist singing along with a chune like “Ramping Shop.”

In recent years, a cohort of vocalists have offered more consistently and unambiguously positive messages, whether in dancehall or classic reggae style. Chronixx, Kabaka Pyramid, Protoje, Dre Island, and Queen Ifrika have all shown that there are alternatives to singing about tight pussy and flying brain matter. However, despite their noble intentions, they don’t seem to have the performative flair or the popularity of stars like Sizzla and Vybz.



Vybz Kartel Cake Soap ad.
(Adapted by Peter Manuel.)

Clashes—Fi Fun and Fi Real

Insofar as some dancehall violence is purely rhetorical, it is much involved with the clashes that constitute a lively part of the scene. These rivalries date from the early sound-system days and the ska-era toasts between Prince Buster and Derrick Morgan, but they have taken on new prominence as competing deejays insult each other in recordings and especially live shows. Several of the famous feuds are purely for entertainment, while others involve genuine animosities that break out into fisticuffs onstage, as happened with Bounty Killer and Beenie Man, and with Ninjaman and Vybz Kartel. Ninjaman is celebrated for reducing Shabba Ranks to tears at the Sting festival in 1990 with his clever freestyle insults. Sometimes, in the weeks leading up to a concert, a deejay will stir up audience attention by publicly insulting another vocalist who is scheduled to perform on the same night. The event will then feature a verbal duel of wits (with the standard insult being that the other party is “batty”—i.e., gay).

The most infamous clash until Vybz’s imprisonment was that between his posse of protégées and fans, known as “Gaza,” and those of his arch-rival Mavado (David Brooks), called “Gully,” after the name of his former neighborhood. While the two deejays battled it out in song, the Gaza-vs.-Gully war also provoked genuine violence between the clans, and no one in a neighborhood dedicated to one tribe would dare be heard playing a chune by the other faction.

At their best, the clashes add another level of entertainment to the scene. As one fan wrote online, “i like di war, di music boring widout it. mi just joke it out and fuljoy the music and laugh when dem groupie get worked up ova fuckry.” But dem groupies certainly do get worked up, with the fans of Bounty Killer and Beenie Man still going at it after twenty years, as in this chat forum excerpt:

MRRIDDIM: Killa only get show ah nursery home these days. Money dry up, only gal wha want killa inna dem 50’s, Yuh aguh soon see killa ah beg change ah road fi money. Just trow some quarters ina him long mout when you walk past. Cheap vodka him a drink.

SHOTTABENZ: Yute yu gone too far now. U a hater now. Mi will kill fi Killa suh doan mek mi buck yu a road. If yu diss Bounty mi tek dat personal. Bounty come in wid a suitcase a money from him european tour, had to bring it ina barrel.

MRRIDDIM: Eediat. Pon which part him fanpage you does live? Unu need fi take unu head outa Bounty’s rear.

OK, let's let these two zealots continue while we go offline to look at yet another dancehall controversy.

Love Music—or Hate Music?

In fall of 1992, Buju Banton's song "Boom Bye Bye" was enjoying steady airplay in New York, and its verses, unlike those of many dancehall songs, were sung slowly and clearly. When a "translation" was circulated, explaining that "batty boy" meant "gay," many listeners could easily follow the vicious message:

Two men necking and a lay down inna bed . . .
 send for the 'matic and the Uzi instead
 shoot the batty boy come let we shoot dem . . .
 Boom bye bye in a batty boy head.

Complaints were made, the media took notice, and a minor uproar ensued. The *New York Post's* headline screamed "Hate Music," and protests were staged against the stations that played the song. When Shabba Ranks defended Buju and offered the humble opinion that gays should be crucified, his scheduled appearance on the *Tonight Show* was canceled, and he was dropped from a high-profile tour with Bobby Brown. With the cancellation of a prominent New York concert, Buju's own international career had also hit a speed bump. And when he stated that he didn't actually advocate anti-gay violence, he was derided by Jamaican deejays and journalists for kowtowing to the "special interest" group of panty-clad Yankee "chi-chi men," and he subsequently revoked his apology.

In retrospect, what seems remarkable is not Buju's song but the fact that it was singled out among so many hundreds of other gay-bashing dancehall songs that are still played on U.S. radio (and Pandora) and that often have titles like Capleton's "Burn Out the Chi Chi." Despite—or perhaps because of—the increasing public space being achieved by gays in Jamaica, homophobia is one of the most common and popular themes of dancehall. Mike men routinely shout, "Everyone who hates batty boys put ya hand up in de air!" Most of the top deejays have reiterated such sentiments in several songs, as in the following:

BEENIE MAN:
 A from me burn chi-chi man and we go burn sodomite
 And everybody bawl out say "that's right" . . .
 Cause when we burn chi-chi man nuttin' nuh wrong
 ("That's Right")

Batty man fi dead, shoot up dem bloodclaat
 (“Batty Man fi Dead”)

I’m dreaming of a new Jamaica, come an’ execute all the gays!
 (“Damn”)

Hang chi-chi gal wid a long piece of rope
 (“Han Up Deh”)

SIZZLA (when not singing “Love amongst My Brethren”):
 Nuff girl out dere. . . . So how come some bwoy turn out batty man?
 Me say, cock the gun and kill out every one
 (“Nuff Girl Out There”)

Shoot batty bwoy, my big gun boom
 (“Pump Up”)

ELEPHANT MAN:
 Battyman fi dead! Gimme the tech-nine, shoot dem like bird!
 (“A Nuh fi We Fault”)

BOUNTY KILLER:
 Burn a fire ’pon a puff and mister fagotty
 poop man fi drown an’ dat a yard man philosophy
 (“Another Level”)

As with gunman songs, reality often parallels the rhetorical violence. Between 1997 and 2004 alone, more than thirty gay people in Jamaica—including the country’s leading gay-rights activist—were murdered, and many more were savagely beaten. A few were doused with acid and set afire by mobs shouting, “Fiya burn!” In summer 2004, Buju Banton himself was facing arrest for taking part in a group assault on six Jamaican gay men. Persecuted by the state, the church, the deejays, and the righteous rudies, several gays have been granted asylum in Europe and Canada.

Explaining the obsessive homophobia of the deejays and many other Jamaicans may be a task for sociologists and psychologists, although we can well imagine what Sigmund Freud would say about it. Many onlookers have wondered how people historically victimized by bigotry and intolerance can show the same traits themselves. From one perspective, in a post-Cold War, globalized economy, where the traditional neocolonial enemies have

evaporated, gay-bashing gives Jamaican deejays a way to portray themselves as waging a new sort of righteous moral crusade—in this case, against the decadent sodomites of Babylon and their deluded defenders. Both doggerel about punanny and gay-bashing macho gun talk can thus be seen as honorable and virtuous.

For their part, the deejays, deeply religious as they say they are, generally cite the biblical injunction against homosexuality (although they don't seem to cite the command that anyone who is rude to his parents or works on Sunday should be killed, or the Levitical instructions about selling one's daughter into slavery). They have claimed that Babylon is trying to censor them ("the voice of a poor ghetto yute") and that, after all, "It's just words." But such specious arguments have cut little ice among foreigners who recognize BS when they see it. And it's a' foreign that the money is to be made.

By the early 2000s, deejays like Buju Banton, Bounty Killer, Beenie Man, Sizzla, Vybz Kartel, and Capleton were finding their European and North American concerts canceled and their visas denied because of protests. Singers could also face legal hate-speech charges in Britain and Canada. They thus found themselves obliged to choose between catering either to the rudies in the yard or to the foreign activists. Facing such alternatives, in the years around 2005 most of these deejays renounced singing homophobic songs, though a few, like Sizzla, immediately went back on their word ("Me no take back me chat!"). Meanwhile, back in Jamaica, violent persecution of gays has continued and, some say, even intensified in the form of backlash against foreign and local calls to reconsider sodomy laws inherited from the Victorian-era British.

Dancing, Sound-System Dances, and Sound Clashes

With all this brouhaha about controversies, clashes, and killings, it's important to keep in mind that these are not at all the most important things to dancehall fans. Rather, for them dancehall is about having fun and expressing oneself, especially through dancing (hence the name). And like reggae music, Jamaican popular dancing is unique among Caribbean arts in its style, forms, and history. The main styles of Latin dancing—especially salsa, bachata, and merengue—could be said to derive their basic "closed couple" format from Euro-American ballroom dancing and the contradance. But such Euro styles had little presence in colonial Jamaica, and neo-African traditions like Kumina and Kromanti also had little to offer in terms of choreography. Further, if Jamaican popular music started off as an imitation of

Afro-American R&B, dance styles didn't travel so easily in the pre-YouTube era, so Jamaicans had to invent their own dances more or less from scratch. And invent they did, especially from the early 1980s when dance-oriented, cocaine-fueled dancehall replaced sluggish, marijuana-heavy roots reggae.

Modern dancing may take various forms. Many people may caper around freestyle. A bodacious woman (who need not be slim) may gather a crowd of hooting onlookers by twerking and wining provocatively. Alternately, a gentleman and a lady (who need not know each other) may essentially have sex with their clothes on, grinding, dry-humping, "dubbing" doggy-style, and athletically "dagging" (especially toward the end of a night, as encouraged by songs like Aidonia's "Jackhammer" or Major Lazer's "Pon di Floor"). Meanwhile, groups of friends may form informal crews or teams (usually all-male or all-female) and work up routines to perform on the dance floor or even in stage shows. At other times, the sound system's selector or mike man may lead dancers in whimsical mimetic routines, shouting, for example, "light de stove . . . now stir de rice . . . now run wid de pot." Far from being sexual or aggressive, these routines—even if performed by cohorts of fierce-looking rudies—can have an almost childlike spirit of fun and silliness. Similarly, some songs (such as Demarco's "Puppy Tail") give their own choreographic instructions.

Then there are what could be called the named dances, whose vogue seems to have started in the 1980s. These mostly consist of one or more distinctive rhythmic moves, typically performed with friends of the same sex rather than as couple dances. Some of the most popular dances are inventions of professional choreographers, such as the late Bogle, or John Hype, who would work in tandem with particular sound systems or deejays. Others have emerged "from the yard," as it were, and are picked up by choreographers and dance teams, who may tour and perform at sound-system dances. Some dances are associated with particular songs (and their videos), such as Elephant Man's "Pon de River" and "Willie Bounce." Some, like Thunder Clap, are linked to particular riddims. All the dances have names, such as Pedal an' Wheel, Dutty Wine, Gully Creeper, and Jerry Springer. Many are mimetic, such as Signal de Plane (light up your cell phone, wave it around), Internet (move your fingers as if typing), Butterfly (flap your knees like wings), Mock di Dread (whip your hair around like a Rasta), and Log On (stomp on a gay man). But don't go trying these dances unless you're sure that they are still in vogue, because as Sean Paul warns:

So from ah gyal nuh up to date we deport dem
Cyan keep up to de change we report dem.

Aside from at private parties, dancing is quintessentially done at nightclubs and at open-air events held regularly throughout Jamaica. These generally feature not live bands but sound systems (of which there are hundreds). A typical sound-system dance doesn't really "hot up" until well after midnight. In sonic terms, the dominant figure is the selector, who serves as emcee by shouting into the mike much of the night, hyping up dancers, guiding them through moves, singing along with tunes, and bigging up any "dancehall queens," dons, or prominent shottas who dignify the event with their presence. Typically, he may play only snippets of a tune, perhaps "juggling" a sequence of songs in the same riddim. As amateur and professional videographers record the goings-on, people vie to be featured in their video lights.¹⁹ At a certain point, a dance crew or deejay may perform, the latter singing bits of his songs karaoke-style to riddims played by the selector.

The most famous and popular of Jamaica's regular dance events is the "Passa Passa" held every week in the Tivoli Gardens neighborhood of Kingston. Although the area is a garrison governed by JLP dons, the Passa Passa events have become more or less safe, attracting corporate sponsorship and large numbers of visitors from Japan, Europe, and elsewhere. The visitors merrily join local dance crews, extravagantly attired dancehall divas, and well-armed members of gangs like the Shower Posse. (As per Bounty Killer's "Gun Down" quoted above, try not to spill your beer on a shotta's designer shirt.) A visiting Jamaican American woman, who as a New York clubgoer was familiar with the latest dances, described a Passa Passa night this way:

First I went shopping with my girlfriends to get the sexiest outfit that I could conjure. Then, on the way to the session, I thought that we were nearby when we heard the music very clearly, but it turned out that we were not close at all, but the music was just that LOUD. Reaching the session, we saw that it was not in a dancehall but in the middle of the road. The speaker boxes are stacked high on the sidewalk, and you have the choice of either going deaf there or dancing in the road. Most, including myself, chose the latter. However, while dancing in the road you may be interrupted by a passing bus, car, or handcart, but once they have passed the pulsating music sweeps you up once again and you continue dancing. Most of the session can be compared to the "Electric Slide" song being played at an American party. Everyone knows the songs and the dances that accompany them. Whether you are in high heels or Timberlands, all across the road everyone joins in, expertly dancing the moves announced by the [deejay], like "Signal de Plane," "Summer Bounce," "Thunder

Clap,” or “The Blaze,” among many others. It was the most exciting dance experience I have ever known.²⁰

Until about 2005, the typical dance would feature two rival sound systems that would end the event by squaring off in a “sound clash,” which is a uniquely Jamaican institution. Sound clashes are not as common nowadays as they once were, but they continue to attract much attention from fans when they do occur. The emphasis in a sound clash is on an entity called the “dub plate,” which is a short recording made by a deejay in which he sings a few lines, usually to the tune of a familiar song of his, substituting new verses that “big up” a particular sound system, which he mentions by name. Thus, to take a fictitious example, if Sean Paul were making a dub for Killamanjaro, he could change “Just gimme the light and pass the dro / bust another bottle of moe” to “Just put up ya hands and mek me hear ya / Jaro’s got the sound we like.” The dub plates are not mass-produced or sold in stores; instead, a sound system will contract a deejay to make the dub especially for it.

Cheap dub plates can be gotten from small-time, aspiring deejays, but a big name like Bounty Killer may charge as much as \$1,000 for a dub plate. (In fact, deejays like Bounty make much of their income recording dub plates.) Audiences thrill to hear new dub plates by current stars, but they also enjoy dubs by deceased figures like Tenor Saw and Garnett Silk. Although some dub plates can be found on YouTube, most can be heard only at the sound clashes, as they are the exclusive property of the sounds. Accordingly, the most popular sound systems are those, like Killamanjaro, Bass Odyssey, Rodigan, and Stone Love, that have been around for decades and have managed to accumulate hundreds of dub plates from artists so that they have a box (of dubs) that is “deep as the ocean.” Jamaican pride notwithstanding, respected sounds come from all over, including David Rodigan (a white Brit), Mighty Crown (from Japan), One Love (from Italy), Sentinel (from Germany), and Massive B (from New York). In fact, even many Jamaican fans prefer the non-Jamaican sounds, as they tend to have more money and can acquire dub plates from all of the top artists, sometimes arranging special duets.

A clash generally starts with rounds in which the sounds alternate in thirty-minute segments, then proceed to fifteen-minute segments, and then battle “dub fi dub” to put a “murderation” pon one another. Audience members—who tend to be mostly male—don’t come to dance during the clash proper, especially since the dub plates are short and are perpetually interrupted by the emcee’s shouting. Instead, fans come to hear the dub plates and the lively banter of the emcees and to savor the competitive spirit of the event. If fans like a song, they may light and wave lighters and cell phones,

shoot guns in the air, and shout for a “forward”—that is, for a repeat of the song. Conversely, a song deemed lame will elicit calls of “Next selectah!” or “Rinse the bloodclot tunes!” The excitement reaches a climax in the dub-fi-dub section, when the best dub plates are brought out. Generally, a panel of judges decides the winner on the basis of audience response.

Much of the fun of the clash scene comes from the rivalry, which rages not only at the clashes but also on the Internet. To get a sense of the connoisseurship involved, let’s tune in to a typical chat-room argument—in this case, about the standing of Killamanjaro (Jaro) and its emcee, Rickie Trooper, vis-à-vis other sounds. Reader beware: X-rated diction follows!

BOOMSHAKA: Bass Odyssey cyaan bakkle [can’t battle] wid Jaro inna tune fi tune when Trooper play Tena Saw weh Odyssey a go play dem weak-ass Garnet Silk. Yes dey have Garnet pon dub, but Odyssey box is a dibby-dibby wading pool next to Jaro.

MADDOG: Fly up now, John-crow! If Jaro box so deep, why Rickie playin the same dubs in every clash? And the old ones, Jaro studio couldn’t cut a clean dub. Every truck and van pass you can hear it on the dubs dem—horn, tires, everyting. And besides a few Tenna Saws from ’85 he cyaan go much deeper.

BOOMSHAKA: I see you have started to disrespect. You is de same likkle yute who I had to put in his place on dancehallreggae.com. You is nothing but a cassette bwoy, you just buy tapes and listen. You don’t know a ting bout yard. You don’t know what tunes Jaro got, only what tunes they bring! How the hell can you expect them to carry 20+ crates of dubs and play maybe 50 songs? Tell Freddy next time two sounds buck up, just call for Saw fe Saw, I guarantee you it won’t be a pretty site, cause blood will diffenately spill, an mi dun talk.

MADDOG: Cho! You just scout every website like a bobo duppy, saluting Trooper. Ho God, people, I believe Trooper a slide him rod inna u pum-pum. Jaro cannot go deep with sounds that cut in the ’80s, and anyhow, Tenor was just a likkle above average, dem man da career take lead, skyrocket after death.

BOOMSHAKA: Bwoy a get shame, change your ways! You deserve to be banished to a world of AOL 3.0 with a 56K dial-up modem!²¹

Whoa! We’d best exit before we’re splattered with cyber-blood. Let’s move on to look at the international reggae scene.

Dancehall inna Foreign

In many respects, dancehall, compared with the internationally oriented roots reggae, represented a sort of turning inward. The focus shifted from Africa and white foreign fans to the humble yard, with songs rendered in thick and often rapid-fire patwa. Nevertheless, by the mid-1980s dancehall had acquired an international presence that surpassed that of Marley and Jimmy Cliff. The boom started, not surprisingly, in neighboring West Indian islands, where dancehall quickly became the youth music of choice, even as Jamaican deejays were often denied visas and denounced as emissaries of a degenerate ghetto culture. In London and Brooklyn, where sizable West Indian populations had existed since the 1960s, lively dancehall scenes developed, with clubs, sound systems, legions of fans, and local Jamaican artists. Particularly prominent have been the London-born Maxi Priest and the then New York-based Shaggy, who stands in a category of his own for his unique style, productions like his humorous “It Wasn’t Me” song and video, and his being the only prominent deejay to explicitly denounce his colleagues’ gay-bashing.

The dancehall scene sustains a lively local Jamaican economic sector that encompasses everything from attorneys to the seamstresses who make custom outfits for the divas. But since Jamaica is a poor country, the real money is to be made abroad. A handful of deejays, from Shabba Ranks to Sean Paul, made crossover hits in the early 2000s. Paul, an uptown, fair-skinned Jamaican, knew how to drop the gay-bashing, tone down the patwa, and deliver tuneful hits that earned him lucrative collaborations with Beyoncé and Snoop Dogg. But with the record industry in crisis, the best way for deejays to make money is to do concert tours in Japan, Africa, the United States, and especially Europe. Top Jamaican dance crews also tour the clubs and festivals, but probably no one has done more to put Jamaican dance on the global map than the entertaining sprinter Usain Bolt, who is wont to bust out some “nuh linga” and “gully creepa” moves whenever he wins a race.

Both the expressive power and the crossover limitations of dancehall may derive from the genre’s ongoing rootedness in the ghetto. Songs about punanny and flying marrow may enjoy a niche market, but taking dancehall to a new level might require an artist who could combine the talent of a Vybz Kartel with the humanitarian vision of a Ruben Blades. At present, no such person seems to exist.

However, as dancehall—like roots reggae decades ago—becomes an international style, in places as remote as Mongolia and Malaysia local artists

inspired by Beenie and Bounty sing not only in English but also in local languages about local themes. A few non-Jamaicans, such as Matisyahu, an orthodox Jew, have shown that one can deejay in a credible and original manner without singing about punanny. As dancehall takes roots in such diverse places and forms, beyond the control of Jamaicans themselves, it has truly succeeded.

Further Reading

Among the many books on Jamaican music, particularly useful are Donna Hope, *Inna di Dancehall: Popular Culture and the Politics of Identity in Jamaica* (Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2007); Sonjah Stanley Niaah, *Dancehall: From Slave Ship to Ghetto* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2010); Steve Barrow and Peter Dalton, *The Rough Guide to Reggae* (London: Penguin, 2001); Lloyd Bradley, *This Is Reggae Music: The Story of Jamaica's Music* (New York: Grove, 2000); Norman Stolzoff, *Wake the Town and Tell the People: Dancehall Culture in Jamaica* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000); Michael Veal, *Dub: Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2007); Timothy White, *Catch a Fire: The Life of Bob Marley* (New York: Henry Holt, 1991); and Markus Coester and Wolfgang Bender, eds., *A Reader in African-Jamaican Music, Dance, Religion* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2015).

Trinidad, Calypso, and Carnival

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS'S first sight of land on his third voyage was a row of three hills on the southeastern tip of a large island, which he consequently dubbed Trinidad, or "trinity." Approaching shore, the famed navigator, still in search of the Orient, was disappointed, as before, to be greeted by a delegation not of Chinese mandarins but of curious Carib Indians in canoes. Columbus tried to welcome them by having his men dance and play fife-and-drum music, but the Caribs, either feeling threatened or simply finding the music disagreeable, showered the ship with arrows and paddled off. It was an inauspicious start for musical syncretism in Trinidad and perhaps foreshadowed the fact that neither Spaniards nor Indians would play major roles in the island's subsequent musical culture.

The Spanish, indeed, took little interest in the island, which had no precious metals and, unlike Cuba and Puerto Rico, was not situated on trade routes. By the mid-1700s, there were still few settlers in Trinidad, leading the Spanish Crown to fret that the British could seize the island with a few sailors in a rowboat. King Carlos III then extended an invitation to Catholic French Caribbeans to resettle on the island, thereby attracting several thousand Frenchmen and their slaves from the Windward Islands, which had recently been conquered by the British. However, scarcely had the French immigrated to Trinidad to escape British Protestant rule when, in 1797, they found themselves subjects of the British, who took Trinidad, imposing an English colonial administration over what continued for a century to be a largely French and Afro-French creole population.

The British themselves stopped importing slaves in 1807 and decreed emancipation in 1834–38, such that the actual period of slavery in Trinidad was relatively short. When the black former slaves deserted the plantations after emancipation, the British imported some 143,000 peasants from India to work the fields as indentured laborers. Along with them came handfuls of Portuguese, Chinese, Syrians, and even some Yoruba Africans. All of these groups gave Trinidad a rather cosmopolitan racial mixture, as is reflected in its place names, which are variously Amerindian (Chaguanas), Spanish (San Fernando), French (Laventille), British (Belmont), East Indian (Fyzabad), and however you choose to classify “Port of Spain.” (And only a stupid Yankee, like this author on his first visit, would pronounce San Juan in the Spanish fashion; the Trini rendering is a nasalized, French-style “*Sawa*.”)

Trinidadian national character, insofar as one can generalize, acquired a rather different hue from that of the other British colonies. The French creole cultural base, the relative prosperity, the brevity of the slave era, and the comparative mildness of British colonial rule in Trinidad seem to have favored the development of an easygoing national culture that prizes humor and fun over puritanism or pathos. While Jamaican “roots reggae” inclined toward expressions of suffering, underclass anger, and visions of messianic redemption, Trinidad’s cultural heart lies more in irreverent and ribald calypsos and, above all, in Carnival, a two-month celebration of music, dance, partying, and various sorts of collective, bureaucratically managed fun.

Most of Trinidad’s musical vitality and cultural dynamism has developed in spite of rather than because of British rule. Until well into the twentieth century, the colonial government, as elsewhere in the British West Indies, took little or no interest in education, preferring to spend its revenue on prisons. A law passed in 1797 in Barbados explicitly forbade teaching slaves to read or write. The British, in their racism and Anglicizing zeal, tried further to stamp out everything they found distasteful or excessively foreign, from Chinese *whe-whe* games to Spiritual Baptist religion.

Despite such efforts, Trinidad remains host to a number of distinctly non-English music traditions. The music of the East Indians, who are now coming to outnumber blacks and constitute the largest demographic group, is considered in Chapter 9. Spanish musical heritage, deriving more from interaction with neighboring Venezuela than from early colonial rule, persists in the form of a Christmastime music called *parang*. *Parang* is still performed by troupes of amateurs (*parranda* in Spanish) who, like their counterparts in Puerto Rico and elsewhere, go from house to house, partying, singing, and playing guitar- and mandolin-type instruments (here, *bandolin* and the Venezuelan *cuatro*). This music, which closely resembles



Shango drummers at a *palais* near Port of Spain, Trinidad, playing (from left to right) the “center drum,” omele, bo, and shaker. (Photograph by Jocelyne Guilbault.)

Venezuelan folksong genres like the *zoropo*, is still widely popular in areas of Trinidad.¹ A parang outing is not considered really successful unless the group carries on until dawn, sustained by rum, beer, coffee, and whatever else is offered by the residents whom they have roused by banging on their door and singing. Usually a group leader is adept in Spanish, and the others follow along, jumbling up words and perhaps transforming “Feliz Navidad!” into “Felice mother dead.”² Despite the language barrier, Trinidadians throng to Yuletide functions to socialize, drink ginger beer, and dance ballroom-style to parang’s syncopated rhythms, dulcet strings, and exotic-sounding Spanish texts. Indeed, far from dying out, parang has been flourishing since the 1960s, invigorated by amateur competition networks. (As we will see, there are competitions for just about every kind of music in Trinidad, making for a very lively music culture.)

Another distinctive musical tradition is that associated with the syncretic Orisha religion (formerly called the Shango cult), deriving mostly from the nine thousand Yorubans who were induced to immigrate as indentured workers in the mid-1800s. Like its counterparts in Cuba and elsewhere, Shango centers on ceremonies in which Yoruba deities (orishas) are honored through dance and music. At these festive events, a lead singer, accompanied by three drummers, leads others in singing chants in old or garbled Yoruba,

ideally inducing someone to “catch the spirit.”³ (Neither the rhythms nor the drums have much in common with those of the Yoruba-derived Cuban *Santería* or Brazilian *Candomblé*, though a few of the same songs are sung.) The British and upper-class Afro-Trinis looked down on Orisha worship, and the threads of tradition—including, for example, knowledgeable singers and drummers—had grown weak by the 1970s. Hindu deities and East Indian worshipers had also found places in Orisha religion. Nevertheless, the religion has undergone a revival in recent decades, and activists, some of whom have traveled to Nigeria for spiritual nourishment, are trying to bring it into the public mainstream. Calypsonian Sugar Aloes, a practitioner, has also foregrounded the religion in some of his songs. Elements of Orisha worship, including possession trance, are also found in the music and religious practices of “Shango Baptists,” or Spiritual Baptists (Shouters), which resemble in some respects Afro-Protestant faiths like Jamaican Revival Zion.⁴ Shouter worship was banned from 1917 to 1951 but has come out into the open in recent decades.

Another Afro-Trinidadian music tradition is “calinda,” a common word in the West Indies, which in Trinidad nowadays denotes the English or

A manifestation of Ochosi, the hunter, at an Orisha ceremony in Port of Spain. (Photograph by Peter Manuel.)





"Ole' Mas": Carnival in 1888. (*Illustrated London News*.)

French Creole songs, sung by a "chantwell" with lively drumming, that accompany stick fighting. This sport, which can be seen at Carnival time, also has an element of dance to it, as the fighters spend much of their time in the ring strutting and capering before engaging in a brief and furious exchange of blows. The calinda songs are about all that is left of what was once a rich repertoire of songs in Trinidadian French Creole, which effectively ceased to be spoken in the early twentieth century.

A different sort of "Africanist" music is represented by the numerous amateur "African drum" ensembles, in which a maestro of some sorts leads teenagers and others in playing newly composed pieces for djembe and other drums. Some of these pieces, performed at various stage shows and competitions, may be quite lively, though they have little to do with any particular African or Afro-Trini tradition. They may also accompany "African dance," implying some similarly imaginative modern concoction, invented in the absence of a local tradition like Santería dancing.

Other distinctive traditions survive in Tobago, which, as its residents would proudly insist, should not be seen as a mere miniature slice of Trinidad. In addition to creole dances like "heel and toe," these traditions include the "tambrin" band, combining tambourine-like frame drums and a triangle.

The Development of Calypso and Carnival

As interesting as such folk traditions are, by far the most characteristic, prominent, and popular music culture of the country has been that of calypso, soca, and steelband, as developed primarily by lower-class Afro-Trinidadians. Calypso has had its counterparts, audiences, and performers elsewhere in the West Indies, but it is in Trinidad and Tobago that calypso and pre-Lenten Carnival have most vigorously flourished in the Caribbean.

While some of the early roots of calypso—including the origin of the word—remain unclear, Trinidadian scholars have reconstructed much of the genre's history. By the 1780s, the word *cariso* was denoting some sort of satirical, extemporized creole song, but modern calypso emerged somewhat later as the product of a set of diverse musical influences. These included, in varying manners and degrees, French creole songs called *belair*, the *lavway* (from *la voix*, a masquerade procession song), now-extinct neo-African genres like *juba* and *bamboula*, British ballads, Venezuelan string-band music, other West Indian creole song types, and the *calinda*.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, these diverse genres—along with *camboulay* (*cannes brûlées* in French), a re-creation of a fire drill accompanied by drumming—came to be centered in pre-Lenten Carnival. Carnival had started as a dainty festival in which the French aristocrats would don frivolous masks and pay social calls. The planters allowed their slaves to celebrate in their own fashion, and by the mid-1800s, as in Cuba, lower-class (*jamette*, from the French *diamètre*) blacks had come to dominate the event, with most British and French folk retreating in fear to their homes. *Jamette* Carnival soon took on its own character, with its rowdy street dancing, *camboulay* processions, stick fights, and masquerade troupes (“mas bands”) featuring revelers in snappy sailor duds, phony military regiments, and folkloric characters like ghoulish *Jab-Jabs* and stilt-walking *Moko Jumbies*.

The British authorities, ever fearful of a Haitian-type rebellion and dismayed by the brawls often provoked by the stick fights, banned *camboulay* in the early 1880s. In the process, they provoked bloody riots in which skilled stick fighters more than once put the lightly armed, fumble-footed policemen to run. Nevertheless, the ban on drumming was enforced, as is related in one early calypso: “Can’t beat me drum in me own native land.” From that time until the present, Carnival evolved as a site of contention between its lower-class Afro-Trinidadian celebrants and the bourgeois and administrative reformers who have sought somehow to control, coopt, or cleanse it. In this vein, local newspapers in the 1880s denounced the “bawdy gestures” of dancing women in Carnival, just as news media do now, more than a century later.

Calypso in Colonialism

By 1900, Carnival music was coalescing into two main types. One was that of the mas bands, in which some two or three dozen costumed revelers, led by a chantwell, would sing rowdy call-and-response chants. Stick-fighting calinda bands and their chantwells also roamed the streets, looking for trouble. Because drums were strictly forbidden, such processions until the late 1930s often came to be accompanied by a “tamboo-bamboo” ensemble of bamboo tubes struck with sticks. While the biggest processions took place in Port of Spain, smaller groups cultivated Carnival contests, plays, and songs throughout the island.

Meanwhile, some of the more formalized mas bands started erecting tapia huts in which members would prepare their costumes and practice their songs, as led by the chantwells. Soon enough, such “tents” were attracting visitors and, subsequently, charging nominal admission fees, as well. As the chantwell tent songs grew more formalized and soloistic, they started to be called “calypso,” which thus developed as a text-oriented song performed for seated audiences in large tents erected for the occasion.

Biscuit-tin band. (Photograph by Peter Manuel.)



The period from 1900 to 1930 saw the rapid refinement, institutionalization, and commercialization of this new form of entertainment. By the 1920s, merchants, liquor companies, civic committees, and enterprising singers were setting up tents throughout Trinidad as commercial enterprises. Audiences paid a small admission fee to cheer or mercilessly heckle the amateur calypsonians competing for cash prizes in contests judged by local aficionados. Particularly influential in the music's development were the innovations of singer and entrepreneur Chieftain Walter Douglas, who starting in 1921 would set up a fancy tent in a bourgeois neighborhood and, using a genteel-sounding Venezuelan-style string band, promoted sophisticated "oratorical" calypsos rather than lewd, calinda-type ditties. (These calypsos were often called *sans humanité*—loosely, "without mercy"—for the stock, semi-nonsensical derivative phrase *santimanitey* that often punctuated verses.)

Calypso evolved rapidly under such conditions. String and brass instruments replaced the noisy street-band ones, and solo singing with refrain replaced the calinda-style call-and-response format. Early calypsonians continued to use snippets from responsorial calindas, Shango songs, and assorted creole folksongs, but most came to rely on a set of familiar, major-key stock tunes that were essentially British in character. (Some Trinidadians prefer to ascribe an African origin to calypso, as suggested by the West African term *kaiso*.) Singers adopted bombastic sobriquets and transferred the calinda boasting tradition to the calypso stage, specializing in improvised verbal *picong* duels (from the French *piquant*). French Creole, which had predominated until around 1900, quickly died out as calypsonians like Lord Executor tried to outdo one another in their displays of pompous rhetoric. While schoolteachers fulminated against their students' fondness for "long-winded words and high-flown phrases," calypsonians matched their wits and vocabularies, as later parodied by Mighty Sparrow in "Well-Spoken Moppers":

Pompomloomically speaking you're a pussystic man,
most elaquitably full of shitification.

The subject matter of calypsos broadened accordingly, encompassing commentary on current events, picaresque anecdotes, and lewd double entendres, as well as boasts and insults. Ribaldry and sarcasm remained the genre's mainstay, and the lyrics continued to show delight in mocking pretensions, exposing elite scandals ("bacchanal"), and ridiculing upper-class women. A favorite topic has always been the complications caused by the hoary Trini

men's custom of maintaining one or more "deputies," or mistresses, along with a wife. In this vein is the evergreen "Shame and Scandal in the Family," first composed by Sir Lancelot and revised in the 1960s by Lord Melody. In each of this song's first three verses, a young man asks his father for permission to marry a different woman. In each case, the father forbids the marriage, stating that the youth's prospective bride is his half-sister, "but your mamma don't know." Finally, in the last verse, the young man appeals to his mother, who replies, "Your father ain't your father, but your father don't know."

For their part, calypsonians (or "kaisonians") came to enjoy considerable notoriety, being alternately denounced or celebrated for their irreverent music and indolent, hedonistic lifestyle. While the quintessential calypsonian shunned work and managed to be gainfully shackled up with a supporting mistress, most found mere survival to be a challenge, since they could perform professionally only two months a year. To this day, only a few calypsonians have been able to support themselves solely through their art, hopping from island to island for shows and local carnivals. Some calypsonians, including the Mighty Sparrow himself, emigrated, returning only for Carnival season.

In the 1930s (what some call the "golden age" of calypso), Decca and RCA Victor started producing records of artists like Atilla the Hun and Roaring Lion, recorded mostly in New York. Although the records sold well in the Caribbean, the United States, and even Africa, the artists received more fame than money, since most of the profits stayed with the record companies or with entrepreneurs like bandleader-impresario Lionel Belasco. The most celebrated case involved the Andrews Sisters' early 1940s recording of Lord Invader's "Rum and Coca-Cola," which sold some 5 million copies in the United States. Decca and the Andrews Sisters made the song famous; they also made the money. Lord Invader and the enterprising Belasco successfully sued the American publishers of the song, although Invader, in true calypsonian style, frittered away his settlement and died broke.

As Carnival and calypso's prominence as a vehicle for the *vox populi* grew, so did the controversies surrounding the music. Should the colonial authorities try to control and limit it, or should they accept it as a boost to tourism and business and a way for the lower classes to let off steam? Should ribald and politically oppositional calypsos be tolerated or repressed? Which mas processions should be supported—the unruly downtown ones or the bureaucratically controlled ones of Port of Spain's Savannah Park? How should factors of originality, poetry, melody, and presentation be weighed in judging calypso competitions? And how should the judges be selected?

Behind such administrative controversies lay the more profound strug-

gle of Trinidadians to survive. Carnival merriment notwithstanding, many Trinidadians continued to live in abject poverty, and the colonial government remained committed more to the masses' exploitation than to their welfare. As Patrick Jones (Lord Protector) sang in 1920:

We are ruled with the iron hand;
 Britain boasts of democracy, brotherly love, and fraternity,
 but British colonists have been ruled in perpetual misery.

Indeed, the pious British praise of human rights and freedom of speech did not apply in the colonies, where any sort of oppositional discourse, such as Marxist or black-nationalist Garveyite literature, was rigorously banned. Attempts by mine and farm workers to organize were brutally crushed, and while the British maintained a façade of parliamentary government, labor leaders like Uriah Butler were kept out of power. Censorship of calypsos reached a peak during the 1930s. Any song criticizing the state or dealing with Afro-Trinidadian culture or religion was subject, however unpredictably, to banning. Calypsonians were required to submit their lyrics to censorship offices before singing them, and policemen were posted in tents to monitor performances. Tents that hosted objectionable songs could be shut down, and singers' licenses could be revoked. Shipments of allegedly subversive records pressed in New York were dumped in the sea, and in general calypso's role as a mouthpiece of popular sentiment was severely curbed.

Such restraints, along with the prevailing hegemony of imperial ideology, partially explain what may seem by modern standards to be the rather low sociopolitical consciousness of most calypso before the 1970s. Many calypsos were obsequiously loyalist, especially during World War II. Some praised the British for the emancipation of slaves, forgetting that the English were the most aggressive of all slave importers in the previous two centuries. Several singers righteously endorsed Britain's stated opposition to the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1936, not knowing that the British had secretly sanctioned the act. Few songs displayed any sense of positive racial consciousness, instead ridiculing people as "black and ugly," mocking Indians and Orisha worship, and presenting the ideal woman as rich, white, and stupid. As is discussed later, representations of women were especially unenlightened.

Only a handful of singers had the integrity, vision, and temerity to challenge the norm and voice genuinely progressive sentiments. Particularly prominent among these was Raymond Quevedo (Atilla the Hun, 1892–1962), who, in addition to being a leading calypsonian for nearly half a century, was

an indefatigable labor leader and legislator. While Atilla failed to transcend the sexism of his era, many of his songs presented the common man's point of view and, from the 1950s, explicitly called for independence.

The World War II years and the establishment of two large U.S. military bases brought unprecedented prosperity to many Trinidadians, including calypsonians. While several thousand locals earned their first decent wages working at the bases, enthusiastic and relatively affluent GIs filled the calypso tents at Carnival time. Meanwhile, however, calypsonians watched with dismay as local women forsook their company for that of the free-spending GIs. Lord Invader's classic "Rum and Coca-Cola," from 1943, relates how his girlfriend, along with her mother and sisters, drove off with some soldiers:

They bought rum and Coca-Cola, way down Point Cumana,
both mother and daughter working for the Yankee dollar.

With the end of the war and the departure of the GIs, many women had no option but to return to the sweet-talking, unemployed calypsonians. The Mighty Sparrow's immortal "Jean and Dinah" captured the mood:

Jean and Dinah, Rosita and Clementina,
On the corner posing, bet your life it's something exciting
And if you catch them broke you can get 'em all for nothing
Yankee's gone and Sparrow take over from now.⁵

This song also illustrates the primary rule of scansion for calypso, which is that you can put as many or as few syllables in a line as you want.

The 1950s were a fertile decade for calypso. The "Young Brigade" of Lord Kitchener (1922–2000) and Lord Melody was in full swing. In 1957, the Trinidadian government, seeking both to promote tourism and cultivate grassroots support, established what has evolved into the National Carnival Commission, which sought to organize and promote Carnival festivities and replaced the local tent contests with a national Calypso Monarch competition. With greater freedom of expression and impending independence, some calypsos both reflected and promoted a greater sociopolitical awareness. In 1955, Atilla, for example, denounced the racism of the *Trinidad Guardian* newspaper's beauty-queen contest:

For this Guardian competition is nothing but real discrimination
One thing in this world will never be seen
is a dark-skinned girl as Carnival Queen.

More significantly, the decade—and particularly the year 1956—saw the emergence of perhaps the two most important figures in twentieth-century Trinidadian culture. One was Eric Williams, “the Doctor,” the brilliant scholar, charismatic orator, and prime minister who dominated his party, the People’s National Movement (PNM), and the nation’s politics in general until his death in 1981. The other was Slinger Francisco, better known as Mighty Sparrow, who won the Calypso Monarch contest in 1956 at age twenty-one and continued for decades to be the genre’s most unfailingly excellent performer. The two figures are further linked in that Williams owed more than a little of his popularity to Sparrow’s eloquent support.

Mighty Sparrow was long the measure of the ideal calypsonian. Possessed of a strong, sure voice, he sang and performed well. He was prolific, managing to release an LP every year when most singers could barely muster two songs. His melodies were simple and effective while adhering to the typical sing-songy calypso style. Most important, his lyrics (whether written by him or by a collaborator) were consistently clever, pithy, and catchy; some of his songs, like “Jean and Dinah,” became so familiar as to constitute a body of modern West Indian folklore in themselves. He was a master of the art of being ribald without being vulgar.

Although Sparrow was not a profound sociopolitical thinker, his topical commentaries often seemed to capture the mood of the nation, and he did not hesitate to criticize Eric Williams on occasion. In 1957, fresh from his first Monarch victory, he successfully organized a boycott of the Savannah Dimanche Gras competition to demand better pay for contest winners. He went on to win the Road March (the most frequently played song, chosen each year at Carnival) six times and the Monarch competition seven times before retiring from the contests in 1974. In 1992, when Carnival was first broadcast internationally via satellite, he reentered the Monarch competition and again won the prize—cash and a car. (The next year, however, he lost to Chalkdust, who almost missed the finals when his own car broke down in central Trinidad. As the show started late, he arrived just in time to perform and win the prize—a much needed new car.) Sparrow’s running *picong* duels with the older Lord Melody delighted audiences throughout the 1950s and 1960s. A typical exchange went:

SPARROW:

Well, Melody, come close to me.
I will tell you plain and candidly,
don’t stop and turn around and smile
because you have a face like a crocodile.

MELODY:

Sparrow, you shouldn't tell me that at all,
 I used to mind you when you were small.
 Many nights I used to mash your head
 in crossing to go to your mother's—!⁶

Sparrow was still going strong until the late 1990s. When in 1993 the calypsonian Ras Shorty I's moralizing song "That Eh Enough" criticized Sparrow's still libidinous image as inappropriate to a man his age, Sparrow retorted wittily with "The More [Girlfriends] the Merrier," reminding Shorty of his own hedonistic days (as Lord Shorty) before his conversion to Rastafari. Despite the renown of a figure like Sparrow, in the annual calypso competition one's status is only as good as that year's song, and the playing field is level enough to include all newcomers.

Modern Calypso

With independence in 1962, calypso and Trinidadian history entered a new chapter. Inspired by the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, a vigorous local Black Power movement arose, nearly toppling the PNM government in 1970. At the same time, the increasing prominence of East Indians in the country's economic and cultural life has obliged all Trinidadians to recognize the profoundly multicultural nature of their national identity. The biggest development was the unprecedented prosperity brought by the formation of OPEC in 1973, which exponentially increased the profits from local oil reserves, and by a concurrent rise in sugar prices. (Trinidad is also blessed with resources of ammonia, asphalt, and natural gas.) Under Williams's guidance much money was wasted in the course of the ten-year oil boom, and long-term planning was bungled, but most Trinidadians, whether through hard work, trickle-down economics, or civil-service sinecures, came to enjoy an essentially bourgeois standard of living. Throughout the island, the old "trash-house" shanties were replaced with modern concrete houses, often complete with TV and carport.

The era was eventful for calypso, as well. By 1970, calypso was on the defensive against reggae and R&B, but at the same time it was revitalized by the new social and musical movements. Calypso's text orientation is both its strength and its weakness. The tradition of writing verses about current events makes calypso a uniquely dynamic form of grassroots folklore, closely attuned to people's daily lives, rather than a mere reiteration of sentimental

clichés. However, this very specificity limits calypso's appeal to the here and now. A song about a petty corruption trial or a cuckolded minister in Port of Spain can amuse local audiences at the time, but it may be forgotten within months and will mean nothing to listeners in neighboring Grenada, not to mention in the United States. Further, calypso verses are too long for pop formats, which demand short, snappy lyrics and danceable refrains.

Accordingly, the calypso recording industry was never more than a small-time affair, consisting of a few rudimentary studios in Port of Spain and storefront labels like Strakers in Brooklyn. Distribution was informal, at best, and as late as the 1970s even Mighty Sparrow could be seen selling records out of the trunk of his car on a street corner in Port of Spain. So most albums were slapped together as seasonal throwaway music, produced as tourist souvenirs in batches of a few thousand and often financed by the artist or by merchants whose ads plaster the backs of the CD covers. Essentially, Trinians hear all the calypso they want on the radio, in the maxi-taxis, and in the tents, so even before the Internet era they felt little need to buy records of calypso.

For that matter, the mass media in most of the West Indies remain dominated by rap, R&B, and Jamaican dancehall. Calypso is mostly heard during Carnival season—after which, it's back to Jay-Z and J-Lo. Local attitudes perpetuate such compartmentalization: Many West Indians feel saturated with calypso by the end of Carnival season. And as one Trinidadian lamented, "If my mother hears me playing a soca record after Ash Wednesday, she shouts, 'Shut that devil's music off—it's Lent now!'"

Calypso remained vital through the turn of the millennium, enlivened by a talented crop of singers. CroCro's 1988 "Corruption in Common Entrance" was an example of a controversial calypso that touched a nerve, provoking a state investigation into alleged improprieties in the education system. (That system, by the way, could be much worse, and Trinidad has produced more than its share of fine scholars, journalists, and novelists, such as V. S. Naipaul and Earl Lovelace.) CroCro and Sugar Aloes generated a steady stream of catchy and pithy songs, including several attacking East Indians and their political party. More light-hearted fare was generally forthcoming from Black Stalin (a congenial figure despite his sobriquet) and Crazy, who cultivated an animated appearance and stage persona. A repeated prizewinner has been Chalkdust, who, after earning a doctorate in ethnomusicology, moved up from being a schoolteacher to securing a post in the Ministry of Culture, while continuing to harangue the nation—often about the decline of calypso—during the Monarch competitions. During Carnival season, urban Trinians, whether heavily invested in the Monarch competition or not,

can amuse themselves by visiting the tents (which are now clubs and theaters) to savor the current crop of songs, even if the presentations don't have the intensity or professional flavor of a top soca band.

In recent decades the popularity of calypso has waned somewhat, especially among the younger generations. East Indians—almost half the population—have no use for it and may even resent that their tax dollars go toward funding their own vilification. Indeed, owners of the calypso tents and revues, whose business is declining, have even encouraged singers of “attack calypsos” to tone down their vitriol. To save money—and in tandem with the decline of live music everywhere—the pleasantly ragged house bands that used to accompany singers in the tents are now largely dispensed with, as calypsonians just sing karaoke-style to a backup track they've prepared. Some singers have tried to modernize the genre by departing from its standardized, somewhat hokey melody-types and rhythms, but such moves provoke controversy and criticism from conservatives who argue for the perpetuation of calypso's distinctive, homey style.

Woman Rising

Trinidadian writers have commented extensively on the occasionally virulent sexism of traditional calypso.⁷ Throughout the twentieth century, calypso was a man's world, rooted in the macho boasting of the calinda chantwell, the ribaldry of the early tent scene, and men's views on social norms in general. Among Afro-Trinidadians, sociohistorical conditions have tended to promote temporary male-female liaisons as much as marriage and the accompanying sentiments of commitment and eternal love. In addition to the socially disruptive legacy of slavery, unemployment endemic in the late colonial period often led both men and women to avoid marital ties, which might burden either with an unproductive spouse. However, men, unlike women, enjoyed a public forum—calypso—where they could present their desires and double standards as a norm and an ideal. Hence, colonial-era calypsos often portrayed women as valuable only as meal tickets or as sexual playthings for the calypsonian stud, as in Mighty Duke's “Woop-Wap Man” (“Woop, wap—next one!”). Calypsos traditionally ridiculed women as ugly, sexually infectious (“Don't Bathe in Elsie's River”), and forever trying to tie men down with obeah (black magic) or false accusations of paternity. The calypsonian Mighty Terror, for instance, sang:

I black like jet and she just like tarbaby,
still, Chinese children calling me daddy.

But the quintessential traditional calypsonian, even if so victimized by his faithless mate, would generally shun responsibility for the children he did sire—especially as he was more often than not unemployed and wholly dependent on whatever women he could charm. While glorifying motherhood in the abstract, calypsos showed little sympathy for the flesh-and-blood mothers struggling to raise fatherless children. (*Sans humanité*, indeed!) “Sixteen Commandments,” sung by Lord Shorty (before his conversion to Rastafari), is particularly explicit in its articulation of men’s double standard. Warning his girlfriend to be faithful to him and not ask him for money, Shorty sings:

If thou see me wid a nex’ girl talkin’, try and understand.
 Pass me straight like you ain’t know me,
 Let me have my woman.

Similarly, Atilla’s “Women Will Rule the World” (1935) warns of women trying to improve their lot and competing with men for scarce jobs:

I’m offering a warning to men this year: Of modern women
 beware,
 Even the young girls you cannot trust, for they’re taking our jobs
 from us,
 And if you men don’t assert control, women will rule the world,
 They say that anything that man can do they also can achieve too,
 and openly boast to do their part in literature and art,
 You’ll soon hear of them as candidates for the President of the
 United States.
 If women ever get the ascendancy, they will show us no sympathy,
 They will make us do strange things, goodness knows,
 scrub floors and even wash clothes,
 If these tyrants become our masters, we’ll have to push
 perambulators.

Goddess forbid! Indeed, poor Atilla would be spinning in his grave to see modern Trinidad with its female prime minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar—not to mention Hillary Clinton, as well as recent female prime ministers who were elected in Great Britain and nearby Dominica.

To forestall such catastrophes, calypsos would often advise men about how to deal with their women, as in “Turn Them Down,” an old calypso revived by Sparrow in the 1970s:

Every now and then, cuff them down.
 They'll love you long and they'll love you strong.
 Black up dey eye, bruise up dey knee,
 and they will love you eternally.

One antidote to such sexist manifestos would be for women to enter the calypso arena and speak for themselves—for example, as to whether they do indeed love being “cuffed down.” Men were traditionally ambivalent about the presence of women in calypso, as in the case of the New York–based entertainer Daphne Weekes (d. 2004), who encountered open hostility from other musicians for having the chutzpah to lead her own band. But although calypso may be inherently male in its emphasis on braggadocio, women have in fact established a place in it, now institutionalized in Trinidad’s Woman Rising competition. Such singers as Calypso Rose and Denyse Plummer have earned their own audiences and awards, in many cases expressing support for women who have faced beatings, insults, and exploitation. Thus, Easlyn Orr sings, “Woman Respect Yourself,” while Singing Francine answers the “treat ‘em rough” philosophy with “Run Away” (1979):

Dog does run away, child does run away,
 woman does run away when man treating them bad . . .
 Woman, put two wheels on your heels.

Similarly, Lady Iere’s “Love Me or Leave Me” became a slogan for abused West Indian women:

You gotta love me or leave me, or live with Miss Dorothy.
 The time is too hard for me to mind a man that’s bad.

In general, since the sociopolitical awakening of the 1970s, flagrantly sexist calypsos have gone out of style, and male calypsonians have often expressed more appreciative attitudes toward women. A trendsetter in this regard was Lord Kitchener’s classic Road March of 1973, “Flag Woman,” honoring the banner-waving women who animatedly lead Carnival bands:

Without an experienced flag woman,
 your band will have no control, your music will have no soul.

Similarly, 1993 found Mighty Terror voicing quaint but timely sentiments in “Tribute to All Housewives”:

Every man should assist his wife and let the love be lasting for life . . .
Don't beat your wife, take this tip from me.

By this period, the calypso judging panels have generally included at least one woman, who is presumably intolerant of old-style sexist cant. Female calypsonians can compete not only in the Calypso Queen competition (a smaller counterpart to the Calypso Monarch) but also in the Calypso Monarch itself. Most successful in this forum was Denyse Plummer, a dynamic entertainer who, although mostly devoted to soca, has won the Calypso Monarch prize repeatedly—after having overcome public misgivings about her bourgeois white social background as well as her gender. Meanwhile, most of the self-contained soca bands feature female singers and dancers, and recent years have seen the emergence of several “soca divas,” like Destra Garcia, Denise Belfon, Alison Hinds, and the Road March winners Sanelle Dempster and Faye Ann Lyon.

Sexual politics aside, calypso continues to delight in erotic puns and euphemisms, where the emphasis is on whimsical wordplay rather than sexual politics. As in other Caribbean genres, practically any ostensibly trivial or obscure song lyric can be assumed to be some sort of sexual double entendre, especially if the actual text appears to be totally innocent. In both calypso and soca, a typical format is for the verses to set up a catchy refrain with a double entendre. For example, in Drupatee Ramgoonai's “Lick Down Me Nani,” the verses describe an encounter between a truck and the singer's “nani” (in Hindi, “grandmother”), setting up the title line's pun, meaning either “[the truck] ran over my granny” or “lick my [pu]nanny.” Or take, for example, Crazy's 1990s hit “Paul, Your Mother Come,” which was banned from the airwaves. Why? Because audiences immediately recognized the refrain as a thinly disguised “Paul, your mother's cunt,” and they would gleefully sing it that way at dance concerts. It would be a mistake to denounce such juvenilia as “sexist objectification” or a degrading insult. It's just pure whimsy, the latest in a long and hoary Caribbean tradition.

Soca

In 1977, Lord Shorty (who stood six feet, four inches tall) set out to improve on calypso's customary bouncy, slightly ragged, but basically bland and generically Caribbean accompaniment patterns. He and arranger Ed Watson came up with a composite pattern they called “soca” (or “sokah,” to reflect the East Indian influence), which, in a loosely standardized form, has been the norm in most calypso since. The chorus of soca artist Arrow's

The musical score for Example 19 is written in 4/4 time with a tempo of 120. The key signature has one flat (Bb). The vocal line consists of the lyrics "Fee - lin' hot hot hot fee - lin'". The melody is simple, with notes corresponding to the lyrics. The bass line provides a rhythmic accompaniment. The chord progression is F, Bb, C, Bb. The drum part includes a snare drum and a bass drum, both playing a steady 4/4 rhythm.

Musical Example 19: A typical soca rhythm.

1983 “Hot Hot Hot” (later covered by Buster Poindexter and, in Hindi, by Babla-Kanchan) typifies the soca beat, as schematically represented in Musical Example 19.

As can easily be recognized, the basic soca beat is an up-tempo reincarnation of the “habanera” beat, which continues to surface here and there in the Caribbean, including in the Jamaica Dem Bow riddim and its derivative, reggaeton.

The terms “soca” and “calypso” are sometimes used somewhat interchangeably, but “soca” is best used specifically to distinguish dance music, as opposed to calypso proper, whose essence remains the text. Soca lyrics are usually short and inconsequential (unless one considers repeated calls to “wine on a bumsie” to be of literary significance); the typical song consists of a series of catchy vocal hooks, perhaps with sections of shouting, “wine! wine! wine! wine!” and “party! party! party! party!” (pronounced “potty”). The usual theme of soca songs is “jam and wine,” which denotes not an aperitif but “party and dance.” In particular, “wining” is now the predominant West Indian up-tempo dance style, whose essence is a pneumatic pelvic pumping, ideally executed in synchronicity with an adjacent “winer,” whether front-to-back, front-to-front, or back-to-back. It is fun and good exercise as well. While it is not inappropriate for a gentleman to wine, wining is more quintessentially done by women, and, indeed, soca in some ways has become a women’s dance music. Soca dancing often has a collective character, as dancers respond to singers’ calisthenic commands to “jump up” or “get something and wave.”

Soca’s popularity sharpened the split between, on the one hand, dance music—designed for fêtes, mas processions, and the Road March prize—and, on the other hand, lyric-oriented calypso, a somewhat more cerebral

genre confined to the tents and aimed at the Calypso Monarch trophy. In the 1993 carnival, the dichotomy was institutionalized with the establishment of separate competition categories for soca and calypso. Accordingly, the gamut of calypso controversies now includes the complaints of those who believe that mindless soca, along with imported pop, has drowned out calypso proper. The veteran *kaisonian* Chalkdust (Hollis Liverpool) voiced the purist school of thought in several songs, as in his prizewinning 1993 calypso “Kaiso in the Hospital”:

The young ran amuck, they cursed in the worst way,
 drugs and sex they glorified.
 They called themselves Rock, Rap, Zouk, and Reggae,
 And Kaiso’s house they occupied.⁸

Such criticisms notwithstanding, most young Trinidadians enjoy soca for what it is—namely, an exuberant, unpretentious dance music. Moreover, in reintroducing the role of dance music in Carnival and playing mas, soca filled a vacuum that had existed ever since calypso evolved as a tent-based idiom and listening-oriented steelbands replaced the processional bamboo-bamboo and biscuit-tin bands.

Unlike calypso, soca flourishes year-round in clubs and concerts throughout the West Indies. However, the Soca Monarch competition during Carnival continues to be a focal event. The competition has had two categories, the Groovy Soca Monarch, for fast soca songs, and the Power Soca Monarch, for even faster ones. Stage theatrics are obligatory, in the form of laser effects, flame throwers, video projections, and tightly choreographed backup dancers; the star vocalist is often lowered onto the stage via cables. The best singers—such as Destra Garcia, Olatunji, perennial winner Machel Montano, and, from the previous generation, SuperBlue—have strong voices, energetic stage antics, and catchy tunes with which they whip up the crowd. A panel of judges grants awards based on performance, tune, arrangement, lyrics, and crowd response. Most modern soca songs adhere to the conventions of the genre, but in recent years a few artists, such as Kerwin du Bois with “Monster Wine,” seem to be pushing the boundaries and enriching soca with more varied arrangements and harmonies. Another new development is the dancehall-style recycling of riddims in different songs. In 2011, for example, the “Girl Scout” riddim was used in Nadia Batson’s “Admiring Me” and Alison Hinds’s “Soca Queen.”

Soca has for decades been a well-established international genre in the sense of being popular in other Anglophone islands and in the West Indian

circuit in the United States (especially but not only New York). However, perhaps due to its rather one-dimensional character as an aerobic dance music, it hasn't gained the broad international appeal of dancehall reggae.

The Carnival Context

Since 1900, Trinidad Carnival has evolved into a felicitous balance of state-funded, bureaucratically organized competitions and festivities, on the one hand, and various sorts of fêtes, informal merrymaking, and “bacchanal” on the other. The bacchanal consists of ad hoc partying, numerous free, open-air dance concerts, and more intimate amusements that are often realized nocturnally in parks, fields, and other normally public places. All of these events are framed by the rhythm of the Carnival schedule itself, including the numerous competitions. These now include the Calypso Monarch and Calypso Queen (and junior counterparts), Soca Monarch, mas band of the year, Costume King and Queen, Road March, Panorama (the national steel-band competition), and Junior Panorama, as well as the privately funded and Indian-oriented Chutney Soca Monarch, lesser musical categories like ex-tempo and rapso, and neighborhood competitions for traditional costumes such as stilt-walking Moko Jumbies and Dame Lorraines, with their ludicrously large derrières.

In a tropical country without clearly differentiated winters and summers, it is Carnival that provides the seasonal reference point for the rest of the year. Carnival is like a big ocean roller that gathers momentum and size from the Christmas season on and then breaks, foaming and crashing, over the urban streets for two riotous late February days. For many people, the rest of the year is a period of recovery, reminiscing, and gradual preparation for the next year.

For calypsonians, preparation may commence as early as late summer, when singers start preparing their songs. Ideally, according to custom, the lyrics and melodies to these are composed by the calypsonian, who enjoys the status of a grassroots spokesperson rather than an air-headed puppet of a producer. Traditionally, a few calypsonians, such as Kitchener, have been skilled composers and musicians, but most may not be. In recent decades, calypsonians have increasingly purchased songs outright from composers like Merchant; problems ensue if the same song is sold to more than one singer. Even if the singer composes his or her own lyrics and tune, he or she generally contracts an arranger, such as Leston Paul or Frankie McIntosh in the previous generation, to write up a score for the ensemble that will accompany the song in the tents or in the recording.

By Thanksgiving, most calypsonians have produced low-budget recordings that are distributed as demos to radio stations for airplay; the instrumental tracks for these are used by the singers to perform karaoke-style in tents. Calypso enthusiasts by this time are waiting to hear how calypsonians will comment on the political events, social issues, and scandals of the season. Audiences are also geared up for the proverbial bacchanal, and the new “jam-and-wine” soca tunes by stars like Machel Montano soon become familiar via airplay, maxi-taxi stereos, and dance fêtes around the country.

By late January, the calypso and pan competitions are under way. In weekend concerts, competing calypsonians, from rank amateurs to big names, perform two songs apiece in tents located around the island (but mostly in Port of Spain). Along with partying Trininis, panels of judges visit the tents, confer, and, on the basis of lyric, melody, and presentation, pick twenty-four finalists who perform the weekend before Carnival. From that group, eight finalists are chosen to compete, presenting two songs each, at the stage set up at Port of Spain’s Savannah fairgrounds on Dimanche Gras, the (“Big”) Sunday before Ash Wednesday, which falls in late February or early March. The finals are watched either live or on TV by much of the population. The judges choose and announce a winner, or Calypso Monarch, invariably provoking both exuberant acclaim and annoyed complaints from the public. Many people regard the award process with cynicism, seeing it as being manipulated by political and other non-aesthetic concerns, such that the emphasis in the calypso scene may lie more on the tents than in the final competition. Serious soca dance fêtes also take place during the Carnival days, with the largest being the Caribbean Brass Festival held at the PSA football (soccer) ground. This event features several live bands and tens of thousands of attendees, who will not forget to bring hankies or rags for the “get something and wave” exhortations.

For most Trininis, as well as foreign visitors, the most important aspect of Carnival is the mas bands (which could be said to resemble their counterparts in Brazil). Until recently, some of the most popular bands were Poison, Brian MacFarlane, and Peter Minshall, while nowadays they would include Genesis, Tribe, Trini Revellers, D’Krewe, Harts, Island People, Legacy, Masquerade, Pulse8, and Spice Mas. Every year, each band chooses a theme, such as “Imperial Rome,” “Ye Saga of Merrie England,” “Pacific Paradise,” or “Bright Africa.” Usually in August the bands post on their websites photos of models wearing the costumes of the various sections, which can include several options each for backline, frontline, section leader, and “individual.” The backline costumes are the cheapest—perhaps averaging around \$100 (U.S.)—and, for women, may consist of little more than a headband, deco-

rated bra and shorts, and ID bracelet. However, many costumes are considerably more expensive, with elaborate feathers, frills, and headpieces. For its 2016 “Emilice” costume, Harts was charging \$3,000 (U.S.). One might think that even the medium-priced costumes (around \$1,000) would be prohibitively expensive for many Trinis, especially since the outfits are essentially worn once—on Carnival Tuesday—and then thrown away (except, perhaps, for the shoes). Nevertheless, playing mas is a high priority for tens of thousands of Trinis, even if it means saving up money from Ash Wednesday on for next year’s Carnival. As one observer wrote, “Carnival women will give up playing mas only if they are in the last stages of pregnancy or actual childbirth.”⁹ Each year about 100,000 of those playing mas are foreign tourists or Trinis living abroad who return for Carnival to march with their favorite bands. With the costume fee come snacks and beverages on Monday and Tuesday, along with toilet facilities and first-aid personnel on call.

Revelers choose their mas bands according to various criteria. Many groups of friends march every year with the same “pretty mas” band, which has the feel of a big, happy tribe. Others choose by costume, or according to which soca bands or stars will perform on the flatbed trucks that accompany the bands. Some people gravitate to the more artistic bands, which included those of Peter Minshall, Brian MacFarlane, and Wayne Berkeley until their recent retirements. Minshall (a white Trini, b. 1941) had a distinctive vision of mas as a work of performance art, a sort of gargantuan street theater, rather than merely a festive parade around some whimsical theme. His 1983 mas, titled “Mancrab/River,” was representative. On the first day, his entourage—2,500 people strong—proceeded clad in spotless white robes, led by a pristine “washerwoman” figure. The next day, a monstrous, thirty-foot-high mechanical crab killed the washerwoman, at which point all the other participants doused their white robes with colorful dyes, dramatizing man’s destruction of nature. Such extravaganzas won Minshall many thousands of fans and eager participants, as well as several annual prizes. Other revelers may prefer bands with skimpier, lighter costumes, more suitable for dancing and cavorting.¹⁰

Producing these tens of thousands of costumes requires, and sustains, an entire cottage industry of Carnival artisans, ranging from legions of ordinary seamstresses and tailors to the skilled welders and craftsmen that assemble the massive Costume King and Queen entries. Most of these workers are paid, of course, but for many it is a labor of love. Brian MacFarlane, one of the most brilliant mas designers, claims he never made a penny from the art and cited inadequate state support as one of the reasons he retired from the scene in 2012. While some costumes have been assembled in China, most are made in

family-style “mas camps,” where workers sit at tables chatting and operating their sewing machines, glue guns, and paint brushes. Aside from making the pretty mas outfits, the craftsmen are also constructing two huge costumes for the Costume King and Queen competition. These extraordinary works of art are not unveiled until Dimanche Gras, at which point they are paraded on-stage, each borne by a single person. After Carnival, they might be shipped around to other island festivities, but sooner or later, rather than finding a home in some huge warehouse museum, they are junked.

Anyone perusing the mas bands’ websites will notice that most of the costumes displayed are for women. In fact, the mas bands are thoroughly dominated by women, and some of the larger bands have women-only sections, just as soca is in some respects a women’s dance music. As has often been noted, the predominance of women in Carnival parallels the increasing dominance of women in other sectors of Trinidadian life, including among teachers, lawyers, doctors, and college students. In addition to splurging on costumes, many women will join expensive gyms in order to look their best in the mas bands. However, having a “hard body” is not obligatory. Carnival is an occasion for women to “let it all hang out,” whether they are slim or shaped like Dame Lorraine. Costume designers, accordingly, must offer outfits in all sizes, ranging from petite to XXXL.

The formal uncorking of Carnival itself begins with j’ouvert (joovay, *jouvert*, from the French *jour ouvert*) at 2:00 A.M. on Monday. In j’ouvert, the most overt vestige of the “ole-mas” or *jamette camboulay*, revelers caked with mud, oil, paint, and powder or costumed as ghouls drink, cavort, and wine their way to dawn, accompanied by small steelbands and old-style drumming. Enthusiasts may opt to join organized j’ouvert mas bands such as Silver Mudders and Red Ants. Hard-core revelers may party at clubs until they proceed to j’ouvert.

By mid-morning on Monday, j’ouvert’s “dirty mas” revelers are mostly dispersed—or, perhaps, conked out on a sidewalk. Port of Spain’s streets are now dominated by the pretty mas bands, whose participants, numbering in the tens of thousands, are starting to jam and wine or else “chip” (a sort of rhythmic stepping to the music) their way toward the Savannah. Monday is a somewhat informal day for the mas processions, with many people in only “half-costume” or a specially provided “Monday costume.” The mas processions also include steelbands, dance bands, and deejayed sound systems mounted on flatbed trucks, all pumping out the new soca hits at deafening volume and surrounded by throngs of dancers and revelers.

Tuesday is the proper “Day of the Bands,” when only those in full costume can parade in the street, and onlookers can appreciate the extraordi-

nary spectacle the color-coordinated bands present. Those offended by the sight of women's bodies should stay at home, as the mas bands are full of women who delight in "getting on bad"—especially in front of cameras. At some point, each band will proceed across the vast stage at the Savannah, where, among other onlookers, judges will observe them and choose a winning band.

While this is going on, other officials posted at specific sites are taking note of which soca songs the bandleaders, disc jockeys, and steelbands—in response to audience enthusiasm—have selected as favorites. After tallying their observations, the observers announce the most frequently played song as the Road March of the year, whose composer receives a cash prize. Thus, while the Calypso Monarch is selected by judges, the winning Road March is the choice of the people themselves, although in the slightly different category of "jam-and-wine" dance music. (Kitchener and Sparrow were the most frequent winners in the pre-soca era.)

No one could possibly attend all the major Carnival events, which are generally scheduled roughly as follows:

- One weekend before Dimanche Gras: soca and calypso semi-finals, Panorama
- The week before Dimanche Gras: Junior Calypso Monarch (school-children)
- Carnival weekend:
 - Saturday: Kiddie Carnival, Soca Monarch
 - Sunday (Dimanche Gras): Calypso Monarch, Costume King and Queen
 - Monday: J'ouvert (2:00 A.M.), mas bands (informal, "half-costume")
 - Tuesday: "Day of the Bands" (i.e., mas bands in full costume and proper formation)

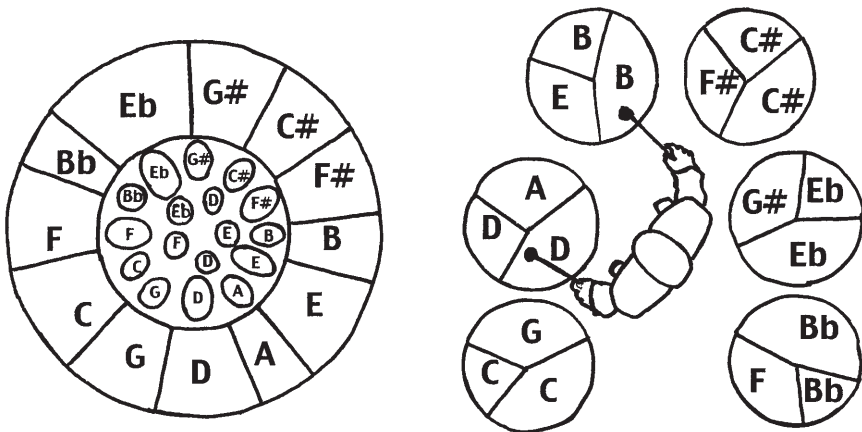
Festivities per se generally come to a sober end on Ash Wednesday, when many people "lime" at the beach, nurse hangovers, and attempt to deal with PCD, or post-Carnival depression.

The Port of Spain Carnival is, of course, the biggest and most renowned, but smaller towns like Chaguanas, Couva, and Carapichaima stage their own regional festivities. These are much less grandiose, to be sure, but they also feature more of the traditional Carnival characters—Moko Jumbies, devilish Jab Molassies and Jab-Jabs, Midnight Robbers, and sailors—which have tended to be eclipsed in Port of Spain by the collective pretty mas bands.



Pan-round-the-neck band, with flag woman and some "ole' mas" characters.
 (Photograph by Peter Manuel.)

Left: Pitch configuration for soprano pan (also called lead or melody pan).
Right: Configuration for six bass pans, with player.



On one level, Carnival is the occasion for an extraordinary amount of artistic creativity, including the soca, calypso, and steelband performances, the gyrations of revelers, and the brilliant costumes of the mas designers. On another level, Trinians cherish Carnival as a joyous celebration of a national character based on fun and unity, in which one can wine on any bumsee, whether of a lover, relative, or an anonymous reveler. As one Trinidadian put it, “What I love about Carnival is to be dancing madly in the street, to see some big minister jamming next to me and give him a big hug or pour beer on his head, whatever; Carnival is when we all really become one.” Its popularity and importance can be gauged by the fact that the Monday and Tuesday events in Port of Spain generally draw about 700,000 participants and revelers, or about two-thirds of the entire country’s population. For outsiders, it is a unique tourist attraction, while for most locals it is the focal reference point of the year. As Mighty Sparrow sang in 1957:

The biggest bacchanal is in Trinidad Carnival
 Regardless of color, creed, or race, jump up and shake your waist
 So jump as you mad, this is Trinidad; we don’t care who say we bad.

Steelband Music

Trinidad is internationally famous not only for calypso and Carnival but also as the home of the steel pan (steel drum). The invention of the steel pan is testimony to the ingenuity and creative perseverance of Afro-Trinidadians in the face of British cultural repression. As mentioned earlier, after the British banned the use of drums in Carnival mas and *camboulays* processions, revelers fashioned bamboo-bamboo ensembles by beating with sticks on bamboo tubes (and often on the heads of rival band members). The bamboo-bamboo bands combined neo-African-style call-and-response singing with lively, syncopated rhythms. In the early 1900s, innovators started to supplement the clackety-clack of the bamboo by beating on available pieces of metal, producing what one witness called “a veritable babel of sound from drums, tubs, triangles, buckets, bamboos and bottles.”¹¹ As the vogue of so-called biscuit-tin bands rapidly spread, Port of Spain residents learned that they had to chain down their garbage-can lids to prevent them from being stolen. By 1940, some of the bands had discarded the bamboo altogether in favor of louder metal objects.

Oral histories differ as to who was responsible for the next step, but around 1939 someone discovered that distinct pitches, rather than a simple, crude bang, could be sounded on an empty fifty-five-gallon oil barrel (of which there were plenty lying around) if the concave head was dented in a



Pannists in the Skiffle Bunch Steelband, with “engine room” behind (at right). (Photograph by Peter Manuel.)

Bass pan setup. (Photograph by Peter Manuel.)



certain way. By the early 1940s, ingenious self-taught metallurgists in Port of Spain's hilly, lower-income neighborhoods like Laventille were learning how to dent and burn the heads to get three or four different pitches, enabling them to play simple bugle tunes and nursery rhymes. Later that decade, Ellie Mannette figured out how to get a diatonic scale so that the bandsmen could play any melody they chose. The next step was to tune the steel pans in a given band to one another and to develop different classes of pans, including "boom pans" for bass, tenor or "cello pans" for harmony, and sharp-sounding ping-pong drums for melody.

Pan fever subsequently took hold of lower-class neighborhoods like East Dry River, Watertown, and Laventille as bands practiced incessantly and jubilantly took their music to the streets. Activity came to peak during Carnival, when the steelbands were often hired to accompany sailor-mas bands. As responsorial *camboulay*-style singing dropped out of the picture, the bands took to playing all sorts of tunes, from folksongs and calypsos to film tunes and even classical pieces. For pan men raised in slums and lacking formal musical training, it became a matter of pride to play pieces by Schubert and Saint-Saens as well as by Sparrow and Swallow.

The British authorities tried to ban the steelbands because of the lowlife, "saga-boy" character of many of the bandsmen, the critics' view of the music as raucous cacophony, and the rowdy fights that often occurred when two bands encountered each other in the streets. (Such feuds were even waged from hospital beds after street brawls.) Policemen would often raid innocent rehearsals and, adding insult to injury, confiscate the drums and use them as garbage cans or flower pots. But by the late 1940s, free-spending tourists were coming to see the bands, and politicians were realizing that they could gain community support by patronizing them. A vehement public debate regarding the bands raged in newspapers, Parliament, and other forums. In the middle of that decade a decision was made to try to wean the bands from violence by legitimizing and even supporting them. So they were incorporated into Carnival and into stage and folkloric shows, and a national ensemble, the Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra (TASPO) was even sent to tour England in 1951. Upright Trinidadians continued to regard pan men as hoodlums, and brawls persisted until the early 1960s. As one Trinidadian told me, "If you were in the winning Panorama band, you didn't dare show your face in town for weeks." Nevertheless, by that time the bands had largely been coaxed out of feuding, had become an integral part of Carnival, and had been taken up avidly by upper-class "college boys" and in other West Indian islands, as well.

In the subsequent decades, pan flourished as the state promoted it as a national symbol and established the Panorama competition in 1963.

Businesses also patronized ensembles, which changed their names accordingly—for example, to the Amoco Renegades. Steelband activity became increasingly focused on Carnival, when large ensembles on wheeled racks or flatbed trucks—largely replacing the old “pan sides” or pan-’round-the-neck groups—could march along with the mas bands. Accordingly, the formerly diverse repertoire largely gave way to renditions of current calypsos. However, during this period Carnival processions also came to feature sound systems on flatbed trucks that drowned out the steelbands. Pan music instead came to be featured primarily at the Panorama competition and, from the 1980s on, the Steelband Music Festival in late summer. Smaller community steelbands are also heard at various other occasions throughout the year.

Steelbands have long since outgrown their underworld associations and, indeed, have come to be seen as a wholesome activity that can keep teens off the streets and out of trouble. Pan has developed into a unique form of amateur, collective music making. Trinidad today hosts more than a hundred bands, from serious adult bands to school bands and small “stage sides” that do various sorts of commercial gigs like weddings and cruise-ship concerts. Many Trinidadian youths—especially girls—play in school bands. Some musicians manage to earn a living playing, but most either perform as a hobby or need to “scrunt”—that is, take other jobs or struggle to make ends meet. Steel pans cost money, so the bands, far from being purely grassroots entities, have to rely on some sort of institutional or commercial support, as Trinis, although fond of pan music, will seldom pay to hear it. While the steelbands to some extent have also lost their intimate links to specific neighborhoods, their membership has also grown to include women, East Indians, white Trinis, and others who were once marginal to the scene.

Scattered around the country’s towns are many dozens of pan yards where instruments are stored and played. In the two months before Carnival, the pan yards come alive as musicians rehearse nightly for long stretches. Generally, the band either hires an arranger or has its own, who provides an arrangement of a contemporary soca or calypso hit. The arranger must choose a song that lends itself well to steelband rendition. Lord Kitchener was one calypsonian who composed his elaborate pieces with the steelbands in mind. The arranger must make the song sound fresh and original and must know how to get a clean and clear sound out of an ensemble of similar-sounding instruments. Often, several bands will be performing versions of the same song—sometimes arranged by the same person for different bands. A few top bands, like Boogie Sharpe’s Phase II Pan Groove, may introduce original compositions, especially for the Steelband Music Festival, but audiences prefer to hear the familiar current hits. Sometimes a song will be

written for a steelband and also recorded by a singer as a promotional tool. Learning a song takes a long time, as band members do not read music and must learn by rote. Even a few of the leading pan arrangers cannot read music, but they nevertheless devise brilliantly intricate and driving arrangements. Spectators and supporters also turn out for rehearsals at the best yards to listen as the arrangements evolve while enjoying beer and *aloo* (potato) pies sold by vendors.

During Carnival, the pans themselves are mounted on frames with wheels so that they can be moved from place to place, and especially to the Savannah stage. The ensemble, which can number up to the decreed limit of 120 musicians, becomes like a huge ship, complete with various floats, racks, and a roof. Its prow is formed by the bass drums, some of which point outward like cannon. Mounted above the surrounding tenor, cello, and melody pans is the “engine room,” a rhythm section consisting of drum kit, congas, and men beating brake drums and wheel hubs. The focus of pan activity is the Panorama competition, whose finals take place in the Savannah stadium on the weekend preceding that of Dimanche Gras and that the audience turns into a marathon party. The pan competitions feature several levels and categories, including Pan around the Neck, Traditional Band, Conventional Band, and the top level of Large Steelband.

In the early decades, steel pans were made by cottage craftsmen who, in the case of a melody pan, would saw off the “skirt” of an oil barrel, “sink” the head into a concavity by hammering it, sear it with fire, and then hammer precisely shaped oval indentations in the head for the individual pitches. By the 1980s, tuners—who are skilled professionals—would use strobotuners to help get the overtones that give pan its sharp and sparkling timbre. Nowadays pans are likely to be freshly constructed rather than made from oil drums. They have also become considerably more expensive. Replacing the lumpen-proletarian amateurs who made the first pans, trained artisans and metallurgists in Trinidad and elsewhere have developed new pan-making techniques, and one can buy factory-made pans from makers such as Pan-yard Inc., in Akron, Ohio, as advertised on the company’s website. But before you click on “Buy Now,” you had better check the price: more than \$4,000 for a basic melody pan.

Steelband has become an international phenomenon, making some Trinis at once proud and fretful that their contribution may be forgotten. Steelbands are found not only throughout the West Indies but also in Europe (especially in the United Kingdom), North America, Japan, and elsewhere. Most such bands may retain a Trini orientation in their repertoire and style, but some consider themselves equal or superior to their Trini counterparts.



Labor Day Carnival, Brooklyn, New York. (Photograph by Peter Manuel.)

Much of the repertoire of top bands and individual players has also outgrown its calypso roots. The gifted American pannist Andy Narell showed how the instrument could be used in jazz, and Trini soloists such as Liam Teague have taken pan playing to unprecedented levels of solo virtuosity.

Calypso and Carnival outside Trinidad

West Indians living in countries other than Trinidad and Tobago often take justified umbrage at outsiders' tendency to identify calypso and Carnival exclusively with Trinidad. It is true that Trinidad is the primary crucible of calypso and that its Carnival is by far the biggest and most extravagant in the West Indies. But other Caribbean islands have played their own roles in calypso's evolution. First of all, such calypso as existed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries appears to have been part of an Afro-French creole culture spread throughout the French Caribbean. Indeed, the first extant appearance of the word *cariso* refers to a singer from Martinique. Martinique was later the source of the tune of "Rum and Coca-Cola," just as the Haitian folksong "Choucouné" provided the melody for "Yellow Bird." West Indian immigrants to the more affluent Trinidad have long enriched that island's music with their own traditions. And aside from the Grenadan-born Sparrow, several major figures have emerged more recently in the calypso world who hail from other countries, including Arrow (Montserrat), Gabby and Red Plastic Bag (Barbados), and producer Eddy Grant (Guyana).

Most West Indian countries also have their own versions of Carnival, of which some are recent gimmicks to attract tourists while others enjoy authentic grassroots popularity. The festivities on the island of Carriacou, as documented by Donald Hill, are typical. Old-style Carnival there commenced with informal calypso singing, family *camboulay* feasts, and stick fighting with calinda songs on Sunday night. Early Monday morning, a rowdy j'ouvert would take place to the accompaniment of steelbands. The rest of Monday and Shrove Tuesday would be devoted to traditional masquerade-band processions and "speech mas," in which two opposing orators (called *paywoes*, shortness, or kings), supported by local sidekicks, would hurl insults at each other and recite flowery speeches from Shakespeare (usually *Julius Caesar*) in a sort of Afro-Saxon call-and-response fashion. In recent decades, under Trinidadian influence, the calypso singing and mas processions have been organized into formal tent competitions held at schools. With most of the various islands holding their own festivals, Carnival and calypso now thrive year-round, albeit in different locales, as in

Nassau's Caribbean Muzik Festival, Barbados's Crop Over, and Antigua's Carnival—not to mention Toronto's Caribana festival; the late August Carnival in Notting Hill, London; and a quite substantial Carnival in Atlanta, Georgia, which has developed into a strong outpost of West Indian emigrant culture. Top calypso and soca performers can try to support themselves by island-hopping after Trinidad's blowout.

Last but not least is another island: Long Island—or, more specifically, Brooklyn, which, as home to more than half a million West Indians, is the largest West Indian city outside Jamaica. Brooklyn's West Indian community has long been dynamic and distinguished, its members renowned (or by some, begrudged) for their industriousness and economic progress. The community has generated such notables as Shirley Chisholm, Sidney Poitier, Kool Herc, Stokely Carmichael, and, among second-generation members, musicians such as Africa Bambaataa, LL Cool J, and Heavy D. Accordingly, the city has also become a center for Trinidadian music, just as it did with French Caribbean and Latin music. In the latter 1900s, New York became the hub of the West Indian recording industry, due to the city's concentrated population and the endemic piracy in the West Indies. Several calypsonians, from Calypso Rose to Mighty Sparrow himself, settled in New York, performing regularly for mixed Caribbean and Anglo audiences at venues like S.O.B.'s. West Indians dominate entire areas of Brooklyn and Queens, and transplanted traditions from parang to pan thrive there.

But needless to say, New York is not exactly a Caribbean city, and its West Indian culture has naturally taken on a flavor distinct from that of its island counterparts. For one thing, there is much more social mixing among the diverse West Indian communities than would occur in the Caribbean. Barbadians ("Bajans"), Guyanese, Trininis, and others do maintain their own social clubs, but living in such close proximity, it is inevitable that they intermingle, intermarry, and develop a more unified sense of identity. At the same time, many young West Indians increasingly identify with African Americans, adopting hip-hop fashions, mannerisms, and music as their own, often to the dismay of their parents. (Conversely, quite a few African Americans with West Indian friends join steelbands and mas processions.) As a result, the typical New York West Indian may have various overlapping ethnic self-identities—for example, as Trinidadian, as West Indian, as black, and even as American. Musical tastes reflect these intersections, as young Trini-Americans grow up enjoying rap and R&B as well as Machel Montano.

The U.S. West Indian community's main occasion to celebrate its identity is the Labor Day Parade, or West Indian Day Parade, in which mas groups,

steelbands, and trucks with sound systems and accompanying dancers work their way down Brooklyn's Eastern Parkway. This event may have started as a miniature version of Trinidad's Carnival, but it has long since acquired its own character. For one thing, it is hardly miniature, as it draws about 2 million people to the avenue, although most come to watch rather than to actively participate. Further, its mas bands—such as Sesame Flyers—are growing in size and sophistication. More significant, the Labor Day Parade has much more of a pan-West Indian character than does its Trinidadian counterpart, as it features processions and bands from Haiti, the Indo-Caribbean community, and all of the various West Indian islands, some of which have no particular Carnival traditions of their own. It thus celebrates both the diversity and the unity of the West Indian community. As the ever quotable Sparrow put it in “Mas in Brooklyn,” from 1969:

You can be from St. Clair or from John John,
 in New York, all that done.
 They haven't to know who is who;
 New York equalize you. Bajan, Grenadian, Jamaican, tout moun
 [everybody],
 drinking dey rum, beating dey bottle and spoon,
 and no one who see me can honestly say,
 they don't like to be in Brooklyn on Labor Day.

The Brooklyn Carnival seems to be marred each year by incidents of violence, which some Trinis insist is perpetrated by people other than the fun-loving West Indians. Such mayhem has led city administrations to restrict and, in the opinion of many, over-regulate the event, including by closing it down at 4:00 P.M., before the hundreds of vendors have had time to make a decent profit.

The growth and increasing self-consciousness of the community led, among other things, to an unsuccessful movement to rename Eastern Parkway “Caribbean Parkway.” This request evoked little enthusiasm from the several thousand Hasidic Jews who also live on the parkway, whose menfolk can be seen on Labor Day wearing their black suits and derby hats in the sweltering heat, watching the raucous Carnival parade wanly from their front porches. In 1994, the Hasidic community made its own conflicting request for use of the parkway in connection with Jewish holidays. In a multicultural society, such are the issues that must continually be negotiated, in a spirit, one hopes, of compromise and mutual respect.

Further Reading

Trinidadian scholars have produced several excellent, though hard to find, books on calypso and carnival—notably, Gordon Rohlehr, *Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad* (Port of Spain, Trinidad: Self-published, 1990); Errol Hill, *The Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972). See also Donald Hill, *Calypso Calaloo: Early Carnival Music in Trinidad* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993); Stephen Steumpfle, *Steelband Movement: The Forging of a National Art in Trinidad and Tobago* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995); Peter Mason, *Bacchanal! The Carnival Culture of Trinidad* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); Jocelyne Guilbault, *Governing Sound: The Cultural Politics of Trinidad's Carnival Musics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); and Kevin Birth, *Bacchanalian Sentiments: Musical Experiences and Political Counterpoints in Trinidad* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008).

East Indian Music and Big Sounds from the “Small Islands”

East Indians in the West Indies

IT IS SUNDAY MORNING at the Newtown Hindu temple. As the neighborhood begins to awaken, the sounds of roosters crowing, songbirds chirping, and a distant Indian film song drift into the temple, where Jeevan Chowtie is preparing the room for the morning session. By 8:00 A.M., about two dozen Indian schoolchildren have trickled in and are seated on the floor, boys on one side and girls on the other. A ten-year-old boy tunes up a *tabla* drum pair, used in North Indian classical and light-classical music, while the other children flip through their songbooks. With Jeevan leading them on the harmonium (a box-shaped, accordion-like instrument), they start singing a bhajan, or Hindu devotional song, in the Hindi language: “Ishvar Allah tero nam, sab ko sammati de bhagwan” (Whether by the name of God or Allah, let everyone give respect).

The scene could be anywhere in North India, except that the temple architecture is a bit different and the children’s Hindi accents are slightly off. But they are close enough, for this is not India but Guyana, home to some 300,000 East Indians. These are not Amerindians but Indians whose ancestors came from India—the ones Christopher Columbus thought he had found in the Caribbean. Columbus was clearly confused in calling the Arawaks “Indians,” but the British partially rectified the misnomer by importing to the Caribbean some 425,000 peasants from India as indentured laborers between 1838 and 1917. The Dutch brought 35,000 more to Dutch Guiana, now Suriname. While some of these workers returned to India,

most stayed, and their descendants now constitute the largest ethnic groups in Trinidad and Guyana and more than a third of Suriname's population.

The Indians had been brought to work on the sugar plantations after emancipation in the 1830s, when most of the freed blacks, having had enough of working for "massa," drifted into towns and took up trades. The indentured workers moved into the slave barracks and suffered many of the same abuses, living lives of poverty, disease, and exploitation. However, many, after completing their years of indenture, started their own farms, raised families, and re-created many aspects of traditional North Indian village life. One Guyanese related to me that his grandfather told him, "The British tricked me into coming here to Guyana, but even so I would never go back to India." Most of the immigrants were illiterate, barefoot peasants, but over the generations their values of family solidarity and hard work enabled many to prosper, gradually expanding, in many cases, from farming into business. By the mid-twentieth century, Indians were coming to dominate not only agriculture but also commerce in Trinidad and Guyana. As they moved into towns, they interacted increasingly with Afro-Caribbeans, in ways that have been mostly friendly but sometimes colored by a sense of rivalry and tension.

With Trinidad known as the land of steelband and calypso and with Guyana and Suriname little known at all, the Indo-Caribbeans have had a rather low international profile. For that matter, even in the Caribbean the first generations had tended to remain somewhat insular and isolated on sugar plantations. Such isolation, along with other factors, helped the Indians retain much more of their ancestral homeland's culture than could West Indian blacks. The Indians also came more recently to the Caribbean than the Africans and were not subjected to the same sorts of cultural repression. They could also look back to a mainstream North Indian Hindi-language high culture, with which they could maintain some ongoing contact through books, visits, and, since the 1940s, Indian films. In recent decades, the East Indians have entered their countries' economic, political, and cultural mainstreams, and their lively musical traditions have come into the open.

Indian music culture has had a tough time in Guyana, a poor country made poorer by the twenty-eight-year dictatorship of Forbes Burnham and his party, who were installed by the CIA in 1964 and whose policies bankrupted the nation and provoked nearly half the population to leave. Both Indo-Caribbean and Afro-Saxon creole culture have fared much better in nearby Trinidad. The country as a whole is much more affluent, and although many Indians have felt that they were discriminated against by the previous black-dominated administrations, Trinidad's democratic government and relative prosperity have allowed the Indians to develop quite a lively and varied musical culture. One



Hindu temple in rural Guyana. (Photograph by Peter Manuel.)

venue for this has been *Mastana Bahar*, an ongoing amateur competition series in which singers and dancers compete in weekly contests that are held around the island and broadcast on radio and TV. Most of the performances consist of renditions of Hindi film songs and dances produced originally in studios in far-away Mumbai. While some Indians lament that these imported songs tend to drown out the distinctively local Indo-Trinidadian traditional musics, most Indo-Trinis would counter that through Indian film music they are connecting with the much larger and richer culture of their ancestral homeland. Many Indo-Caribbeans can merrily sing along with dozens of film songs while only vaguely, if at all, understanding the words.

Most of the indentured immigrants came from the poor and backward Bhojpuri region of what is now the North Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. After the ships of indentured immigrants stopped coming in 1917, Indians were totally cut off from that region, and the Bollywood films, film songs, and Hindu holy men that started coming decades later had nothing to do with the rustic, rural Bhojpuri culture that lived on like an undercurrent in Indo-Caribbean life. Despite being isolated from the ancestral Bhojpuri hinterland, and despite the decline of the Bhojpuri dialect of Hindi as a spoken language, Indo-Caribbeans were able to maintain many musical traditions brought by their ancestors.

One such tradition has been the Bhojpuri nuptial songs sung by women

at certain points during a Hindu wedding. With every generation there are fewer elderly “aunties” who remember these songs, but nowadays Trinidadian women can learn songs through booklets, CDs, or evening classes, and a wedding host can also hire professional troupes to sing them. Every now and then some pop singer will “discover” one of these catchy tunes, jazz it up with modern instruments, and make a hit out of it, as did Rikki Jai with the song “Mor Tor” and Sonny Mann did with “Lutela.” A few oldsters are also still able to sing snippets of an old Bhojpuri narrative song form called *birha*. When I played recordings of these Guyanese singers for elderly *birha* singers in the Bhojpuri region of India, they laughed and said, “That’s the old *birha* style, no one here has sung that way for generations.” Such instances reveal that while Indo-Caribbeans, like Yoruba descendants in Cuba, have lost much of the culture of their ancestral homelands, they have also retained entities that have declined or even disappeared in those places.

Another Bhojpuri traditional genre that survives—and, indeed, thrives—among Indo-Caribbeans is a group song form called chowtal, which is heard during the Hindu springtime festival called Phagwa (or Holi). During this festival, Hindus take to the streets, singing and playfully dousing one another with colored powder or talc. At temples and other venues, groups of enthusiasts—young and old, male and (to a lesser extent) female—will gather to sing boisterous chowtal songs, reading the Romanized Hindi words from booklets or photocopied sheets. A chowtal song segues through tricky rhythmic modulations, with medium-tempo sections accelerating to exciting climaxes and then settling down again. A group will rehearse in order to negotiate the shifts in tight unison and in a spirit of great fun and camaraderie. Whether in Trinidad, Guyana, or New York, competitions are held in which dozens of groups participate. Meanwhile, Indians in the far-off Fiji Islands of the Pacific—whose ancestors came from the same region, during the same indentureship period—sing the same chowtals, in the same way, as do enthusiasts in India’s Bhojpuri region, even though these three communities haven’t had any contact with one another for a century.

Chowtal: An East Indian Folk Song

Afro-Caribbean rhythms are rightly celebrated for their richness and complexity, but they are not the only source of rhythmic vitality in Caribbean music. The traditional music of India, both folk and classical, displays other sorts of rhythmic complexity and drive, relying more on linear intricacies than on African-style simultaneous layerings of interlocking patterns. One common feature of Indian music is the use of “additive” meters, often involving mea-

sures of odd-numbered beats. Chowtal, a North Indian folksong genre transplanted to the Caribbean, uses such a rhythm, which is also common in other North Indian styles and in Indo-Caribbean “local-classical” singing.

The basic chowtal meter can be regarded as in seven beats, divided into three plus four (hence the term “additive”). You can get the feel of it by counting “one-two-three-one-two-three-four-one-two-three-one-two-three-four” repeatedly, clapping on the underlined beats. A typical chowtal refrain is given in Musical Example 20.¹



Musical Example 20: Chowtal.

While chowtal and wedding songs are sung essentially the same way as they were 150 years ago, as brought by the immigrants, other kinds of transplanted music were developed by generations of local performers into totally original forms, without borrowing significantly from Afro-Caribbean or Western musics. One such music is tassa drumming. In India and the Caribbean, a typical tassa ensemble consists of two or more shallow kettle drums (themselves called “tassa”), strapped around the waist and played with two sticks; a large, heavy bass drum held up with a shoulder strap; and a pair of cymbals called “jhanjh.” In the Indian regions whence the immigrants came, tassa groups are not uncommon, but they enjoy no particular prominence, and their playing tends to be fairly straightforward and simple. In Trinidad, by contrast, generations of local musicians took up tassa playing with great zeal and turned it into a rich and lively performance tradition. Today there are more than a hundred tassa groups in Trinidad and a few dozen more in New York, Toronto, and other diasporic sites. Almost every Hindu wedding will feature one or two tassa groups, who are hired to play at certain points, provoking animated dancing. In the St. James neighborhood of Port of Spain, tassa groups also play central roles in Muharram—or Hosay, as it is called locally—a colorful commemoration in which Shi’a Muslims honor their seventh-century martyrs by constructing elaborate “taziya” floats, which are paraded through the streets to the accompaniment of massive tassa ensembles. Tassa groups also participate in formal competitions and play at various other events. Indeed, on a typical Sunday afternoon, one can stand almost anywhere in Trinidad (except, perhaps in the hilly northern jungles) and hear tassa playing, wafting over hill and dale like distant thunder, from some festive event.



Tassa drumming is hot, exciting, and thunderously loud, and it is also a rich and complex art form. A tassa group, as guided by the lead drummer, must have a solid command of at least a dozen composite rhythms (with names like *tikora*, *chaubola*, *dingolay*, and *nagara*), most of which have complicated internal cadences and lead-drum patterns that must be played smoothly and with flair. At a wedding, a tight band will provoke young and old to “wine their waists” and “get on bad.” Comments on YouTube tassa clips reflect the same enthusiasm, with statements like, “Meh feel strong again damn cyah stop wine me backside woi” and “This music hav my hips and waist moving from one end of Trinidad to the next!” Indeed, while in other islands “hot” drumming tends to be associated with Afro-Caribbeans, in Trinidad, ever since the British stamped out *camboulay* it has been the East Indians who dominate the field.² (The Trinis could also play circles around most tassa drummers in India, who tend to be casual players merely expected to make some noisy ruckus during processions.)

Another lively Indo-Caribbean drumming tradition can be found in the South Indian-derived

Tassa drummers, with taziya float, at Hosay commemoration in Port of Spain, Trinidad, in 1993.
(Photographs by Peter Manuel.)



Dancing to tassa drummers (Jason Nandoo, at left) in New York.
(Photograph by Peter Manuel.)

Mariamman worship. In these ceremonies—especially vital among Indo-Guyanese—vigorous rhythms played on large circular *tappu* frame drums accompany spirit possession and goat sacrifice. Although this “Madrasi” religion, with its rustic traditions, has tended to be looked down on by other Indo-Caribbeans, in recent years its followers have sought new legitimacy by reconnecting with South Indian counterparts via the Internet and via social interactions with “India people” in New York, and the religion has gained many new followers who are attracted by its ecstatic practices.³

Another sort of neo-traditional East Indian music is what Indo-Caribbeans call “local-classical singing,” consisting of Hindi-language songs rendered by a lead singer accompanied by harmonium, dholak barrel drum, and a metal rod (*dantal*) struck with a steel rod. Local-classical music is a mixture of old tunes brought from North India, light-classical songs on records that were imported from India in the 1930s, somewhat garbled elements of North Indian classical music, and some features unique to Indo-Caribbean culture. As with tassa, after 1917 local professional singers were isolated from India and left to their own devices in reconstructing a professional, semiclassical traditional music.⁴ As a result, the various imported and half-remembered



“Local-classical” musicians (Rooplal Girdharie and party) in Trinidad, playing dholak, two dantals, and harmonium. (Photograph by Peter Manuel.)

musical elements were jumbled up and then reassembled into an idiom that acquired its own rigor and beauty. As Trinidadian musician Mungal Patasar described the music to me, “You take a capsule from India, leave it here for a hundred years, and this is what you get.” If an occasional visitor from India happened to hear local-classical music, he would invariably be flabbergasted by it, and meanwhile, on the rare occasions that a local-classical musician happened to hear classical music from India, he generally found it boring. As one told me, “Dat music ain’t got no spice to it.”

At a wedding where local-classical musicians are hired, one or two singers, who also play harmonium, will sing all night, with the dholak drum (heavily amplified, like the singing) provided a bubbling, rollicking rhythmic underpinning. But since few people understand Hindi nowadays, local-classical music is declining dramatically and has all but disappeared in Guyana. Even when it is performed, by 1:00 A.M. or so people are in a dancing mood and call out, “Give us some chutney, man!” The singers then oblige, performing chutney, meaning up-tempo songs in folk style with simple, catchy tunes. At that point, men and women commence the most uninhibited and animated dancing, continuing until mid-morning.

Chutney is a different sort of mixture of old and new, in some respects representing the process of bringing a closed family tradition into the public sphere. Chutney’s roots lie in the lively songs and dances that Hindu village women would perform—with no men around—at weddings in the ancestral Bhojpuri region. In the absence of male onlookers, women could delight in making the songs and dances as comically lewd as they liked. These tradi-

tions were transplanted intact to the Caribbean, where until the 1960s and '70s many elder women still spoke the Bhojpuri dialect of Hindi. Around that time, chutney—as these songs came to be known—literally came out of the closet, as Indo-Trinidadians, no doubt influenced by libertine creole culture, seem to have decided that women needn't confine themselves to a stuffy back room, and that it was OK for them to sing and dance among the other wedding guests, who were mostly family and friends anyway. And just as familiarity with the old songs started to wane, recordings and radio brought lively chutney-style folksongs from nearby Suriname, where Bhojpuri (there called Sarnami) is still widely spoken.

The next step happened in the mid-1980s, when many Indo-Trinis came to feel that chutney was too much fun to be confined to the occasional wedding, and entrepreneurs started holding public chutney dances at open-air clubs throughout the island, with live bands (originally featuring the traditional harmonium, dholak, dantal, and voice). In effect, folk chutney had survived just long enough to be made into a pop dance phenomenon. A tempest-in-a-teapot polemic exploded within the Indian community, as moralists denounced the ribald songs and especially the bawdy dancing of women, who were supposed to be the pristine upholders of decency, propriety, honor, modesty, and so on (while men can act any way they please).

Over the next decade, chutney definitively trumped those hoary values, despite the fulminations of the pandits. Chutney fêtes have come to be held nearly every weekend in Trinidad. These generally commence as film-music concerts, but after a few hours the beer takes effect, the chutney band starts, and listeners—young and old, male and female—push aside the folding chairs, and a joyous pandemonium takes over. The dance style is unique, combining vigorous pelvic “wining” with graceful hand-and-arm gestures deriving from Indian



Chutney dancers in Trinidad.
(Photograph by Peter Manuel.)



A temple prayer session turned chutney fete. (Photograph by Peter Manuel.)

folk dance. The result is a delight to behold, especially in its pervading sense of fun and its good, clean, wholesome, outrageous sexiness.⁵

By the 1990s the traditional harmonium-and-dholak-based chutney group had increasingly come to be replaced by a more modern band with synthesizer and drum machine, which generally provided a soca-style rhythm. The soca beat mixes easily with the funky, heartbeat chutney rhythm (what Indians in India would call *kaherva*), and the result was soon dubbed “chutney-soca.” This hybrid genre soon became a fad among Indians in Trinidad, Guyana, and the secondary diasporas in New York and Canada. Some chutney-soca retains a strong Indian flavor in its Hindi lyrics, traditional chutney-style melodies, and the thumping and pumping dholak. But English lyrics have become increasingly common, and the dholak, which is difficult to amplify, has tended to drop out, so that there is often little chutney in the chutney-soca. As with calypso, some of the vocalists sing in tune and some don’t. Those who do, like Trinidad’s Rikki Jai and Suriname’s Kries Ramkhelawan, are mini-stars in much demand. A few women have enlivened the scene and perpetuated the genre’s prehistory as a women’s idiom. Asha Ramcharan sings:

When we were friendin’ [courting] you were always at my side
As soon as we get married you forget you had a bride

Dem fellows you limin’ [hanging out] with, you feel dem is your friend
 If I was a slack woman I sure take one of dem.

The flowering of the chutney scene in the 1990s paralleled the increased movement of East Indians away from rural sugar plantations and into the political, economic, and cultural mainstreams of Trinidadian and Guyanese society. Despite prevailing tensions between the two sets of communities, in both countries the greater prominence and demographic growth of Indians have increasingly obliged everyone, including the traditionally more dominant Afro-Caribbeans, to acknowledge the multiracial nature of their societies. For their part, while Indians take pride in having left behind such ancestral evils as dowry, caste discrimination, and Hindu-Muslim enmity, they are proud of their ethnic ancestry. On the whole, they cherish their ties to India and in some cases look down on Afro-Caribbeans for having adopted the slavemasters’ religion and lost touch with their traditional culture. Meanwhile, some Afro-Caribbeans continue to regard Indians as unpatriotic foreigners—especially, for example, when they cheer for the visiting cricket teams from India or Pakistan.

In its own way, music has mirrored the complex relations between the two groups, and it has often been the focus of debates about race relations. In the 1990s, when chutney-soca burst on the scene, many hailed it as a felicitous fusion of Indian and creole musics that embodied the emergence of Indians on the pop scene, their ability to celebrate Indianness and be local at the same time, and the new degree of racial cultural interaction. The musical vogue coincided with the 1996 election of an Indian prime minister, Basdeo Panday, in Trinidad. That year, a catchy chutney (“Lutela”) by an elderly Indian, Sonny Mann, became a national hit and “Road March” played by steelbands and took him to the finals of the Carnival season’s Soca Monarch competition. (There, unfortunately, he was pelted with bottles and cans by unappreciative Afro-Trinidadians shouting, “We ain’t want to hear de coolie.”) The following year, a separate, privately funded Chutney-Soca Monarch competition was inaugurated, which has since become a fixture of the Carnival festivities and invariably features several Afro-Trinidadian competitors, who are no doubt attracted by the prizes and are welcomed and enjoyed by Indian audiences.

For their part, calypsos traditionally tended either to portray East Indians as bizarre and exotic or, more typically, to ignore them. A celebrated case of the latter tendency was Black Stalin’s 1979 “Caribbean Unity,” an appeal to Afro-Caribbean solidarity:

Dem is one race, from de same place, that made the same trip,
on the same ship, de Caribbean man.

For obvious reasons, this message did not go over well with Indians, who are no longer content with being written out of their nations' history. However, that song by Stalin (who in fact has always supported racial harmony) was quite benign compared with the venomous and divisive "attack calypsos" that have come to be aired since the mid-1990s, as both friendly interaction and competitive tension between the races have increased. As one song put it:

Dey say it's Carnival, and it's kaiso time again
and for the Indian man, that means plenty pain.

More specifically, it means that Indians tend to avoid the calypso tents and often complain about how their tax dollars subsidize their denigration by singers like CroCro at the Monarch competition. (Said CroCro in a 1996 interview, "I'm not racist. Why, I had sex with an Indian woman just last week." His wife shrugged the remark off.) But it should also be noted that for each mean-spirited, clannish rant by CroCro and Sugar Aloes, there are usually a few songs that appeal for racial harmony. Some of them may be collaborative products, like the 1992 "Cry for Unity" written by the Afro-Trinidadian Ras Shorty I (formerly Lord Shorty) for Indian singer Rikki Jai, who has always tried to cross racial boundaries:

We both come down here by boat under the hands of the master,
I from India, you from Africa . . .
Between the two races since the days of slavery we was always
enemies, is time we try unity.

Shorty's song goes on to urge Indians and blacks to "mix up cultures"—and, indeed, the cultures have been mixing up for a long time. In Trinidad, one can buy halal pig tail (a sort of equivalent to kosher pork), hear a Catholic sermon by one Father Mohammad, and visit an all-purpose religious edifice known as the San Francique Hindu Mosque. East Indian singers like Jai and Drupatee Ramgoonai have made a splash in the soca scene, introducing tassa drums and other Indianisms. Drupatee's 1989 "Indian Soca" put the case plainly:

The music of the steel drums from Laventille
cannot help but mix with the rhythm from Caroni [an Indian area],

for it’s a symbol of how much we’ve come of age, . . .
 rhythm from Africa and India,
 blend together in a perfect mixture.

Similarly, the longtime leader of the Amoco Renegades, a top steelband, was an Indian, Jit Samaroo (1950–2016), and Shorty himself stated that the soca beat he invented was inspired partially by Indian *tassa* drumming (as heard in his hits from the late 1970s like “Endless Vibrations”). Meanwhile, calypsos like Sparrow’s “Maharajin” and self-described chutneys by the Afro-Trini Crazy (like “Pulbasia” and “Jammania”) have highlighted East Indian themes, and Indian radio and TV programs have proliferated. While some non-Indians in Trinidad, Guyana, and Suriname continue to regard such shows as ethnically divisive, a sense of cultural pluralism is becoming institutionalized in both Trinidad and Guyana. Also steadily increasing is the number of interracial marriages, one of whose products is the Trinidadian-born Onika Maraj (better known as Nicki Minaj). For its part, Trinidad—the proverbial land of steelband and calypso—is already being referred to more inclusively as the land of steelband, calypso, and chutney.

Small Island Traditions

Although Caribbean music has tended to be dominated by the bigger islands, the smaller islands, in their musical diversity and richness, have always constituted an important part of the soundscape. They have also contributed to the big-island musics, with, for example, the calypso and soca scenes being enriched by Mighty Sparrow (born in Grenada), Arrow (of “Hot Hot Hot” fame, from Montserrat), and the “Bajan Invasion” of Barbadian soca singers—not to mention Rihanna (another Bajan) and the honey-voiced Kevin Little of St. Vincent, with his 2004 quasi-dancehall hit “Turn Me On.” Several small islands have their own lively calypso scenes. But the small islands should also be appreciated as repositories of their own musical traditions. One might generalize that, taken individually, these music traditions might not have the richness or sophistication of big-island musics like traditional rumba or *son*. But they nevertheless have their own charm and flavor, and taken collectively they constitute a scene of much variety and interest.

Most of the islands in question are former British colonies, inhabited primarily by English-speaking descendants of enslaved West Africans and varying numbers of white people, whether longtime locals or foreign-born expatriates. In some islands, like St. Lucia and Dominica, there is a strong

French Caribbean heritage, and French Caribbean Creole is widely spoken. The islands range from tourist-heavy St. Thomas and Nassau to sleepy Dominica. Some, such as St. Lucia, are independent countries, while others, like the Virgin Islands, are still governed by Britain or the United States. Although there is little of the desperate poverty that one sees in Haiti, some islands have lost as much as half their population as people emigrate to find work or just to broaden their horizons. In places like Carriacou, relative isolation, insularity, and underdevelopment have contributed to the survival of unique music traditions. In other islands that are blessed with beaches, tourism can help sustain music and dance traditions, at least in staged forms.

Much small-island music can be grouped into a few familiar categories, especially in terms of their place on a continuum of African or European origins. On the neo-African side are musics like Curaçao's *tambú*, which feature the familiar Afro-Caribbean format of drums (usually three) and call-and-response singing. Variants of this pattern may use more informal percussion instruments but retain the Afro-Caribbean emphasis on lively rhythmic ostinatos and responsorial vocals.

There are many accounts from the slavery period of such performances, several of which mention not only African-derived “gumbay” drums but also stringed instruments like the “banjar” or “banye”—the ancestor of the banjo. One visitor described a call-and-response song he heard in 1790, which testified to the alienation of the slave from both his ancestral and new homelands:

If me want for go in a Ibo
 Me can't go there
 Since dem tief me from my Guinea
 Me can't go there
 If me want to go inna Kingstown
 Me can't go there
 Since massa go inna England
 Me can't go there.⁶

Several factors militated against the survival of festive neo-African traditions in the small islands. Aside from the cessation of slave imports after 1807, the intolerant British Protestant plantation owners and missionaries tended to repress African practices and were very successful at getting slaves to internalize their masters' Eurocentric prejudices. Thus, an 1814 account from Antigua, among others, describes the contempt with which some local-born fife-and-drum-playing slaves regarded the rowdy drumming and dancing of the African-born slaves.⁷ Recent decades, by contrast, have seen

a revalorization of the Afro-Caribbean musical heritage, which partially offsets the marked decline of such traditions.

Small-island music traditions also include the various styles of spirituals and hymns that are sung at church services and other occasions. Although the melodies and harmonies of these musics tend to be European in style, their rhythms, like those of gospel music, may be intense and syncopated, especially in the case of Pentecostal and Spiritual Baptist traditions, which are syncretic faiths that combine Protestant and African features.

Another category of music consists of the lively, percussion-dominated sounds that accompany Carnival or Junkanoo traditions. Some of these festivals, like those of Antigua and Barbuda, are relatively recent inventions aimed at tourists. However, some of the masquerade themes—such as that of the “Wild Indians” bands from St. Thomas—are in their own way thoroughly traditional. Like Barbadian fife-and-drum “tuk,” the Carnival ensembles may incorporate features derived from British marching bands. Several islands also have their small but colorful calypso scenes, which come alive at Carnival season, whenever that might be on the local calendar. One distinc-

“Wild Indian” band (now also known as “Traditional Indians”) during the annual Carnival procession in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, in 2004. (Photograph by Ken Bilby.)





Two members of the Rio Band performing benna in Falmouth, Antigua, in 2004. (Photograph by Ken Bilby.)

The Harmonites String Band with a performer on tuned steel cups in Kingstown, St. Vincent, in 2004. (Photograph by Ken Bilby.)





Vincentian boom drum band, with a steel pan added, in Rose Bank, St. Vincent, in 2004. (Photograph by Ken Bilby.)

tive, albeit obscure, calypso-style tradition is the music called “benna” of Antigua, whose songs might be accompanied by a banjo and a “bass pipe”—in this case made of PVC tubing. Nowadays, Trinidadian-style steelbands are also common on the smaller islands. Steel drums also work their way into string bands, as in the case of the Harmonites String Band of St. Vincent, in which the sole string instrument, the banjo, is also supplemented by a homemade tin-can xylophone.

Particularly prominent in the small islands are the varieties of secular creole dance musics that combine syncopated rhythms with European-style melodies and dancing. Some of these varieties can be seen as local efflorescences of string-band music, in which the melody (whether also sung or not) is provided by a fiddle, guitar, or banjo, accompanied by various instruments such as shak-shak (a shaker), some sort of scraper, a marimbula-type bass instrument, and perhaps a triangle, tambourine, or hand drum. Often, however, the melodic instrument is an accordion, a fife, or a harmonica. The accompanying dances often stem from the contradance family, in which men and women typically form two lines, and partners interact and separate as in a Virginia reel. (However, this format can also be combined with neo-African drumming, as in the Haitian-Cuban *tumba francesa*.) Scottish-derived jigs and reels, along with dances like “heel and toe,” can be found in such places as Tobago. Particularly common are variants of the British- and

French-derived quadrille, a set dance in which, typically, a suite of five or six “figures” (dance styles, each with a distinct musical section) is executed by four couples in a circle or square. Quadrille choreography requires some training and experience, which are valued accordingly by enthusiasts. The tunes played by the accompanying ensembles are generally European in style, and perhaps in actual derivation, although the rhythms may be brisk and syncopated. Hence, in local versions of the quadrille, or of the polka, waltz, reel, or mazurka, the rhythm may be so accelerated and syncopated and the melody so obscured by the loud drumming that they sound thoroughly Afro-Caribbean. Nevertheless, like string-band music in general, such traditions would have roots in plantation life, as slaves imitated the songs and dances of their masters or were engaged to perform such music for their masters’ entertainment.

In 1962, V. S. Naipaul wrote of one such dance tradition, with his typical mixture of condescension and insight:

By listening beyond the drums to the accordion, one could perceive the stringed instruments of two centuries ago, and see the dances which even now were only slightly negrofied, the atmosphere became thick and repellant with slavery, making one think of long hot days on the plantation, music at night from the bright windows of the estate house. . . . The music and motions of privilege, forgotten elsewhere, still lived here in a ghostly, beggared elegance: to this mincing mimicry the violence and improvisation and awesome skill of African dancing had been reduced.⁸

Modern academics might tend to regard such an uncharitable description as politically incorrect, in seeing quadrille and belair dancers as deculturated mimics of the old slave masters rather than as active reinventors of a tradition. Clearly, in cultivating their own versions of creole dances and songs, West Indians were adapting the materials available to them in ways that suited their own situations and sensibilities. But the truth is that most West Indians might at least implicitly share Naipaul’s disparagement, insofar as they have largely lost interest in such colonial-era dances. Except for some elders, most of today’s West Indians, on the small islands as well as in Jamaica and Trinidad, are thoroughly tuned in to the cosmopolitan sounds of Machel Montano and Vybz Kartel, not to mention Jay-Z and Beyoncé. Quadrille, on the whole, is for tourists, folklorists, and handfuls of elders.

But enough generalizations. Let’s go island-hopping, proceeding, for lack of a better way, from north to south.

To Americans, the Bahamas, with their fine beaches and proximity to Florida, are perhaps best known as a resort area, and the local population of some 225,000 predominantly Afro-Caribbeans is outnumbered by the more than 3 million tourists who visit each year. To entertain such visitors, hotel bands play “Day-O,” country and western, and whatever else is called for. At the same time, Bahamians have also cultivated their own distinctive music traditions. Religious music includes spirituals and “anthems,” which, like gospel music, may be sung in church, but they are also heard as festive, processional “rushin’ songs” in the Junkanoo parade. In the realm of secular music, quadrilles were traditionally danced to the accompaniment of a “rake ’n’ scrape” band, featuring accordion, a saw scraped with a piece of metal, a gumbay barrel drum, and possibly other instruments. The term “gumbay,” however, also denotes the topical songs that correspond to what others would call calypso. But the context in which the gumbay drum is most often heard is the Christmastime Junkanoo festival, with its rowdy street ensembles also featuring whistles, cowbells, foghorns, conches, bicycle horns, and, more recently, wind instruments like trumpets and saxes. Since the 1920s, the Junkanoo tradition has been revived, regulated, and promoted by the government as a tourist attraction, but it has its own appeal to locals, who constitute both spectators and participants in the music-and-dance groups, which can include more than a thousand people.⁹

Moving on to the Virgin Islands, to the east of Puerto Rico, one finds a music culture that in many ways is similar to that of the Bahamas. Historical references document the existence of a now largely extinct Afro-Caribbean dance genre accompanied by drumming and singing and called bamboula—a word that, like “calinda” (kalinda), denoted various sorts of similar genres throughout the Caribbean. Topical songs called *cariso* also flourished in St. Croix, although they are seldom heard today. Still performed in St. Croix, whether for tourists or local entertainment, are quadrilles and other European-derived dance forms, as accompanied by a “fungi band” or “scratch band”—so named for the *güiro*-type gourd scraper that plays alongside fiddle, accordion, other percussion instruments and, nowadays, electric guitar. Quadrilles and similar dances also survive in Montserrat, where they are part of a “jumbie dance”—“jumbie” being a West African-derived word here denoting both a drum and a spirit. Unfortunately, Montserrat has been cursed by volcanic eruptions since 1995, which have led to the emigration of all but about three thousand stalwarts.

In the islands of Dominica and St. Lucia, English colonial culture was imposed—in some respects, only superficially—on a more resilient layer of French Caribbean creole culture and language. Although these islands are

small, their rugged terrain traditionally impeded transportation and promoted the cultural isolation of individual communities. In Dominica, as in some other French Caribbean islands discussed in Chapter 6, one might still encounter drum-based Afro-Caribbean ensembles accompanying dances called *bèlè* or *belair*. Both church and state militated against Afro-Dominican culture until independence in 1965 led to a reappraisal of such traditions and a somewhat ephemeral vogue of *cadence-lypso*, a local mixture of Haitian *cadense* and calypso. In both Dominica and St. Lucia, as elsewhere, local versions of the quadrille (*kwadril*) have come to be seen by many people as relics of the colonial era. Since the early 1800s, performances of quadrilles and other dance genres in St. Lucia have taken place especially in the context of weekly meetings by two rival social-support societies, the La Rose and La Marguerite societies, which have branches in every town.

The French creole cultural layer found in islands like St. Lucia and Trinidad is absent in Barbados, where four-and-a-half centuries of uninterrupted British rule led to an even more thorough suppression of neo-African drumming and dance traditions. Hence, the drums used in the percussion-and-flute bands called *tuk*, heard nowadays at festivals, derive more from British regimental bands of the colonial era. But regardless of whether they can be traced to Africa, percussion traditions flourish in both Barbados and nearby St. Vincent, as in the “boom-drum” band. Although the 1960s–70s in Barbados saw the flourishing of calypso-like songs called “spouge,” more conspicuous in the 1970s and ’80s was the emergence of a lively local calypso and soca scene. This is especially centered on the summertime Crop Over festival, which attracts both tourists and performers from Trinidad and elsewhere.

Moving southward to Grenada, we find a scene that is by now familiar: historical references to extinct *belair* and *calinda* dances, a defunct quadrille tradition, and a reinvented summertime Carnival, with calypso and masquerade bands. However, we also encounter a neo-African tradition shared with Trinidad: the Shango religion, deriving from the practices of Yoruba indentured workers who immigrated from West Africa in the mid-1800s.

Traditional musics are somewhat more vital on the smaller and (even) less developed island of Carriou, with a population of about five thousand. Particularly distinctive, and still performed, is a neo-African tradition called “big drum.” This genre features an ensemble of three hand-played barrel drums (which are not unusually big) and *shak-shaks*, in front of which a few people dance while others provide responsorial singing in French Creole. Big-drum rhythms are numerous, exciting, and varied. The names of the drums—*boula* and *kata*, creolized as “cutter”—recur elsewhere in the French Caribbean cultural sphere and are of African origin. Several of the rhythms

bear names that, according to local belief, reflect the specific African nations whence they originate; these names include Igbo, Manding, Kongo, Arada, Moko, and Kromanti. The last term, which also denotes Afro-Caribbean religious or musical practices in Suriname and Jamaica, refers to the primarily Akan slaves who were shipped by the British through the Dutch fort of Cormantine in West Africa.

Meanwhile, in Carriacou, as in other islands, string bands once were quite important at lifecycle events, and they still play at wedding parties and gravestone-raising ceremonies. Members of string bands also have a new social role: Via the freshly minted lyrics to their songs, they publicize to the rest of the community (especially during parang season, for example) the misbehavior of other Carriacouans. In doing so, they reassert traditional social standards and expectations common to the extended community.¹⁰

We can allow our southwesterly momentum to carry us on to the South American mainland, to the former British colony of Guyana, which is an essentially West Indian rather than Latin American nation. In its mixed East Indian and creole demography, it bears some affinities with Trinidad, without that country's French connection and oil wealth. As the East Indian music scene was discussed earlier in this chapter, here I should mention the lively tradition of que-que (kweh-kweh), a song and dance form still performed by many Afro-Guyanese at weddings. Que-que can occur at several points in the wedding festivities, such as the prenuptial night, when the groom's party arrives at the bride's house to discover that she has been "hidden" by her friends, whether in the crowd, in someone else's clothing, or in a nearby tree. In que-que, male and female dancers form two lines while others sing responsorially, with rhythm being supplied by clapping and the stamping of the dancers' feet. The role of the lead singer is taken by anyone with the energy and creativity to make up lyrics; the que-que can go on for hours, with men and women taking turns singing the lead. As in other wedding songs throughout the world, the ribaldry of the songs can serve to prepare the bride for the wedding night and make light of the impending consummation. Hence, a song might go like this:

Coolie man ting ting long e so long e so
 white man ting ting lillie so lillie so
 Chinee man ting ting lillie so lillie so
 [groom's name] ting ting biggie so biggie so.

One can see why children are generally not supposed to be present at que-que sessions. Another part of Guyana's creole music heritage is the repertoire

of folksongs associated with “pork-knockers”—the local term for the hardy, independent gold prospectors who spend most of the year sloshing around in the muddy streams of the country’s rainforest.

Hopping a bit to the west, off the northern coast of Venezuela we find the Dutch Antillean islands of Curaçao, Aruba, and Bonaire, which, despite a population of fewer than 220,000, are host to a remarkably rich music scene. The musical diversity parallels the linguistic scene, as Dutch, English, and a Portuguese-African creole called Papiamentu are all spoken (and sung). Salsa and Cuban *son* are well established, especially because in the first half of the twentieth century more than half the male population worked seasonally in Cuba, cutting cane. Like Cuba and Puerto Rico, the islands also boast of their own light-classical tradition, especially as fostered by Jan Gerard Palm (1831–1906), a prolific composer of waltzes, mazurkas, and *danzas* for piano, and also stylized versions of local creole songs called tumba. At the Afro-Antillean end of the gamut is tambú, which, despite being vigorously banned until 1956 and restricted even today, managed to survive and even make a modest comeback. In tambú, drummers and iron bell players beat out a fast 6/8 rhythm, with responsorial vocals, to accompany the distinctive solo dance style—essentially, wiggling one’s butt and shuffling around with arms raised. Meanwhile, the distinctive local creole music is tumba, for couple dancing, whose modern form is played by horn-based salsa-style dance bands, some of which are extraordinarily tight and professional. Tumba, which is heard especially during local Carnival season, sounds like hot, hard-driving salsa, except that it’s in syncopated 6/8 time rather than salsa’s straight binary meter. Neither salsa-style On-1 nor On-2 dancing will work with this!

Further Reading: Indo-Caribbean Music

See Peter Manuel, *Tales, Tunes, and Tassa Drums: Retention and Invention in Indo-Caribbean Music* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015), and Peter Manuel, *East Indian Music in the West Indies: Tan-Singing, Chutney, and the Making of Indo-Caribbean Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000). See also Peter Manuel, dir., *Tassa Thunder: Folk Music from India to the Caribbean*, documentary video, 2014, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jLu0dXWslcg>.

Five Themes in the Study of Caribbean Music

Unity and Diversity in a Continent of Islands

IN THE OPENING CHAPTER of this book, we briefly looked at some aspects of unity and diversity in Caribbean culture and music. Having surveyed the region's individual music styles, we may now be better poised to tackle some fundamental questions: To what extent does the Caribbean constitute a unified musical area? Is Caribbean music just a colorful collage of diverse genres, without any pan-regional continuity? In what sorts of ways has music been able to transcend linguistic boundaries?

The Caribbean has always been culturally and politically divided by geography, language, political dominion, and ethnicity. The linguistic and colonial boundaries are the most obvious, and to some extent one can divide the area into three major cultural zones—that is, Spanish, English, and French. However, even these subregions are in some respects internally fragmented in terms of rivalries as well as musical traditions. Residents of the nearby French islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe manage to look down on each other, and the calypso line “Small island, go back where you really come from” long expressed Trinidad's attitude toward its neighbors. The end of colonialism only exacerbated such fragmentation. The pan-West Indian federation fell apart in 1962, and a few years later, tiny Anguilla seceded from St. Kitts–Nevis, even though it had no telephones, power, or paved roads. In what ways, then, have musical tastes and traditions reflected such divisions, and in what ways has music transcended them?

The parallels between musical and linguistic boundaries are obvious. A Martinican feels closer to France than to nearby Barbados. Similarly, despite

Cuba's proximity to Jamaica, its similar history, and its overwhelming musical influence on the Spanish Caribbean, Cuban music does not seem to have much impact on Jamaican popular music. Linguistic fragmentation reaches an extreme in the southern Caribbean Basin, where the national languages of the adjacent Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana, and Brazil, are, respectively, Spanish, English, Dutch, French, and Portuguese.

However, such disparities represent only part of the picture. For one thing, as noted in Chapter 1, the entire region shares a set of basic socio-musical attributes, including the presence of an Afro-Caribbean cultural common denominator; a history of musical syncretization; the strength of oral traditions; and the emergence of lower-class, African-influenced work songs, religious musics, Carnival traditions, and creole, duple-metered dance-music genres. Further, even the boundaries between the Spanish, French, and English zones have often been fluid and permeable. The French creole zone formerly extended to eastern Cuba, Trinidad, and elsewhere in the present Anglophone realm (including New Orleans), and in terms of language and musical tastes, Dominica and St. Lucia still straddle the two. Hence, it is not surprising that in the realm of traditional Afro-Caribbean musics, words like "calinda," "tambú," "tumba," "juba," and "bamboula" pop up throughout the region.

Internal migrations have also left musical traces that traverse linguistic barriers. Haitian culture and music are well evident in eastern Cuba, just as Cuban dance music heavily influenced the 1950s Haitian *konpa*. West Indian migrants to southern Puerto Rico appear to have contributed to the emergence of plena, and the Trinidad calypso was enriched by melodies brought from throughout the region. The Afro-Curaçaoan tambú, as brought to Puerto Rico by immigrants, may have been the source of the bomba rhythm called *holandés*, while the tambú of modern Curaçao bears obvious influence of the Cuban rumba, presumably deriving from the guest workers who resided in Cuba. Descendants of Afro-American migrants from the southern United States preserve their own traditions in the Dominican peninsula of Samaná, and laborers from just about everywhere migrated to Panama to work on the canal. Internal migrations have continued in recent decades as Haitians seek work in the Dominican Republic, Dominicans flock to Puerto Rico, and small-island West Indians migrate to prosperous Trinidad (while everyone migrates to New York and Miami). Similarly, despite strained relations between Haitians and Dominicans (including disputes about the origin of the *méringue/merengue*), the two nations' musical histories are inseparable. As we saw in Chapter 6, the mid-twentieth-century Haitian *konpa* emerged to some extent as a local variant of the Dominican

merengue, while modern Dominican bandleaders like Wilfrido Vargas mercilessly plagiarized Haitian hits.

Since the 1950s, the conflicting trends toward unity and diversity have acquired a new dimension with the spread of the mass media. It may seem contradictory to speak of simultaneous homogenization and diversification, but that is in many ways what has happened, especially as the sheer amount of musical production and dissemination increases. One common denominator has been popular music from the United States, which now pervades the entire region. Rap, rock, and R&B have their own undeniable appeal and vitality, and when backed by powerful multinational record companies, they can tend to put local musics on the defensive throughout the Caribbean. In many countries, local broadcast media are so poorly funded that they can barely compete with the United States. In some smaller countries, there is hardly any local TV at all. Instead, everyone watches pirated satellite transmissions from the United States, complete with New York City news and ads for products that are unavailable as well as unaffordable. So it is not surprising that rap and R&B have a strong presence in West Indian airwaves, constituting a new sort of musical lingua franca. The presence of these cosmopolitan musics may at once enrich local music scenes by broadening horizons and impoverish them by displacing and devaluing local musics.

In recent decades, dancehall reggae and its Spanish-language cousin, reggaeton, have constituted two new and distinctly Caribbean sorts of pan-regional common denominators. The international popularity of dancehall, indeed, has transcended language barriers and provided a kind of cultural unity and contact that is unprecedented in the Caribbean. In general, the mass media and Internet, together with interaction of migrant communities in New York and elsewhere, facilitate all sorts of musical cross-fertilization and fusions, from Garifuna punta-rock to Spanish-language soca. Many of these hybrids are just ephemeral gimmicks and fads, but others may be more than that. Indeed, in an age of multiple identities and crisscrossing media networks, some of the most vital and dynamic artistic creations may be coming from the borders and interstices rather than the stylistic hinterlands. The borders can of course be virtual rather than geographical, for this is the era of the remix, in which fusions of languages, styles, and genres can operate both as statements of social solidarity and as postmodern pastiches.

Race and Ethnicity

The history, styles, and meanings of Caribbean music are intimately linked to issues of race in several ways. Musical genres are often associated with or

claimed (plausibly or not) by specific ethnic groups; alternately, they may be celebrated as national patrimonies whose appeal transcends such boundaries. Throughout the region, song texts chronicle and articulate popular attitudes regarding race. Perhaps most significant are the ways in which music not only passively reflects race relations but also actively influences them. In some cases, it serves as a powerful symbol of racial syncretism and harmony, often situating local versions of Afro-Caribbean music in the mainstream of national culture.

It is impossible to generalize about race relations and attitudes in the Caribbean, except to say that they are complex, diverse, and often different from those in the United States. Thus, for example, throughout the West Indies black people may historically have internalized colonial prejudices, but because they generally constitute demographic majorities, unlike many North American blacks, they are less likely to regard themselves as members of an alienated and marginalized minority. Race relations in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean are generally more fluid and flexible than in the English-speaking world. For many Puerto Ricans, this tradition of tolerance and mixing has been a source of nationalistic pride vis-à-vis the United States. Certainly, North American and English racial ideology, which traditionally recognized only black and white, is relatively unusual in the Spanish and French Caribbean, especially since so many people are of mixed ancestry. Instead, people may be highly conscious of shades of coloring. Even within Afro-Caribbean communities, social preferences for lighter skin, thin noses, and straight (“good”) hair remain widespread, as evidenced in the widespread practice of skin bleaching, although such attitudes have been much challenged—including by music—in recent decades. For North Americans, understanding such attitudes is complicated by the entirely different norms of discourse about race. Especially in the Hispanic Caribbean, people simply do not talk about race in the same ways that Americans do.

In some cases, racial attitudes are expressed openly in song, as in the 1950s chachachá “Negra bembón,” in which a black man chides a *mulata* for thinking she is superior. At the same time, one must be careful in trying to draw conclusions from song texts. For example, in Latin music innumerable songs portray the ideal woman as a *mulata*. This convention could be interpreted as an indication of racial openness on the part of the singer, or a black preference for lighter skin, or, perhaps most often, a white stereotype of *mulatas* as hot and sexy—a stereotype that at once exoticizes mixed-race women and devalues the sexuality of others.

In general, the styles, associations, and breadth of individual music genres tell us much about the racial and cultural composition of Caribbean

societies as a whole. Most Caribbean musical cultures exhibit a continuum of genres, ranging from the African-derived to the European-derived. The proportions vary considerably from island to island, however. An obvious contrast is between some smaller West Indian countries, where neo-African cult musics are relatively weak and marginal, and Cuba and Haiti, where they are widespread. Even in Trinidad, for example, Orisha worship was until recently such a private subculture that calypsonians portrayed it as an exotic and bizarre cult, to be feared or ridiculed. By contrast, innumerable Cuban popular songs refer with easy familiarity to the orishas whose religion pervades lower-class Afro-Cuban life. Similarly, one can trace a direct evolution from Congolese secular dances through the traditional rumba and on to modern Cuban dance music and salsa, as reflected, for example, in modern salsa versions of old *sones* like “Kikiribú mandinga,” with its combination of African words and colloquial Spanish. By contrast, the weakness of such threads of continuity in the British West Indies led Trinidad’s Prime Minister Eric Williams to speak, however exaggeratedly, of Afro-Trinidadians as a “deracinated” people with “nothing indigenous.”¹

Throughout much of the Caribbean, the emergence of creole popular musics has involved a process of accepting and legitimizing local forms of Afro-Caribbean music. This process occurred in different forms and in different stages throughout the Caribbean. It happened especially late in the British West Indies, where colonial masters had so successfully instilled ideas of the racial inferiority of blacks among their Afro-Caribbean subjects. Hence, many colonial-era calypsos mocked people with negroid features, and the waves of the French and Spanish Caribbean Négritude movement seemed to bypass the English-speaking islands. It was not until the 1970s that a black pride movement—in the idiosyncratic form of Rastafari—forced a reassessment of such colonial prejudices. Since then, roots-reggae songs have explicitly and defiantly celebrated Africa and blackness, and self-denigrating racist calypsos have gone out of style. In subsequent decades, dance-hall songs have voiced popular Jamaican attitudes with particular frankness. After the singer Buju Banton was criticized for his “Love Me Browning,” which eulogized fair-skinned girls, he released his own rejoinder, “Love Black Woman.”

In Cuba and Puerto Rico, the local version of the Négritude movement generated a degree of white bourgeois interest, however qualified and obscurantist, in local black music and culture. In *negrista* poetry, this often took the form of white poets writing verse in colloquial *bozal* (fresh-off-the-boat slave) speech and “oogah-boogah”-type, African-sounding mumbo-jumbo. In early twentieth-century Cuba, white composers wrote many theater songs

that eulogized blackness in a somewhat sentimental, exoticizing fashion. In the 1940s and '50s, the Afro-Cuban bandleader Arsenio Rodríguez could draw on his own family heritage to present a more authentic black perspective, as in “Bruca maniguá,” with its mixture of Spanish and Congolese words:

Yo son Carabalí, negro de nación
sin la libetá, no puedo viví
Mundele caba con mi corazón
tanto matrata, cupo van filirí
chechere bruca maniguá, ae!

I'm a Carabali, a black man from Africa
Without freedom I can't live
The white man is breaking my heart
From so much abuse my body is dead
Powerful witch from the bush!

In the 1930s, the modernist art music of Alejandro García Caturla and Amadeo Roldán represented another kind of appreciative rearticulation of Afro-Cuban music, and after 1959 the Revolutionary government, for all its ambivalence toward Afro-Cuban religion, celebrated Afro-Cuban music and dance as cultural treasures.

In Puerto Rico, where white literati had traditionally ignored black traditions, the essayist Tomás Blanco took a step forward in a 1935 article declaring his island's culture to be mulatto, as best embodied in the plena. Still, this formulation neglected bomba, which is thoroughly Afro-Puerto Rican rather than mulatto in character.

In the 1960s, Afro-Puerto Rican singer Ruth Fernández liked to remind listeners of the island's African heritage in her setting of the poem “¿Tu abuela, dónde está?” (Where's Your Grandmother?), by Fortunato Vizcarrondo, addressed to a negrophobic man who denies his mixed racial ancestry:

You're so proud of looking white, but where's your grandmother? . . .
Among high society, you don't want anyone to see your mother's mother
You're a polished *blanquito* [pass-for-white snob]
But I know her well, her name's *Siña Tatá* . . .
You hide her in the kitchen, because she's a genuine negress
Here, whoever doesn't have *Dinga* [blood] has *Mandinga*.

While some Dominicans have tried to deny the African-derived elements of merengue, in most countries the Afro-Caribbean elements of modern popular musics are now recognized and celebrated, or often, simply taken for granted. Reggae, the Cuban *son*, the *plenas* and *bombas* of Puerto Rican bandleader Rafael Cortijo, and even the imagery in Tego Calderón's reggaeton videos are all so overtly Afro-Caribbean that their popularity has not only reflected but also helped create a wholesale mainstreaming of black identity.

The modern tendency to celebrate creole or Afro-Caribbean culture as national culture, although an improvement over colonial Eurocentric biases, is naturally complicated by the presence of other ethnic groups. Thus, developing an inclusive sense of national identity may demand a degree of openness on the part of Afro-Caribbeans as well as the lighter-skinned upper class. The Trinidadian Denyse Plummer, as a fair-skinned teenager of biracial parents, sought to blend in with the predominantly white community she was raised in, and when she later started singing calypso, she was heckled and pelted by black audiences who resented her for being whitish, bourgeois, and female. But by the 1980s, because of both her prodigious talent and the advent of a less proprietary public sense of popular culture, she had become well accepted by Afro-Trini audiences and went on to win the Calypso Monarch prize repeatedly. Similarly, while the Rasta aspect of roots reggae celebrated Africa and black nationalism, dancehall culture has become a remarkably open arena in which the ethnicity of Super Cat (an Indo-Jamaican) and David Rodigan (a white Brit deejay) is essentially a non-issue. Indeed, even leaving aside Cuba and Puerto Rico, with their substantial white populations, many West Indian islands have significant East Indian, Chinese, Syrian, and European-descended communities. As we saw in Chapter 9, the identity question has been particularly marked in Trinidad and Guyana, where East Indians outnumber blacks. The oft-heard saying, "All a' we is one"—which could be taken to imply that everyone should conform to a creole mainstream—has given way to a more explicit multiculturalism. Although ethnic stereotypes still abound, and communities are often polarized by politics, the norm remains one of interracial courtesy and tolerance, not Balkan-style fratricide. And typically, the contradictions raised by Afrocentricism have been expressed not in violence but in whimsical songs, like the calypso "Split Me in Two," by Mighty Dougl. Dougl, whose sobriquet denotes an Indian-African mulatto, contemplates his fate under an imaginary law repatriating all Trinidadians to their ancestral homelands:

Can somebody just tell me where they sending poor me?
 I am neither one nor the other, six of one, half dozen of the other
 If they serious about sending back people for true, they got to split
 me in two.

Such complexities and contradictions are reflected in the ethnic associations of musical styles in general. Many music genres remain identified with particular communities, with tastes and affiliations serving as boundary markers. For example, one Indo-Guyanese youth told me, “I like all kinds of Indian music, and nothing else.” However, what is perhaps more marked is the tendency for Afro-Caribbean popular musics—*son*, reggae, soca, and *konpa*—to become integrating symbols, uniting audiences of all communities. In such cases, music serves less as a flame beneath a melting pot than as a dressing poured over a mixed salad, integrating its diverse elements into a coherent whole.

Meanwhile, the entertainment industry does not hesitate to foreground—or, in some cases, obscure—a performer’s ethnic identity for its own commercial purposes. Since the 1990s, being Latino has become fashionable in mainstream U.S. pop culture—in certain contexts and to certain degrees. Although Jennifer Lopez’s music has no particular Latin stylistic flavor, her Puerto Rican ancestry is certainly part of her image, and, like Christina Aguilera, she does sing in Spanish as well as in English. Similarly, Ricky Martin’s music, whether sung in English or Spanish, falls into the pop rather than Latin category, and he has been successfully promoted to the Anglophone market as a sexy Latino (Latin, but not too Latin). For his part, Marc Anthony more overtly embodies “crossover” marketing; much of his repertoire is mainstream English-language pop, but he also sings straight-ahead salsa, draping himself in the Puerto Rican flag in some of his Latino-oriented concerts. And although he complains about the term “crossover,” there may be no better term to describe his dual target audiences and his release of songs like the *son montuno*-flavored “I Need to Know/Dímelo” in both Spanish and English versions.²

Music, Sex, and Sexism

In the Caribbean, as throughout the world, romance and relationships between men and women have always been favorite song topics. Throughout the region, music relates the perennial themes of love, betrayal, and loss (and sex!). Caribbean men, especially in the Spanish-speaking areas, may use songs to convey their feelings, singing softly in a lover’s ear, playing a

romantic record over and over for a beloved woman, or even giving a sweetheart a chosen recording. In a lighter vein, songs throughout the region display an uninhibited delight in sexuality, typically expressed in whimsical, thinly disguised puns and double entendres. Beyond this level, however, the particular sentiments expressed in Caribbean music reflect the attitudes and values in the region, many of which, rather than being universal, are products of specific sociohistorical conditions.

It is difficult to generalize about gender relations in the Caribbean, as in most complex societies. Throughout the region, for example, one finds nuclear families as well as strong extended family structures. Kinship networks help provide stability and cohesion to families in situations in which the men are absent or peripheral, for whatever reason. In colonial as well as modern times, it has become quite common for men to have only loose ties to their children and partners. To a considerable extent, this condition is a legacy of slavery, which undermined the role of the male provider and, more significantly, destroyed traditional African kinship structures, which had to be rebuilt afresh after emancipation.

With modernization, familial ties have been further strained by urbanization and greater mobility, which disrupted village kinship networks, and above all by poverty and unemployment. As traditional men's occupations like cutting sugarcane have been mechanized, the role of the male breadwinner has been increasingly weakened. In some cases, women stand better chances than men do of finding jobs, whether as domestics or as workers in factories whose managers prefer women because they are less likely than men to organize. Such conditions can put a tremendous strain on family cohesion. The devoted but unemployed father unable to feed his children can suffer unbearable grief and guilt, as chronicled in Zeigfield's 1938 calypso "Depression":

Five children and a wife and myself to mind,
but to me the world is so unkind.
No work, no food, no clothes to wear.
If things go on, I'll die in despair.

Such a father, however well-meaning, may even be ejected by a wife who, out of duress, finds a better provider or who is herself employed but unable to feed a dependent man. Alternatively, the man may simply avoid responsibility, going from one mate to another, ignoring whatever children he sires, and hoping ideally to shack up with some woman whom he can charm into supporting him. Thus, throughout the Caribbean, as elsewhere, many lower-

class men and even women have tended to avoid marital or even emotional ties that may become burdensome and frustrating. When relationships become mediated primarily by money, some employed women shun male hangers-on, and unemployed women accept men's advances only if they get something tangible in return. As Growling Tiger's calypso "Money Is King" from 1935 related:

If you have money and things going nice,
any woman will call you honey and spice.
If you can't give her a dress or a new pair of shoe,
she'll say she have no use for you.

At worst, the women struggle to support the children, and the underemployed men hang out in bars, listening to songs that pump up their egos and soothe their frustrations. Such tensions, ironically, may be exacerbated as women make increasing socioeconomic progress, rivaling and in some cases surpassing men in higher education and the professions.

Music plays an active role in conditioning people's attitudes, but it has tended to present not universal feelings but predominantly men's viewpoints, in accordance with men's domination of most aspects of the music world and of public culture in general. Many modern Caribbean songs have articulated the most self-indulgent forms of men's boasting. Such songs may be extremely influential in presenting a certain male ideal—that of the swaggering macho stud who attracts women by his charm alone and promises nothing more than a good time. Some songs offer specific advice to other men, like the several old calypsos that warn against marriage (for example, Atilla's "I'll Never Burden Myself with a Wife"). In genres as disparate as calypso, bolero, and reggae one finds denunciations of women for their alleged faithlessness, moral degeneracy, and ugliness.³ While men boast of their sexual conquests and demand that women submit to them,⁴ they denounce promiscuous women and rail against supposedly false accusations of paternity.⁵ Men's irresponsibility is celebrated, and women are repeatedly portrayed as valuable for only a good time.⁶ Jamaican dancehall deejays often clarify that they offer women only sex, rather than commitment, while at the same time deriding as prostitutes women who demand material compensation for their favors.⁷ Traditional calypsos, *plenas*, and other songs have portrayed women as trying to tie men down with black magic (*obeah*, *brujería*).⁸ A few notorious songs have urged men to keep their women in line and even to gain their love by beating them.⁹ Many songs have articulated a paradigmatic dichotomy between the respectable yet devalued wife and the sexy and seductive

mistress—in West Indian parlance, the wifey vs. the matey or deputy, or in Spanish, the *señora* vs. the *mujer de la calle* (woman of the street, quintessentially a *mulata*).¹⁰

Portrayals of women in Caribbean music vary according to individual genres and their social backgrounds. Overtly sexist songs are relatively unusual in the Spanish Caribbean (or at least they were until the advent of reggaeton), perhaps due to the persistence of Hispanic ideals of family honor—ideals that many West Indian women might find restrictive in their own way. The norm in most Latin music, whether sentimental boleros or upbeat salsa songs, is a genteel sentimentality, often idealizing women, however unrealistically. There are, however, plenty of boleros and bachatas that denounce women as *mentirosas*, *traidoras*, and *abusadoras* (liars, cheats, and abusers).

Such song lyrics may seem sexist to some. But interpreting their social significance may be far from simple and may involve recognizing the contradictory relationships between an expressive discourse such as popular song and actual gender relations and attitudes. Most Caribbean popular music is dance music, in which the literal meaning of the text may be less important than the purely musical aspects. Accordingly, many listeners are easily able to ignore or shrug off the verses' problematic aspects, especially in the ideal consumption context of the dance floor. One female West Indian college student told me, "I like dancehall, and I don't mind the sexist songs; I just don't take the words seriously." Another concurred: "I like this music because of how it sounds, not because I agree with the message it sends." Even in word-oriented dancehall, the text may be valued less for its message than for the way its rich alliterations, internal rhymes, and rhythmic delivery contribute to the kinetic drive of the music. The danger, however, is that among some listeners, the sexism and homophobia of the lyrics may be so rampant and ingrained that they are taken for granted.

As for the many bachatas and boleros in which brokenhearted men bitterly denounce women as liars and traitors, the innumerable female fans of such songs, rather than taking offense, may appreciate the vulnerability the male singer expresses. Further, women, in listening, can easily identify with the abstract emotions of longing and heartbreak the man voices. The listener's ability to relate in this "transgender" manner may be conditioned by the way and the extent to which a song is identified with a particular gender, depending on grammar, the sex of the singer, and other factors. Sentimental love songs are particularly likely not to be strongly gendered in their text content, such that listeners can easily transcend the overt and superficial gendering that is present. By contrast, a female listener might well

have difficulty assuming the subject position in “Yaw Yaw,” in which Beenie Man boasts of having impregnated several women and sings admiringly of a friend who has twelve children who are still teething.¹¹

One factor that is changing the gender dynamics of Caribbean music is the increasing ability of women to voice their own viewpoints. Women have always played important roles in performing certain kinds of Caribbean music, from domestic lullabies to church hymns, but in the Caribbean, as elsewhere, the worlds of professional folk music and commercial popular music have traditionally been dominated by men. Women have entered these genres, but they often have to contend with predominantly male personnel and male-oriented performance norms (as well as the standard video format showing the male singer fawned over by cavorting strumpets). Moreover, in patriarchal societies, any woman who expresses her sensuality in public runs the risk of being perceived as a sex object by men, especially in a genre so oriented toward “slackness” as Jamaican dancehall. Thus, for example, the flamboyantly sexy dancehall performers Patra and Lady Saw have been seen by some West Indian women as embarrassments who reduce women to the status of sex toys and cater to the male deejays’ degrading stereotypes.

Other West Indian women, however, resent the traditional double standard that allows men but not women to flaunt their sexuality, and they enjoy how the new breed of liberated women like Spice, rather than being passive sex objects, can present themselves as fully in control of their exuberant sensuality. They ask, “If men can act that way, why can’t we?” One female West Indian student told me, “My sisters and I were raised in a fundamentalist Christian family, and we were taught to be ashamed even to see our own naked bodies in the mirror. But Lady Saw and Patra changed all that for me.” Other female performers, from reggaeton’s Ivy Queen to reggae’s Tanya Stephens, have managed to find ways to constitute female role models without risking being seen as boy toys. Latin women have been able to find particular inspiration in songs like La India’s “Ese hombre” (That Man), Olga Tañón’s merengue “Es mentiroso” (He’s a Liar), and Ivy Queen’s “La vida es así,” which turn the tables on men by denouncing duplicitous former partners. Merengue singer Lidia de la Rosa resignified the evergreen “La chiflera,” with its denunciation of unfaithful women, by adding her own verses, “If the man is going to have a good time, the woman will, too.”¹²

In many cases, female performers have relied on male producers and composers. The 1980s all-female merengue group Las Chicas del Can showed that women could play and sing just like men, and their songs included some witty feminist manifestos, such as that presenting a woman getting back at her cheating man by doing the same (“It wasn’t one man or two, it was

three”). Some people, however, felt that the band’s ability to serve as female role models was compromised by the fact that Las Chicas, from its compositions to its skimpy “jiggle-show” outfits, was overwhelmingly the creation of its male producer, Wilfrido Vargas. To what extent, and in what way, does the gender of the author matter? Does it matter that Cuban singer La Lupe’s moving and poignant neo-feminist song “La tirana” was written by a man (Tite Curet Alonso)? Or, for that matter, that Aretha Franklin’s liberated soul sister anthem “Respect” was also written by a man and earlier recorded by Otis Redding?

In some contexts, more important than a song’s lyrics may be the dynamics of how the song is used, especially in terms of what is happening on the dance floor. However, if “reading” the gender politics of lyrics can be challenging, interpreting dance can be even trickier. For example, Latin dance styles like salsa and bachata are all about tight coordination and synchrony between partners, which entails one dancer following the lead of the other, who just happens to invariably be the guy, not the girl. Does that mean that it perpetuates and reinforces “male domination” or, at least, involves a willful abdication of creative leadership on the woman’s part? Needless to say, many female dancers don’t necessarily see it that way, and they appreciate how a good leader lets the female follower express herself in her own way. But then there might be people like the female Dominican American college student who said of learning bachata:

The woman is always supposed to follow the man’s lead. I remember trying to move left or right when I felt like it, or turning because I thought the beat allowed me to, but I was quickly scolded by my cousin. She told me that I was taking too much control of the dance. Women are not supposed to be powerful when dancing bachata; they are supposed to be passive and sensual. The dance focuses on what the man wants.¹³

Such women might prefer a kind of music, such as hip-hop or reggae, that lets them dance freestyle rather than having to follow a man’s lead (even their boyfriends’). One could say that ballroom, closed-couple dancing is not *inherently* male-dominated or “sexist,” but that some modern-minded women might nevertheless feel constrained by it and prefer other genres.

Even more open to variant interpretation is the *perreo* style of reggaeton and dancehall grinding, in which the gentleman stands against a wall while the lady “wines ’pon him” with her butt. From one view, he is the prince, being energetically serviced by his boy toy, but from another angle, she is the

active partner, and he is essentially useless and interchangeable. (In dancehall, if the gentleman wishes to be more active, he may “dagger” the lady by leaping onto her from a modest height, such as atop a speaker cabinet, and throw her to the floor.)

Meanwhile, whether in a reggae club or Trinidad’s Carnival procession, it often seems that, regardless of the song lyrics, it is women who are ruling the scene, flaunting their sensuality in a way that is more for their own enjoyment than aimed to entice men. Hence, while a dour critic might regard the words of the merengue “La tanga” (The Thong) as “objectifying,” women love to jump to the stage when that song is performed in clubs and strut their stuff to wild applause. Similarly, a Jamaican college student emphasized to me how the sexy, hedonistic lyrics of dancehall songs are perfectly suited to the party and club milieu. She wrote:

As couples gyrate against a wall to lyrics like “Wine ’pon me Gal” and “Flex Girl Time to Have Sex,” the content of the song is not offensive, but necessary. If dancehall performers began to base the contents of their songs on world peace, family life, or even the sweetness of falling in love, the music would lose its edge and popularity.

A disparaging voice might argue that the celebration of sexuality for its own sake can serve to reduce individuals to bodies and body parts and encourage the sexual exploitation of women and the failure of men to take responsibility for the children they sire. These are not merely narrow, puritanical concerns in societies or subcultures where the weakness of the institution of the family places great burdens on women and children. At the same time, it could well be argued that the dance floor is the one arena in which sensuality can be celebrated in a controlled and even artistically creative context. It is clear that millions of women in the Caribbean and elsewhere experience popular music as a liberating and even exhilarating force precisely because it allows them to experience and, through dancing, express their own sexuality, free from the traditional constraints of family, religion, and patriarchy in general. In that sense, the open eroticism of much Caribbean dance music, however rampant with objectification and hedonism, may constitute an essential and even liberating aspect.

Caribbean Music International

Liberty Avenue in Queens and Brooklyn’s Nostrand Avenue typify the new kind of polyglot Caribbean migrant neighborhoods that have emerged in

New York City and elsewhere. West Indian snack bars offering calaloo and roti adjoin Chinese Cuban eateries, while groceries hawk coconuts, curry powder, fresh fish from Guyana, cassava, and day-old Caribbean newspapers. On the sidewalk, one hears a Babel-like chatter of Spanish, Jamaican patwa, Haitian Creole, Afro-American jive, and even standard English (though usually with a Caribbean lilt). Meanwhile, ghetto-blasters, car stereos, and storefront sound systems boom out the throbbing rhythms of merengue, salsa, soca, and reggae, which intertwine like some perpetually changing postmodern polyrhythm.

New York has become a Caribbean city, especially since the 1980s, when its Caribbean population reached a sort of critical mass of more than 2 million. As of 2015, well over a third of the city's 8 million residents are Caribbean immigrants or their descendants. New York is now the biggest Caribbean city and the second biggest Jamaican, Haitian, and Guyanese city. There are more people from Nevis in New York than there are in Nevis itself. Dominicans, who number more than 800,000, have become the dominant community in Washington Heights (also known as "Quisqueya Heights") and parts of Queens and Brooklyn, as have Puerto Ricans in Spanish Harlem and the Lower East Side ("Loisaida") of Manhattan and English-speaking West Indians elsewhere in Brooklyn and Queens. While other North American cities like Cleveland and Detroit have degenerated into depopulated rotting shells, New York's economy has been kept alive by Caribbeans who bring their traditions of initiative and self-reliance. As the saying goes, when a West Indian gets ten cents above a beggar, he or she opens a business—and adds color and vitality to the city's street life and culture.

The vicissitudes of the immigrant experience—especially in New York—have been voiced, whether poignantly or humorously, in dozens of *plenas*, *aguinaldos*, merengues, calypsos, and dancehall songs. Taken retrospectively, many of these can be seen to articulate a loosely sequential set of stages, or what cultural historian Juan Flores, in reference to Newyorican identity, called "moments," in terms of their attitudes toward New York vis-à-vis the former island homeland.¹⁴ The starting point for these is the immediate reality of the forsaken homeland and the difficult and often hostile new urban environment. In this initial stage, the immigrant community is an isolated "island in the city," whence the singer longs to return home: "Yo me vuelvo a mi bohío" (I'm going back to my hut). The harshness of the dislocation engenders Flores's second "moment," an enhanced and often idealized appreciation of the Caribbean homeland, which is eulogized as a place of physical and emotional warmth, in contrast to cold and unfriendly New York. As Flores pointed out, this new appreciation of the homeland,

although nostalgic and utopian, can extend to its Afro-Caribbean aspects. It can also constitute a necessary step toward the next “moment” or state of mind, in which immigrants—or, more typically, their children—transcend sentiments of despair and loss, embrace their new homeland, and assert the legitimacy of their own culture therein. Thus, in the 1970s, New York *salseros* saw themselves not as some voiceless, disempowered minority but as the musical messengers of a new sense of Latino pride that, like salsa, emerged in New York while drawing from island tradition. Hence, in “El mensaje,” Bobby Rodriguez could sing:

I bring you a message. . . . It's the clave of the *guaguancó* rhythm
 the modern sound from the enchanted isle (Puerto Rico)
 I sing to my Puerto Rico and to Los Angeles as well
 to Venezuela and Santo Domingo.

This dynamic and transplanted modernization of island-based music paves the way for the culminating “moment,” in which Caribbean Americans actively and selectively embrace other aspects of mainland (perhaps especially Afro-American) culture, along with other Caribbean cultures. This process is nowhere more apparent than in music when local performers freely combine salsa, merengue, reggae, and reggaeton with rap and R&B, and with each other. And as Flores stressed, such hybrids should no longer be seen as a case of Caribbean Americans passively assimilating to the hegemonic mainland culture. Rather, they should be seen as dynamic artistic collaborations enacted from a position of cultural strength and confidence.

In the age of the Internet and smartphones, it is easier than ever to keep in touch with island families and friends, whether or not physical visits are feasible. As immigrants retain dual senses of loyalty and have community networks in both places, they constitute transnational communities that are economically, emotionally, and culturally as much “there” as they are “here.” For others, despite such virtual contacts, “home” is a distant island that they may have never seen, barely remember, or remember in a way that hasn’t existed for decades. Homeland ties may be particularly poignant for undocumented workers who are unable to return home, except to leave the United States for good. For all of them, music and food can take on new significance as symbols of identity; curry goat and reggae music can represent Jamaica, just as roti and soca signify Trinidad. As one Dominican college student told me:

I wouldn't know anything about Dominican culture if it weren't for Dominican music. My parents raised me American, and we didn't

even eat rice and beans, but through music I got inspired to keep up my Spanish and get to know my culture.¹⁵

Another told me, “Music is something you can keep even when you assimilate.”¹⁶

Accordingly, Caribbean migrants and their descendants can develop complex and multiple senses of identity, so that a second-generation Jamaican may see himself or herself in various contexts as Jamaican, West Indian, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-American, Brooklynite, or just plain American. Most Caribbeans, rather than wishing to assimilate totally, want to retain some sense of their origins, and their musical tastes generally reflect these cosmopolitan and overlapping senses of identity.

Emigration has mixed effects on musical culture in the homelands. Emigrants can enrich island culture by sending money home and by serving as conduits for new trends, ideas, and other “cultural remittances.” Haitians in the United States, for example, send considerable amounts of money back home to support Rara festivals. At the same time, the tendency for the best and brightest to emigrate can deplete the ranks of talented musicians on the islands. Lesser folk-music genres that fail to thrive in emigrant communities can decline altogether. For example, folksong traditions formerly maintained in lively “tea meetings” on islands like Nevis and St. Vincent have been eclipsed markedly because most of the creative performers have left.¹⁷ Islanders left behind express their demoralization in songs like the early 1990s calypso from Dominica “Dominicans Come Home.”

Such instances of cultural impoverishment are to some extent counterbalanced by the thriving of Caribbean culture abroad. As we have seen, New York, with its media infrastructure and concentrated Caribbean enclaves, has been a center for Caribbean music for many decades. Since the 1920s, most of the leading Puerto Rican composers and performers, from Manuel “Canario” Jiménez to Rafael Hernández, have come to live in the city, and much of the evolution of Latin dance music took place in New York. The mambo evolved mostly in clubs like the Palladium, and salsa emerged as a barrio reinterpretation and resignification of Cuban dance music in the late 1960s. New York continues to be the center of the recording industries for Haitian and West Indian music. The music scene in Haiti, for that matter, has continued to be crippled by poverty, political instability, and the effects of the 2010 earthquake, which killed several thousand people. Local clubs tend to play more electro-house music than Haitian *konpa*, which thrives more in New York, Montreal, and other diasporic sites. Other cities, like Toronto, Birmingham (U.K.), and Paris, have played similar roles in the devel-

opment of modern Caribbean music, collectively hosting more clubs, record producers, and top groups than the islands themselves.

Of course, the international presence of Caribbean music has never been limited to immigrant communities. In the nineteenth century, the habanera charmed European ballroom dancers, and Jamaican regiments brought by the British to their West African colonies introduced not only European brass band music but also their own syncretic “gumbay.” Since then, styles of Caribbean commercial popular music have found their own international audiences, often in accordance with the eccentricities of the global music industry. In some cases these may be motivated by the sheer power of the music. In the 1950s in the United States, the mambo was, by any standards, some of the hottest dance music around. In other cases, Yankee demand for some sort of superficially exotic, sensuous, and tropical beat has generated ephemeral fads of various bowdlerized versions of Caribbean music. Hence, the first LP in the world to sell a million copies was not by Elvis or the Beatles but was Harry Belafonte’s 1956 *Calypso*, which spawned a brief but furious fad of ersatz calypsos and shaped the repertoire of West Indian tourist music for generations. As Belafonte often pointed out, most of the songs on the LP, including “Day-O,” were not calypsos at all, but the vogue nevertheless led to corny “calypsos” subsequently being recorded by such aspiring entertainers as Louis Farrakhan, Maya Angelou, Robert Mitchum, Alan Arkin, Jack Lemmon, and Rita Hayworth. (As the Trinidadian scholar Keith Warner said of Hayworth’s “calypso” dancing in the film *Fire Down Below*, “It just looked to us like another white person who can’t dance.”)

Some of the most significant disseminations of Caribbean music have largely bypassed the developed West, with the mass media allowing Caribbean musics to spread way beyond the reach of Caribbean musicians themselves. Thus, for example, Cuban dance music became a dominant urban popular music in Africa during the mid-twentieth century, providing, among other things, a model for the composition and performance of horn-based dance musics, which later evolved into the more distinctively local genres like Congolese soukous. Since the 1970s, roots reggae has come to enjoy phenomenal popularity in African countries like Gambia, whether in the form of old Bob Marley records or new songs in local languages by performers like Alpha Blondy (Ivory Coast) and Lucky Dube (South Africa). With the added input of dynamic groups like Steel Pulse in Great Britain, roots reggae in many respects came to flourish outside the Caribbean more than it did in its place of origin, Jamaica. For that matter, dancehall has also become a global style, easily adapted to local languages everywhere from Malawi to New Zealand. Similarly, *zouk*—or “Cabo zouk”—sung in Cape

Verdean Creole has become the dominant dance music in Cape Verde and its diasporic communities in Europe and New England. In general, musics like salsa, reggae, and *zouk* have taken on lives of their own outside the Caribbean, becoming truly international. This process, however, does not signify a global cooptation of Caribbean music, for the region itself and its émigré musicians continue to be sources of the most dynamic innovations. For the most creative artists, Caribbean music now involves combining international sounds and Caribbean cross-fertilizations while often reaching deep into local traditions for inspiration.

Music and Politics

While the Caribbean has long served as a vacation retreat for many foreigners, Caribbean people themselves historically have had to contend with toil, poverty, and repressive and corrupt governments that often have been imposed by outside forces, whether during the colonial era or the Cold War decades. One function of music in the Caribbean, as elsewhere, has always been to provide some sort of escape from such adversity. In dancing and singing, people can temporarily forget their woes, reaffirm community ties and values, and cultivate their artistic creativity. But it has also been the nature of music and verse to express the full range of human emotions, including those related to sociopolitical conditions. Through music, men and women can voice aspirations and ideals, strengthen group solidarity, and transcend adversity by confronting it and transmuting it into song. Accordingly, music in the Caribbean has often been explicitly linked to sociopolitical struggles.

Local music genres, whether overtly political or not, can be important symbols of nationalistic pride and identity. In the nineteenth century, both Cuban habaneras and Puerto Rican *danzas*, aside from being fashionable dances, were celebrated as symbols of bourgeois and petty bourgeois opposition to Spanish rule. Many other songs and *décimas* of this period also explicitly celebrated the independence struggle and, later, nationalistic opposition to Yankee domination. Populist dictators like the Dominican Republic's Rafael Trujillo have also promoted local musics for their own propagandastic purposes.

Some musicians themselves have entered the realm of politics. Harry Belafonte was a fervent champion of progressive causes and a critic of racism and American imperialism. Merengue innovator Johnny Ventura was an outspoken opponent of the Balaguer dictatorship in the Dominican Republic and held important political offices, while salsa artists like Ruben Blades and Willie Colon both ran energetically, if unsuccessfully, for political office.

While Colon has composed songs dealing with everything from military despots to AIDS, he said during his 1994 campaign for the U.S. Congress, “Sometimes writing a song is not enough.”

Since gaining independence, Caribbean countries have faced the need to ameliorate poverty by gaining control over their own natural resources and by promoting social justice. North American imperialism has in many cases impeded such progress. Especially during the Cold War years, virtually whenever a Caribbean state attempted significant reform—redistribution of wealth, land reform, or nationalization of resources—the United States intervened, often by overthrowing governments in the name of “safeguarding American interests” and “fighting communism.” Aside from undertaking numerous regional invasions and occupations in the early twentieth century,¹⁸ the CIA destabilized elected governments in Guatemala (1954) and Guyana (1962–64), effectively replacing them with corrupt and brutal dictatorships. In 1964, the U.S. Marines invaded the Dominican Republic to prevent a popular uprising from ousting the U.S.-friendly military establishment. In the 1970s, U.S. hostility helped undermine the reformist People’s National Party (PNP) government in Jamaica, leading to its defeat in 1980 by the more pliant Jamaican Labour Party. Since 1959, the Cuban people have had to endure all manner of Yankee hostility, including armed invasion in 1962, ongoing CIA-backed sabotage and terrorism, and a crippling embargo. In the early 1980s, the U.S.-backed IMF engineered a crisis in the otherwise thriving Trinidadian economy, forcing the country to make painful and unnecessary cuts in “socialist” public services such as the health system. In 1991, Haitian generals trained in the United States ousted the elected Prime Minister Jean-Bertrand Aristide and instituted a reign of terror. While American intervention in 1994 nominally restored the cantankerous Aristide to office, the arrangement ended up sustaining the infrastructure of military and paramilitary repression. Finally, in case anyone thought that the Cold War days of American big-stick imperialism were over, in 2004 Aristide was effectively kidnapped and again ejected from power by the Bush administration.

During this period, much of the Caribbean music industry has been dominated by North American–owned multinationals with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. There has also been a marked tendency—and often explicit pressure from producers—for musicians in the industry to avoid controversial song lyrics and stick to stock romantic or sexual themes. Nevertheless, different forms of Caribbean music have, in their own way, confronted social reality and voiced, however idiosyncratically, the demand for social justice. Such uses of music were particularly prominent in the

1960s and '70s, which were a period of sociopolitical ferment, mobilization, and optimism throughout the region, as in much of the world. The Cuban Revolution seemed to be successfully challenging U.S. domination, the Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo was dead at last, and the newly independent West Indian states thought that they could for the first time control their own national destinies. As Bob Marley sang (ambiguously, to be sure), "If you are the big tree, we are the small axe, ready to cut you down." In the United States, this was the era of the youth counterculture and the Black Power movement, whose influence spilled over into the Caribbean. And last, even if the Soviet bloc itself did not constitute an attractive model, at least its existence and the aid it could provide implied the possibility of an alternative to Yankee domination and cultural "Coca-Colonization."

The *nueva canción* of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic was one form of music explicitly linked to the optimism and idealism of the era. Other genres mirrored the spirit of the age in their own ways. Salsa of the 1970s emerged as the youthful voice of the barrio, self-consciously assertive and optimistic, chronicling the vicissitudes of lower-class urban life with a dynamic exuberance. In Jamaica, the sociopolitical ferment of urban youth found expression in roots reggae, which was linked not only to Rastafari but also to the activism and idealism of the 1970s PNP government.

In subsequent years, however, a changed sociopolitical climate led to a broad decline in activist musics and the utopian idealism that had animated them. By the 1980s, the American youth counterculture had burned out, and the Civil Rights Movement, having achieved some important goals, dissipated in the face of more intractable problems of economic equity. In the Latino community, the Young Lords self-destructed, and salsa lyrics withdrew from barrio assertiveness to the safe, common-denominator refrains of "I can't live without you." Enthusiasm for the political left waned as the Cuban economy collapsed, the Puerto Rican independence movement dissipated, and in the Dominican Republic, the progressive but ineffectual PRD administration of 1978–86 failed to live up to hopes. In the Spanish Caribbean, as elsewhere in Latin America, the *nueva canción* movement sputtered out accordingly. In Jamaica, the quasi-socialist PNP experiment collapsed under hostility from the United States and the IMF, leading to a return to the status quo of multinational exploitation and laissez-faire capitalism. Accordingly, roots reggae's militancy gave way to the slackness of dancehall, with Bob Marley's "Redemption Song" replaced by Mad Cobra's "Flex, Time to Have Sex."

In retrospect, the 1960s and '70s, with their exuberant optimism and idealism, seem like a passing revolutionary historical moment, at once ad-

mirably idealistic and naïvely utopian. In the globalized “New World Order,” with its absence of clear imperialist antagonists, singing of revolution and redemption has become like spitting into the wind, and popular music seems to have retreated into sensuality, sentimentality, and lumpen nihilism. Perhaps it may be inappropriate to expect dance music to do more than entertain, although the music of Ruben Blades and Juan Luis Guerra, and songs like Bujá Banton’s “Untold Stories,” suggest ways of transcending the norms of commercial entertainment. And there is something to be said for dancing through adversity, in a way that combines both escapism and affirmation of life, community, and hope.

Notes

CHAPTER 1

1. The Inquisition, although hardly an expression of cultural tolerance, was a religious campaign rather than a racial one and was aimed primarily at Jews, not blacks.

2. In Trinidad and Guyana, a “creole” generally implies a black or mulatto person, as opposed to an East Indian, and “creolization” thus has a different meaning, referring, for example, to the phenomenon of an East Indian adopting Afro-Trinidadian manners.

3. In Roger Abrahams and John Szwed, eds., *After Africa: Extracts from British Travel Accounts and Journals of the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Nineteenth Centuries Concerning the Slaves, the Manners, and Customs in the British West Indies* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1983), 301.

4. Derek Walcott, “The Muse of History,” in *Is Massa Day Dead? Black Moods in the Caribbean*, edited by Orde Coombs (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1974), 1–27.

CHAPTER 2

1. Perhaps this is a good place for a word on Spanish pronunciation in general, with which all North Americans should be familiar. Briefly, *j* is an aspirated *h*; *ll* is like *y*; *h* is silent; *z* is like *s*; *gue* is like *gay*; *güe* is like *gway* (or *way*); and *qui* is like *key*. Hence, *jolla* is pronounced *hoy-a*; *hija* is pronounced *ee-ha*; *quinto* is pronounced *keen-toe*; and *son* falls somewhere between *sun* and *sone*.

2. Most *botánicas* are hole-in-the-wall affairs, but a few—such as the Jewish-owned Original Products in the Bronx—are veritable supermarkets.

3. Sarah Rainsford, “Cubans Trace Roots to Remote Sierra Leone Village,” BBC News, April 21, 2014, available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-25876023>.

4. See the video clip “Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, late 1980s” on my YouTube and Vimeo websites, at <https://youtu.be/xWfpstcTqNk> and <https://vimeo.com/141268542>.

5. Alejo Carpentier, *La música en Cuba* (Mexico City: Fondo da Cultura Económica, 1946), 104–05; Alejo Carpentier, *Music in Cuba*, edited by Timothy Brennan, translated by Alan West-Durán (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 130.

6. “Yo nací de Africa, tal vez soy del Congo, tal vez soy del Ampanga. . . . Yo no soy Rodríguez, yo no soy Fernández. . . . Tal vez soy Amoto, tal vez soy Momomba.”

7. “La esencia del guaguancó,” composed by Tite Curet Alonso, was originally released on *La perfecta combinación* (Fania 4XT-SLPC-380).

8. As a joke from the 1990s went (more or less): What do you call two violinists, a trumpeter, and a tuba player? The Cuban National Symphony Orchestra returning from a U.S. tour.

9. Anna Robin Isenstadt.

10. See Nora Gámez Torres, “Hearing the Change: Reggaeton and Emergent Values in Contemporary Cuba,” *Latin American Music Review* 33, no. 2 (2012): 227–60.

CHAPTER 3

1. See Edgardo Díaz Díaz and Peter Manuel, “Puerto Rico: The Rise and Fall of the Danza as National Music,” in *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean*, edited by Peter Manuel (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 113–54.

2. Chuitín and Chuito, “Quién manda en la casa,” on *Un jíbaro terminao*, vol. 2 (Ansonia SALP 1519).

3. Baltazar Carrero, “El jíbaro de rincón,” on *Tierra adentro* (Ansonia SALP 1537).

4. Ramito, “Puerto Rico cambiado,” on *Parrandeando* (Ansonia SALP 1492).

5. In my course on Caribbean music in New York, after I devoted a class session to *jíbaro* music, a young Puerto Rican woman approached me and told me that she had grown up in the countryside and was steeped in *jíbaro* music and culture. When I said, “Oh, you should have spoken up and shared that with the class,” she exclaimed, “No way! I don’t want anyone to know!”

6. See the video clip “Fiesta of Santiago Apostol, Loíza, Puerto Rico, 1993” on my YouTube and Vimeo websites: <https://youtu.be/oXlpO5uT0hI> and <https://vimeo.com/141267769>.

7. See the video clip “Bomba in Loíza, 1993” on my websites.

8. “Mamita llegó el Obispo / llegó el Obispo de Roma / mamita, si tú lo vieras. ¡Qué cosa linda, qué cosa mona! . . . El Obispo no toma ron / que le gusta la cañita / Mamita, si tú lo vieras, ¡qué cosa linda cuando se pica!”

9. As quoted in Juan Flores, *Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity* (Houston: Arte Publico, 1993), 104.

10. Rafael Hernández, “Yo vuelvo a mi bohío.”

11. El Gallito de Maní, “Culpando el subway,” on *Tierra adentro* (Ansonia SALP 1537).

12. Baltazar Carrero, “Un jíbaro en Nueva York,” on *Tierra adentro* (Ansonia SALP 1537).

13. “No sufren por nada / aunque estén ausente / si brillen sus mentes / su tierra adorada / siempre recordara / una vida entera. / Si un día cualquiera / verás tu regreso, / vente con un beso; / tu patria te espera / en la Navidad, Borinquen” (*aguinaldo oroco-veño*).

14. “Yo tuve un sueño feliz, quise hacerlo una canción, y mi guitarra cogí, puse todo el corazón, concentré pensando en ti. . . . Era en una playa de mi tierra tan querida.”

15. Quoted in John Storm Roberts, *The Latin Tinge: The Impact of Latin American Music on the United States*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 87.

16. In 2015, Puerto Rico’s economy entered a crisis mode and the island defaulted on

its bond payments. Among other problems, the local economy is still crippled by extortionate policies such as the Jones Act, which requires all merchant shipping to and from the island to be conducted by U.S. vessels.

17. Flores, *Divided Borders*, 104.

CHAPTER 4

1. In fact, some of Pacheco's early hits, despite LP titles like *Pacheco y su nuevo tumbao* (Pacheco and His New Beat), were simply well-executed covers of forgotten and by then unavailable recordings by the Cuban bands of Felix Chappotin and Benny Moré.

2. Sergio George, interview with Vernon Boggs, *Latin Beat* 3, no. 1 (February 1993).

3. A reference to the Cuban nationalist José Martí, who wrote of the United States in an 1895 letter, "I have lived inside the monster and know its entrails."

4. Willie Colon, "Calle luna calle sol," on *Lo mato* (Fania SLP 00044, copyright by José Flores, Sonido Inc.).

5. From Willie Colon's "El malo" (1967): "El malo de aquí soy yo, porque tengo corazón."

6. Ruben Blades, in Jeremy Marre, dir., *Salsa: Latin Pop Music in the Cities*, documentary, 1979. In the same film, the Young Lords activist Felipe Luciano eloquently articulated the vision of salsa lyricism that he shared with Blades: "Can our lyrics make sense? We're not asking for leftist lyrics, we're not asking people to become Marxist-Leninists. We're only saying to our composers and our arrangers, and to our lyricists, 'Our sons and daughters are listening to this music; can we say something about the kind of life that they're leading, about what the options, or the lack of options are?' Ruben Blades is doing that, and there are others who are trying to do that, but they're fighting an uphill battle." With the advent of *salsa romántica* in the 1980s, the battle was lost for good.

7. Ruben Blades, quoted in "Singer, Actor, Politico," *Time*, January 29, 1990, 50.

8. C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (London: Stanley Paul/Hutchinson, 1963), preface.

9. Blades, quoted in "Singer, Actor, Politico," 52.

10. Eddie Palmieri, "Ven ven," originally on *Cheo y Quintana* (Barbera LP B205 SENI 0798).

11. Jorge Manuel López, interview, *El Diario*, September 24, 1993, 32.

12. As related by Chris Washburne, salsa trombonist and Columbia University professor.

13. For further information regarding On-2 dancing, see Juliet McMains, *Spinning Mambo into Salsa: Caribbean Dance in Global Commerce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Sydney Hutchinson, ed., *Salsa World: A Global Dance in Local Contexts* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014).

14. From the "Just Dance" section of Salsaforums.com. See also www.salsanewyork.com.

15. See Raquel Rivera, Wayne Marshall, and Deborah Pacini-Hernandez, eds., *Reggaetón* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press). Reggaetonologists note that the riddim in Shabba Ranks's song was actually "Poco Man Jam" and the Puerto Rican adaptation derives more directly from the "Pounder" riddim.

16. Kathy Rodriguez, then at John Jay College.

CHAPTER 5

1. See, e.g., the video clip "Fiesta of La Señora de la Virgen de Regla, in Baní, Dom. Rep., 2006," on my websites at <https://youtu.be/oPt33BsWy6s> and <https://vimeo.com/141267973>.

2. See the discussion of these traditions in Martha Ellen Davis, *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music: South America, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean* (New York: Garland, 1998), 850–57.

3. See the video clip “Sarandunga in La Vereda, Dominican Republic, 2006,” on my websites at <https://youtu.be/4s-rVrWYjzc> and <https://vimeo.com/141269775>.

4. Ethnomusicologist Angelina Tallaj is the primary source for data on the revival of *palo*.

5. See the video clip “Carabiné (Dominican Folk Dance),” on my websites at <https://youtu.be/sela19oBovY> and <https://vimeo.com/141267678>.

6. I am indebted to Sydney Hutchinson for this information on current *merengue típico*.

7. Particularly appropriate in Trujillo’s case would be the adage “¿Tu abuela dónde está?” (literally, “Where’s your grandmother?” but implicitly, “You pretend to be white, but what about your black grandmother?”); see Chapter 10.

8. In 2015, the Dominican government made another widely criticized attempt to deal with the immigration problem by decreeing the deportation of all undocumented Haitians, including many thousands who were born and raised in the Dominican Republic, have never been to Haiti, and do not speak Creole.

9. The main source of information on merengue in these pages is Paul Austerlitz, *Dominican Merengue in Regional, National, and International Perspectives* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997).

10. Wilfrido Vargas warned would-be emigrants in “La Yola” (1983), “Puerto Rico may be close, but go by air, if you get a visa you won’t have problems with immigration; don’t go in a *yola* [launch], don’t kid yourself, because in the Mona Passage, the sharks will devour you.”

11. “Todos le felicitaron cuando vino del lado, vino con siete maletas . . . para’o, el hombre llegó para’o.”

12. See Angelina Tallaj, “A Country That Ain’t Really Belong to Me’: Dominican-yorks, Identity, and Popular Music,” *Phoebe 2* (2006).

13. Manuel Chalas, “Aquí la mujer se daña,” in Deborah Pacini Hernandez, *Bachata: A Social History of a Dominican Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 165.

14. For further information and resources on early bachata, see www.iasorecords.com. The guitar timbre is called “chorus” and is a standard option on most amplifiers today.

15. This song is adapted from a Congolese soukous tune by Lea Lignazi, “Dede Priscilla,” on *Sound d’Afrique II “Soukous”* (Island ISSP 4008).

16. Quoted in Jordan Levin, “Guerra’s Music Mirrors Dominican Republic,” *Miami Herald*, June 21, 2002.

17. In “Soldado,” he is a sword-wielding “soldier of Christ,” and while he may be a peaceful man, some might say that such militant, chauvinistic Crusader imagery is not helpful in the present era of global jihad.

CHAPTER 6

1. In Haiti, “Vodou” is most often used to refer to a specific rite in the Rada denomination of spirits. Recently, writers have used the term to refer to all Rada religious rituals. Although Haitians do not have a single term to refer to all religious rituals associated with African ancestral spirits, I use the term “Vodou” to refer to spiritual practices in general.

My purpose is to contrast the practice of Vodou with the stereotypical depiction of Haitian spirituality known as “voodoo.”

2. Lois Wilcken, *The Drums of Vodou* (Tempe, Ariz.: White Cliffs Media, 1992), 22.

3. The word “Rara” (not to be confused with the Rada nation of Vodou spirits) should be pronounced by rolling the *r* sound in the back of the throat, as in French.

4. See the video clip “Rara” on my websites, <https://youtu.be/QnaHRTzy6nI> and <https://vimeo.com/141267416>.

5. The principal source of information on Haitian popular music in this chapter is Gage Averill, *A Day for the Hunter, A Day for the Prey: Music and Power in Haiti* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

6. The *contredanse*, which was among the most popular dances at *bals*, or dances of the colonial elite, was eventually adopted by the rural Haitian population and is still performed today at outdoor festivals known as *fèt champèt*.

7. Kate Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 232–36.

8. Tabou Combo, “Konpa ce pam,” on *Aux Antilles* (Zafem Records TC 8056CD).

9. The principal source of information on *zouk* in this chapter is Jocelyne Guilbault, *Zouk: World Music in the West Indies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

10. Dominique Cyrille, “Sa Ki Ta Nou (This Belongs to Us): Creole Dances of the French Caribbean,” in *Caribbean Dances from Abakuá to Zouk: How Movement Shapes Identity*, edited by Susanna Sloat (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 244.

11. Guilbault, *Zouk*, 216.

12. *Ibid.*, 32.

13. Jerome Camal, “Gwoka modènn,” in *Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World, Volume 9: Genres: Caribbean and Latin America*, edited by John Shepherd and David Horn (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 349–52.

14. See <https://kannidainternational.bandpage.com>, accessed August 23, 2015.

15. Julian Gerstin, “Interaction and Improvisation between Dancers and Drummers in Martinican Bèlè,” *Black Music Research Journal* 18, nos. 1–2 (1998): 126.

16. Despite their slightly different versions of French-based Creole, the languages of Martinique, Guadeloupe, Dominica, and St. Lucia are referred to here as Kwéyòl.

17. Guilbault, *Zouk*, 144.

18. Laura Caroline Donnelly, “Life after Zouk: Emerging Popular Music of the French Antillies,” master’s thesis, Michigan State University, East Lansing, 2010, 77. Donnelly provided the translation of the “Mozaik Kreyol” lyrics.

CHAPTER 7

1. Anthony Trollope, *The West Indies and the Spanish Main* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1860), 56.

2. Matthew Gregory Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor: Kept during a Residence in the Island of Jamaica*, 1834, 358, 61–63, available at <https://archive.org/details/journalofwestind00lewi>.

3. Kenneth Bilby and Elliott Leib, “The Kromanti Dance of the Windward Maroons of Jamaica,” *New West Indian Guide* 55, nos. 1–2 (1981): 52–101. See also the recording Kenneth Bilby, *Drums of Defiance: Maroon Music from the Earliest Free Black Communities of Jamaica* (Smithsonian SF 40412). Neither Kromanti Play nor Kumina should be conflated with obeah, a pan–West Indian miscellany of West African–derived folk magic practices that have no particular associated music traditions.

4. Kenneth Bilby, “Kumina: A Kongo-Based Tradition in the New World,” in *A Reader in African-Jamaican Music, Dance, Religion*, edited by Markus Coester and Wolfgang Bender (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2015), 484.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Kenneth Bilby, “Africa’s Creole Drum: The Gumbe as Vector and Signifier of Trans-African Creolization,” in *Creolization as Cultural Creativity*, edited by Robert Baron and Ana Cara (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), 137–77.

7. See Kenneth Bilby and Daniel Neely, “The English-Speaking Caribbean: Re-embodying the Colonial Ballroom,” in *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean*, edited by Peter Manuel (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 231–70.

8. The refrain of “Emmanuel Road” has been reworked into a few dancehall songs, notably T.O.K.’s clever “Galang Gal” and Masicka’s smutty “One by One.” Something for everyone!

9. Speaking of the Beatles, the stereo version of the Fab Four’s 1969 novelty song “You Know My Name (Look up the Number)” includes a parody of ska (from 1:05). Paul McCartney once stated that this was his favorite of all the group’s songs.

10. The attack seems to have been orchestrated by thugs trying to extort money from Marley for a horse-racing scam a ghetto chum of his had perpetrated. It may have also been encouraged by the CIA via its JLP thugs. (Marley’s Trenchtown friends hunted down and killed the assassins.) Supporters of the CIA involvement theory would note that this was the period of various CIA-aided assassinations in the area, the CIA-backed overthrow of Chile’s democratically elected government in 1973, and the bombing of a Cuban civilian airplane in 1976 by Cuban exiles trained by the CIA, killing seventy-three people. Marlon James’s novel *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2014) presents a marvelous and quite credible fictionalization of the gang wars of the period and the Marley shooting.

11. Marley’s cancer is often stated to have been caused by an injury to his toe while playing soccer in 1977, although evidence indicates that the toe was already cancerous when the incident occurred.

12. Brent Dowe, quoted in Lloyd Bradley, *This Is Reggae Music: The Story of Jamaica’s Music* (New York: Grove, 2000), 299.

13. From one perspective, both early hip-hop and proto-dancehall sought to use recordings to provide rhythmic vamps over which a mike man could “toast.” From the late 1970s on, Bronx soundmen like Grandmaster Flash and Africa Bambaataa did this by using two turntables to loop a short rhythmic “break” in a song like “Apache.” The Jamaicans achieved a similar effect by using B sides of records that featured only the instrumental track.

14. Dub versions are often referred to as remixes, but insofar as that term might imply the addition of sounds from other songs or sources, “remastering” more aptly describes the standard dub practice of working with only the extant tracks in a song.

15. See Carolyn Cooper, *Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture at Large* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), chap. 2.

16. Quoted in *ibid.*, 154.

17. From [http://www.forum.dancehallreggae.com/showthread.php/215303-TOP-5-DANCEHALL-GANGSTA-\(GUN\)-SONGS-OF-THE-MODERN-ERA!!!!](http://www.forum.dancehallreggae.com/showthread.php/215303-TOP-5-DANCEHALL-GANGSTA-(GUN)-SONGS-OF-THE-MODERN-ERA!!!!)

18. This quote, along with others presented here, is among the innumerable pithy comments that can be found at <http://www.forum.dancehallreggae.com>.

19. Dancehall events are evocatively described in Sonja Stanley Niaah, *Dancehall: From Slave Ship to Ghetto* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2010), and in Norman

Stolzoff, *Wake the Town and Tell the People: Dancehall Culture in Jamaica* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000).

20. Concert report written for the author by Dainia Lawes, a student at John Jay College, New York, in 2004.

21. This dialogue is freely adapted from postings at the now extinct www.reggaeweb.com.

CHAPTER 8

1. See the video clip “Parang Group, Trinidad” on my websites, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gduGrw6bzak> and <https://vimeo.com/141271651>.

2. See Kevin Birth, *Bacchanalian Sentiments: Musical Experiences and Political Counterpoints in Trinidad* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008), 132.

3. See the video clip “Orisha Ceremony (Shango), Trinidad, 2010” on my websites, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6AUzVdNqIo> and <https://vimeo.com/141271772>.

4. Among the few publications on Orisha music is Ryan Bazinet, “Shango Dances across the Water: Music and the Re-construction of Trinidadian Orisha in New York City,” in *Reconstructing Place and Space: Media, Culture, Discourse and the Constitution of Caribbean Diasporas*, edited by Kamille A. Gentles-Peart and Maurice L. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 123–47.

5. “Jean and Dinah,” words and music by Don Raye and Mighty Sparrow, © 1957 MCA Music Publishing, a division of MCA, Inc. Copyright renewed. International copyright secured. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

6. Mighty Sparrow and Lord Melody “Picong” (1957), on *Calypso Kings and Pink Gin* (Cook 1185, reissued by Smithsonian Records).

7. See Gordon Rohlehr, *Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad* (Port of Spain, Trinidad: Self-published, 1990), chap. 5; Keith Warner, *Kaiso! The Trinidad Calypso* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents, 1985), chap. 4.

8. Chalkdust, “Kaiso in the Hospital,” on *Chalkdust: Visions* (Straker GS2365).

9. B. C. Pires, quoted in “Trinidad Carnival Is . . .,” *Caribbean Beat* 53 (January–February 2002).

10. A fine portrait of mas bands and other Carnival activities is Glenn Micallef, dir., *Mas Fever: Inside Trinidad Carnival*, documentary, 1996. Mas bands’ websites, which are easily found using Internet search engines, are also informative.

11. Quoted in Stephen Steumpfle, *Steelband Movement: The Forging of a National Art in Trinidad and Tobago* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 27.

CHAPTER 9

1. For vignettes of chowtal, see the section from 21:50 in Peter Manuel, dir., *Tassa Thunder: Folk Music from India to the Caribbean*, video documentary, 2015, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jLu0dXWslcg>.

2. See the section from 35:20 in Manuel, *Tassa Thunder*.

3. Ethnomusicologist Stephanie Jackson is the source for this information.

4. See the video clip “Tan-Singing of Trinidad and Guyana,” available on YouTube, by that title, or on my website.

5. For vignettes of chutney, see the section from 5:25 in Manuel, *Tassa Thunder*.

6. Quoted in Roger Abrahams and John Szwed, eds., *After Africa: Extracts from British Travel Accounts and Journals of the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Nineteenth Centuries*

Concerning the Slaves, the Manners, and Customs in the British West Indies (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1983), 290.

7. See also Chapter 1 and the similar account from 1831 in Richard Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 67.

8. V. S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage* (London: Penguin, 1962), 231.

9. Some of the information on small-island music comes from entries in Dale Olsen and Daniel Sheehy, eds., *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music: South America, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean* (New York: Garland, 1998). Other informative sources, in addition to those cited under “Further Reading” in Chapter 9, include John Szwed and Morton Marks, “The Afro-American Transformation of European Set Dances and Dance Suites,” *Dance Research Journal* 20, no. 1 (1988); and Donald Hill, liner notes, *The Big Drum and Other Ritual and Social Music of Carriacou* (Folkways FE 34002).

10. I thank Rebecca Miller for this information.

CHAPTER 10

1. Quoted in Eric Eustace Williams and Paul Sutton, *Forged from the Love of Liberty: Selected Speeches of Dr. Eric Williams* (Port of Spain, Trinidad: Longman Caribbean, 1981), 228.

2. Marc Anthony (born Marco Antonio) has stated, “This crossover thing really displaces me. Like I’m coming in and invading America with my music. I was born and raised in New York, man”: quoted in Licia Fiol Matta, “Pop *Latinidad*: Puerto Ricans in the Latin Explosion,” *Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños Bulletin* 14, no. 1 (2004): 40.

3. For example, Mighty Sparrow’s 1950s calypso “Jean Marabunta” (see Keith Warner, *Kaiso! The Trinidad Calypso* [Washington, D.C.: Three Continents, 1985], 100), and Rafael Cortijo’s “Severa” (1950s Puerto Rican *guaracha*).

4. For example, Buju Banton’s “Have to Get Your Body Tonight” (“even by gunpoint”) or Bounty Killer’s “Stucky” (1980s dancehall).

5. For example, in El Gran Combo’s “Me dicen papá” (1970s Puerto Rican salsa), the singer complains about all the multiracial children who call him “Papa” and whom he must support, noting that some of them resemble his friends who hang around, and one of them looks like bolero singer and famed ladies’ man Daniel Santos. Other songs in this vein include Mighty Terror’s “Chinese Children” and Sparrow’s “Child Father” (calypsos; see Warner, *Kaiso!* 97–98) and Bounty Killer’s “Living Dangerously” (dancehall).

6. For example, Atilla’s “I’ll Never Burden Myself with a Wife” (1930s calypso). Back in the 1970s, when salsa lyrics actually had something to say, the singer and bandleader Oscar D’León provided a different sort of role model by singing hit songs about the joys of raising his children (“Mis hijos,” and “Siéntate ahí”).

7. For example, Beenie Man, “Old Dog” and “Nuff Gal” (1990s dancehall); Coupé Cloué, “Fem Colloquint”; and Miami Top Vice (T-Vice), “Yo tout pou zin” (Haitian *konpa*). In “Old Dog,” Beenie Man states that it is simply his nature to need many women, often two or three at a time, and that he even intends to seduce his mother-in-law.

8. For example, Cortijo’s “Huy qué pote” (1950s Puerto Rican plena) and the colonial-era calypsos cited in Gordon Rohlehr, *Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad* (Port of Spain, Trinidad: G. Rohlehr, 1990), 258–63.

9. For example, Mighty Sparrow’s “Turn Them Down” (calypso), Hector Lavoe’s “Bandalera,” Johnny Pacheco’s “Préstame los guantes” (salsa), Daniel Santos’s “Yo la mato” (bolero), and Johnny Ventura’s “Dále un palo” (merengue).

10. For example, the 1990s Dominican merengue “La grua” (The Tow Truck), which comically depicts the possessive wife dragging her husband away from his girlfriends at the dance club.

11. During an interview with Sabrina Hannam, one of my students, Beenie Man stated that he was in fact a monogamous, devoutly religious family man and that the playboy image was merely a commercial pose. He further asserted that he sang because God told him to, although, as she observed, “God did not specify what type of song should be sung.”

12. “Si el hombre se divierte, la mujer también vacila.” I thank Sydney Hutchinson for pointing this out.

13. Kathy Rodríguez.

14. Juan Flores, “‘Qué assimilated brother, yo soy asimilao’: The Structuring of Puerto Rican Identity in the U.S.,” in Juan Flores, *Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity* (Houston: Arte Público, 1993), 182–95.

15. Kathy Rodríguez.

16. Aida Gonzalez.

17. Roger Abrahams, *The Man-of-Words in the West Indies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 12, 16.

18. These include occupations of the following countries: Nicaragua (1910, 1912–33), Honduras (1903, 1907, 1911–12, 1919, 1924–25), Cuba (1906–09, 1912, 1917–20, 1933–34), Mexico (1913–17, 1918–19), Panama (1921, 1925, 1989), the Dominican Republic (1916–24), and Haiti (1915–34).

Glossary

- abakuá.** An urban Afro-Cuban secretive brotherhood derived from the Efik people of Calabar.
- abeng.** A cow's horn blown as a trumpet in Haiti, Jamaica, and elsewhere.
- afranchi.** Emancipated light-skinned people of color in Saint-Domingue or colonial Haiti.
- aguinaldo.** A kind of Puerto Rican *jíbaro* (farmer) music performed especially during the Christmas season.
- arará.** A Dahomeyan-derived Afro-Cuban sect.
- areito.** An Arawak socioreligious ritual with music and dance.
- bachata.** A romantic, guitar-based bolero style of the Dominican Republic.
- balada** (ballad). A sentimental Spanish-language song in mainstream, commercial pop style, generally not associated with dance.
- bamboula.** A colonial-era name for several kinds of Afro-Caribbean dance and song forms.
- bandu.** The more deeply voiced of the two drums normally played in traditional Jamaican Kumina music, on which an unvarying supporting rhythm is played.
- bandurria.** A Spanish-derived, mandolin-like instrument used in Cuban *guajiro* (farmer) music (especially *punto*).
- bann rara.** A Haitian Rara band.
- barriles de bomba.** Bomba barrel drums.
- batá.** A Yoruba-derived double-headed, hourglass-shaped drum played in a trio, used in Afro-Cuban Santería music.
- bèlè/belair.** A term for a variety of French Caribbean—especially Martinican—Afro-creole voice-and-percussion song and dance forms.
- bembé.** (1) In Cuba, a type of Santería event that uses eponymous drums and rhythms, wherein possession may occur, despite a prevailingly festive air. (2) The staved barrel drums used in the *bembé* festivity. (3) A term used loosely to describe any Santería ceremony with music and dance.
- benna.** A creole folksong genre of Antigua.

- benta.** A monochord found in Jamaica, Curaçao, and elsewhere, consisting of a long bamboo stick out of which a strip has been cut, which is struck with a stick while the strip is stopped with a gourd.
- bhajan.** A generic term for a Hindu devotional song, such as those sung in India and in Indo-Caribbean society.
- biguine.** A creole dance-music genre of Martinique and Guadeloupe, flourishing especially in the mid-twentieth century.
- birha.** A narrative song genre of North India's Bhojpuri region, also occasionally performed in the Indic Caribbean.
- bogle.** A Jamaican popular dance style of the 1990s, named after its creator.
- bolero.** A romantic, danceable song in slow quadratic meter, popular throughout the Spanish Caribbean, with a characteristic bass pattern (when bass is present) of a half-note followed by two quarter-notes.
- bomba.** An Afro-Puerto Rican dance and music genre.
- bombo.** A Spanish drum used in military bands and in Cuban conga processions.
- bongó (bongo).** (1) A pair of small, joined hand drums, originating in Cuba. (2) An archaic Afro-Trinidadian social-dance genre traditionally performed at wakes.
- botánica.** A store selling articles pertaining to folk Catholicism, Spiritism, and Afro-Caribbean religions such as Santería.
- boula (bulá).** A name for a drum used in Haitian Vodou music, Cuban *tumba francesa*, and Carriacou big-drum music.
- bubbling.** A generic Jamaican term for dancing.
- buru (burru).** A specific style of neo-African Jamaican music, played primarily in the parishes of Clarendon and St. Catherine, that uses three drums and a variety of percussion instruments. The term is also used more broadly in Jamaica to refer to any music of obviously African origin.
- cabildo.** (1) In Cuba, an Afro-Cuban mutual-aid society. (2) Town council.
- cadens.** See *kadans*.
- cajón.** (1) Literally, "box." (2) The wooden box sometimes used as a drum in Cuban *rumba columbia*.
- calinda (kalinda).** A colonial-era name for several kinds of Afro-Caribbean dance and song forms. In Trinidad, calinda was especially used to accompany stick fighting.
- camboulay (canboulay).** A nineteenth-century Afro-Trinidadian festival with drumming and dancing, derived from a plantation fire drill (from the French *cannes brûlées*).
- canción.** Literally, "song," especially a through-composed, sentimental, slow song (cf. *balada*), not associated with dance.
- canto.** (1) Literally, "chant." (2) The first section of a rumba (syn., *largo*).
- cascara.** (1) Shell. (2) The hollowed stick or log that is struck with two sticks in rumba and other Afro-Cuban genres.
- catá (kata).** A term for a drum in Cuban *tumba francesa* music and in Carriacouan big-drum music (cf. the "cutter" lead drum in Afro-Trinidadian music and *tassa* drumming).
- chacha.** Uncovered baskets shaken like rattles in Santiago de Cuba *comparsa*.
- chachachá (cha-cha-chá, chacha).** A Cuban popular dance and music genre in medium tempo that flourished in the 1950s.
- cha madigra.** In Haitian Carnival, mobile floats carrying bands.
- changüí.** A creole music genre of eastern Cuba, especially Guantánamo.
- charanga.** A Cuban dance ensemble consisting of flute, two or more violins, piano, bass, and percussion (originally called *charanga francesa*).

- chowtal.** A responsorial folksong form performed by Hindu Indo-Caribbeans during the vernal Phagwa or Holi festival, derived from the Bhojpuri region of North India.
- chutney.** (1) An East Indian spiced condiment. (2) A light, fast Indo-Caribbean song and dance in modernized Indian folk style.
- Cibao, El.** Densely populated valley of central-northern Dominican Republic.
- cinquillo.** A Cuban term for the rhythmic ostinato that pervades *danzón* and related genres (in note values, long-short-long-short-long, or 8th-16th-8th-16th-8th, or x-xx-xx-).
- clave.** (1) Literally, “key” (especially used metaphorically). (2) One of a pair of hard wooden sticks, struck together. (3) The characteristic ostinato played on *clave* sticks. (4) In “*coros de clave*,” a nineteenth- and early twentieth-century urban genre of Cuba, in 6/8 meter, sung by strolling choruses (from José Anselmo Clavé).
- cocolo.** Slang (loosely, “coconut-head”), originally a derogatory Spanish Caribbean term for black people or fans of Afro-Latin dance music; in the Dominican Republic, a descendant of West Indian immigrants, especially in the area around San Pedro de Macorís.
- cofradía.** Literally, “brotherhood”; in the Dominican Republic, the term used for a set of Afro-Dominican urban mutual-aid and religious societies.
- colmado.** In the Dominican Republic, a neighborhood “Mom ’n’ Pop” store.
- columbia.** One of the three main types of Cuban rumba, danced by a solo male, in what could be regarded as 12/8 meter.
- comparsa.** A street procession associated with Cuban Carnival, featuring large groups wearing coordinated costumes, performing ambulatory dance with accompanying music, all generally of a more formal and elaborate character than a street conga (syn., *paseo*).
- compas.** See *konpa dirèk*.
- conga.** (1) A single-headed, Congolese-derived drum used in Cuban dance music. (2) A song and processional dance genre, performed during Carnival, generally of a more informal character than a *comparsa*. (3) A group that performs such a genre (e.g., Conga de Los Hoyos).
- conjunto.** In Latin music, a standard dance ensemble consisting of a rhythm section, two to four horns (typically trumpets), and vocals.
- contradanza** (cf. country dance, contradance, *contredanse*). (1) The predominant nineteenth-century Cuban salon and popular dance and music genre. (2) A Spanish salon dance and music genre of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.
- contredanse.** A French and derivative Franco-Haitian salon and popular dance and music genre dating from the late eighteenth century.
- controversia.** (1) Literally, “debate,” “argument.” (2) A Cuban and Puerto Rican campesino music genre in the form of a poetic duel between two singers.
- coro.** In salsa, *son*, and other Latin musics, the “chorus” or refrain, which may also function as a hook.
- cuatro.** (1) Literally, “four.” (2) A Puerto Rican guitar-like instrument with five doubled strings used in *jíbaro* (farmer) music. (3) A ukulele-like instrument used in Venezuela, in Suriname, and in Trinidadian parang.
- cuchifrito.** A kind of fried snack.
- cumbia.** A popular music genre of Colombia and, subsequently, Central America and elsewhere.
- dantal** (dand-tal, dhantal). In Indo-Caribbean and Bhojpuri Indian music, two steel rods (one long and straight, the other short and U-shaped) struck together rhythmically.

- danza.** (1) A popular and salon dance and music genre of Puerto Rico. (2) A roughly synonymous term for the nineteenth-century Cuban *contradanza*, especially from around the 1850s.
- danzón.** A Cuban salon music genre popular from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century.
- décima.** A Spanish-derived verse form of ten octosyllabic lines, usually with the *espinela* rhyme scheme *abbaaccddc*.
- deshoukaj.** Haitian Creole: literally, “uprooting; by extension”; the popular attempts to destroy vestiges of the dictatorship of Jean-Claude Duvalier in Haiti in the late 1980s.
- despelote.** A Cuban style of dancing (especially to timba), in which the woman dances freestyle in a flamboyant, sensual manner.
- dholak.** The standard two-headed barrel drum used in North India and to accompany various kinds of music in Indo-Caribbean society.
- dub.** A substyle of reggae remixes that flourished during the 1970s and early 1980s, characterized by special studio effects such as fades, echo, reverb, and shifting of recorded tracks.
- dub plate.** In dancehall, a recording (traditionally a 45 rpm vinyl record) custom-made for a sound system, in which the deejay, typically singing to the tune of an existing hit of his or hers, sings new lyrics praising the sound system.
- dub poetry.** A Jamaican genre of poetry (also disseminated in printed form) usually performed with reggae-style accompaniment, using Jamaican patwa language and socially conscious lyrics.
- Espiritismo.** The Latin American version of Spiritism, a quasireligious doctrine adapted from the nineteenth-century writings of the French educator Hypolite L. D. Rival, under the pseudonym Alan Kardec.
- estribillo.** Chorus, refrain.
- etu.** A Yoruba-influenced genre of neo-African music played in western Jamaica.
- fiesta patronal.** In Spain and Latin America, the festival in which a town honors its patron saint.
- funde.** (1) The “time-keeping” drum in traditional Rastafarian *nyabinghi* music. (2) The name of one of the three drums used in traditional *burru* music.
- fusilamiento.** (1) Literally, “firing.” (2) In Dominican music, the adaptation of a preexisting song to the format of a local genre (especially merengue).
- gagá.** The Dominican derivative of Haitian Rara, in which bamboo or PVC tubes play hocket-style ostinatos, with drumming and singing.
- galleta.** A military-style bass drum used in Cuban conga processions.
- guaguancó.** The most popular kind of Cuban traditional rumba.
- guajeo.** In Cuban dance music, a melodic ostinato, especially as played by the *tres* in a *son*.
- guajira.** (1) A female peasant of Cuba. (2) A kind of folk and popular music associated with or eulogizing Cuban rural life (from *música guajira*). (3) In Spain, a *cante* or song-type of flamenco loosely derived from Cuban rural music.
- guajiro.** A Cuban farmer, implicitly white or mulatto.
- guaracha.** (1) In nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Cuba, a light, often satirical or bawdy theater song, typically alternating verse and chorus. (2) Subsequently, in Cuba and Puerto Rico, a term (roughly synonymous with *son*) for a light, up-tempo song.
- güira.** A Dominican scraper, typically made of a serrated metal cylinder, played with a few metal prongs attached to a handle.
- güiro.** A gourd scraper, used especially in Cuban popular music.

- gumbay** (goombay, gumbe, gumbé). A common colonial-era term denoting various kinds of Afro–West Indian drums, dances, and festivals; more specific meanings include (1) an African-derived Jamaican religion and the neo-African music associated with it, (2) the square, stool-like frame drum used in various sorts of Afro-Jamaican traditional music, and (3) a pre-Lenten masquerade festival in Bermuda.
- habanera**. A slow, sentimental, vocal song, set to the rhythm of the Cuban *contradanza*, originating in Havana in the 1840s and spreading thence to Mexico, Europe, and elsewhere.
- harmonium**. A hand-pumped, accordion-like keyboard instrument popular in India and in Indo-Caribbean music.
- holandés**. A rhythm used in Puerto Rican bomba.
- iyesá**. An Afro-Cuban, Yoruba-derived religious sect whose sole *cabildo* exists in Matanzas.
- Jab-Jab**. A ghoulishly costumed stock character in Trinidad’s Carnival.
- jíbaro**. A Puerto Rican farmer, implicitly white or mulatto.
- jinetera**. (1) Literally, “[female] jockey.” (2) In modern Cuba, a woman who hustles foreign tourists for money.
- joropo**. A Venezuelan folksong genre in fast 6/8 meter.
- junkanoo** (John Canoe). In Jamaica and other West Indian islands, a festival with music, often performed in street processions.
- kadans ranpa**. Haitian Creole: literally, “rampart rhythm.” A Haitian dance rhythm popularized by Weber Sicot in the 1950s.
- kete**. The ensemble of three drums used in traditional Rastafarian music, consisting of repeater, *funde*, and bass; also sometimes used to refer to the repeater drum alone.
- konpa dirèk** (*compas direct*). A Haitian dance rhythm popularized by Nemours Jean-Baptiste in the 1950s.
- Kromanti Play**. Traditional religion of the Maroons living in the Blue Mountains of eastern Jamaica.
- Kumina**. (1) An African-derived religion in eastern Jamaica and the neo-African music associated with it. (2) Lowercase: The name of a new, secular, urban style of drumming that developed in Kingston and contributed to the development of *nyabinghi* drumming.
- kyas** (also, *playing kyas*). The higher-pitched of the two drums normally used in kumina music, which plays the more complex rhythmic patterns.
- largo**. The initial section of a Cuban rumba (following the short introductory *diana*), where the lead vocalist sings an extended text (synonym, *canto*; in salsa, also called *guia* or *tema*).
- Latin jazz**. A predominantly instrumental, latter twentieth-century genre featuring jazz-oriented solos over Afro-Cuban rhythms, intended primarily for listening rather than for dance.
- lucumí**. An Afro-Cuban of Yoruba descent.
- lwa** (loa). A spirit in Haitian Vodou.
- malimba**. Haitian term for *marimbula*.
- mambo**. (1) An up-tempo, predominantly instrumental, big-band dance-music genre featuring antiphonal sectional arrangements for contrasting brass instruments, flourishing especially in the 1950s. (2) An instrumental interlude in the *montuno* section of a salsa or Cuban-style dance-music song (especially one in which the chord progression departs from that of the *montuno*). (3) The vamp-like, harmonically static coda of a

late 1930s and 1940s *danzón*. (4) A devotional song in the Afro-Cuban, Congolese-derived *Palo* religion. (5) The ostinato-based second section of a merengue, often featuring call-and-response vocals (syn., “jaleo”). (6) Among “On-2” salsa dancers, a term for their style of dance, also loosely used to designate the music—for example, “On-2 mambo dance.”

manman. The largest drum in the Haitian Vodou ensemble.

marimba. (1) In the Dominican Republic, the African-derived lamellophone; in Cuba, called *marimbula*. (2) Elsewhere, a xylophone with wooden keys.

marimbula. In Cuba, a lamellophone, used as a bass instrument, consisting of plucked metal keys mounted on a wooden box.

Maroon. A runaway slave or a descendant thereof (in Haitian Creole, *mawon*).

masón. A dance genre in Cuban *tumba francesa* in which men and women form opposing lines and perform choreographic figures, derived from the *contredanse*.

mbira. Shona (Zimbabwean) name for a lamellophone, consisting of plucked metal keys mounted on a small wooden box, with or without a gourd amplifier.

mento. A Jamaican creole folksong genre played on a variety of instruments, most typically featuring guitar, banjo, fife (or fiddle), and rhumba box (bass lamellophone).

mereng (méringue). A popular creole music and dance genre of Haiti, especially as flourishing in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century.

merengue. (1) A popular creole music and dance genre of the Dominican Republic.

(2) In the mid-1800s, Puerto Rican term for the genre otherwise known as *danza*.

(3) In Colombian *vallenato* music, a song form in 6/8 meter.

mini-djaz. A Haitian popular dance music of the 1960 and 1970s, especially as played by electric guitar-based combos, perhaps with trumpets.

Moko Jumbie. A traditional stilted, costumed stock character in Trinidad Carnival, also formerly common in other Afro-Caribbean festivals.

moña. An instrumental interlude during a salsa *montuno*, similar to the second definition given for mambo, except that a *moña*, unlike a mambo, occurs over the same chordal ostinato used in the rest of the *montuno*.

montuno. The final, and usually longest, part of a rumba, *son*, or salsa song, employing call-and-response vocals over a rhythmic and harmonic ostinato.

ñañigo. A member of a Calabari-derived Afro-Cuban Abakuá society.

Négritud (Fr. Nègritude). An early-twentieth-century literary and cultural movement of the Spanish and French Caribbean, celebrating Afro-Caribbean heritage.

ngoma. (1) In Cuba, a Congolese-derived cylindrical drum. (2) In Africa, a term for a wide variety of regional drums and music and dance genres.

nouvel jenerasyon. Haitian Creole: literally, “new generation.” Haitian pop music of the 1980s and 1990s.

nueva canción. Literally, “new song.” The Latin American variety of singer-songwriter music, explicitly or implicitly identified with progressive politics and cultural policies.

nueva trova. A Cuban efflorescence of *nueva canción*.

nyabinghi. (1) A traditional, drum-based Rastafarian musical style. (2) Formal Rastafarian gatherings or ceremonies.

obeah. A body of West African-derived folk beliefs and practices relating to medicine, ritual, and, especially, magic.

orisha. A deity or spirit in Yoruba and Afro-Caribbean Yoruba-derived religions.

orquesta típica. In the second half of the nineteenth century, a Cuban horn-dominated ensemble primarily playing *danzón* and *contradanza*, consisting of cornet, trombone,

- figle, bombardino* (saxhorn), two clarinets, two or more violins, contrabass, timbales, and *güiro*.
- oru del igbodú.** The initial, semiprivate part of a Santería ceremony during which a suite of drum “salutes” to the orishas is performed before an altar.
- palitos.** Literally, “little sticks,” such as those used to play rhythmic ostinatos on the side of a drum or a log (or *cascara*) in traditional rumba and other Afro-Cuban genres.
- palo.** (1) Literally, “stick.” (2) A Congolese-derived Afro-Cuban religion. (3) Lowercase: Drums used in Afro-Dominican music and, by extension, the music itself (e.g., “*música de palo[s]*”)
- pandereta** (*pandero*). A jingle-less tambourine (frame drum) used in Puerto Rico and elsewhere.
- paquete, el.** (1) Literally, “packet.” (2) In modern Cuba, the varied media content (songs, movies, videos) disseminated via USB flash drives.
- parang.** A Trinidadian Christmas season song and dance genre of Venezuelan derivation (from the Spanish *parranda*, “spree, party”).
- paseo.** (1) In traditional bomba, merengue, and *contradanza*, an initial ambulatory choreographic figure. (2) In eastern Cuba, a Carnival procession (syn., *comparsa*).
- perico ripiao.** Spanish: literally, “ripped parrot.” The traditional style of Cibao merengue, played on an ensemble of accordion, *tambora*, *güira*, and optional saxophone and *marimba*.
- perreo.** A style of dancing (especially to reggaeton), in which the woman, often bent over somewhat, grinds her buttocks against the man standing behind her.
- picong.** A musical verbal duel between two calypso singers (from the French *piquant*, “spicy”).
- piquete.** In bomba dancing, a move or pattern.
- plantilla.** In communist Cuba, the status of being a full-time, salaried musician.
- playing kyas.** See *kyas*.
- plena.** A creole song form of Puerto Rico that exists in both informal and dance-band versions.
- Poco.** Shorter, more common term for Pocomania.
- polyrhythm** (polymeter). A composite rhythmic structure combining two or more regular meters (most typically, a repeating 12/8 pattern internally subdivided into duple and triple pulses).
- ponche.** (1) Literally, “punch.” (2) In salsa, a rhythmic break, set to the second and third strokes of the “three” part of the “two–three” *clave* pattern. (3) In bomba dancing, an abrupt, jerky move that initiates the rendering of other moves (*piquetes*) and the interaction with the drummer.
- pork-knocker.** A Guyanese gold prospector.
- Pukkumina** (Pocomania). A blanket term for the Afro-Protestant religions that developed in Jamaica during the nineteenth century, as well as for the music associated with them; also sometimes used to refer to a specific, more African branch of the larger category of religions known as Revival.
- punta.** A folk music and dance genre of the Garifuna (Black Caribs) of coastal Honduras and Belize.
- punto.** In Cuba, the musical rendering of a *décima*.
- quadrille** (*kwadril*). In the British and French Caribbean, a dance, with accompanying music, generally involving a series of choreographic figures performed by men and women arranged in squares or a circle.
- que-que.** An Afro-Guyanese song and dance form, with call-and-response singing, typically performed at weddings.

- quinto.** (1) Literally, “fifth.” (2) The higher-pitched conga in Cuban rumba.
- ragga.** (1) In some contexts and regions, Jamaican dancehall music. (2) Dancehall using a synthesized rather than acoustic soundtrack.
- raggamuffin.** (1) A substyle of Jamaican dancehall music that developed in the late 1980s. (2) Since at least the 1970s in Jamaica, a poor young resident of the ghetto.
- ranchera.** A popular sentimental song genre of northern Mexico and Tex-Mex music.
- Rara.** Haitian street celebrations held during Lent, with music provided by *bann rara* (Rara bands).
- reggae.** A specific genre of Jamaican popular music that developed around 1968 and remained the dominant form until around 1980. The term is also loosely used to include modern dancehall.
- reggaeton** (*reggaetón*). A genre of Hispanic Caribbean (especially Puerto Rican) popular music.
- repeater.** The highest-pitched of the Rastafarian drums used in traditional *nyabingi* music, which plays the more complex rhythmic patterns.
- Revival.** A blanket term for the indigenous Afro-Protestant religions that developed in Jamaica during the nineteenth century, as well as the music associated with them (see also Poco, Pocomania).
- rhumba box.** A Jamaican bass instrument with plucked metal lamellae; equivalent to Cuban *marimbula* and Dominican *marimba*.
- riddim.** The recorded instrumental track in Jamaican dancehall, primarily consisting of a composite ostinato, that may be recycled for use with different voicings by vocalists.
- rockero** (*roquero*). In Puerto Rico and elsewhere, one who likes rock music.
- rock steady.** A Jamaican popular music style that supplanted ska and was dominant around 1966–68.
- rueda de casino.** A Cuban dance format in which a set of dancers (typically, five women and five men) perform elaborate choreography (especially to timba music), executing figures and changing partners in response to calls from a leader.
- rumba.** (1) An Afro-Cuban secular dance and music genre, with voice and percussion (congas, *palitos*, and *clave*). (2) In informal and imprecise usage, a *son* or other popular song evocative of a traditional rumba.
- salsa dura** (also *salsa caliente*, *salsa brava*). “Strong,” “hot,” hard-driving salsa music, as opposed to *salsa romántica*.
- salsa romántica** (also *salsa sensual*). “Romantic,” “sensual,” sentimental salsa, as emerged in the 1980s, with a softer, less percussive sound and exclusively romantic lyrics.
- salve.** (1) A Catholic prayer, liturgical or non-liturgical, typically to the Virgin Mary. (2) In the Dominican Republic, a musical rendering of such a prayer.
- sanse.** A Caribbean religious amalgam, primarily of Puerto Rico, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic, synthesizing elements of folk Catholicism, Espiritismo, and the similarly eclectic and vernacular 21 Divisions.
- sans humanité.** (1) Literally, “without mercy.” (2) A standard and essentially meaningless rhetorical phrase (creolized to *santimanitey*) inserted at the end of early twentieth-century calypso verses (later replaced by “in this colony” and, after 1962, “in this country”).
- Santería.** A Yoruba-derived Afro-Cuban religion, also called Regla de Ocha.
- sarandunga.** In the Baní district of the Dominican Republic, an Afro-Dominican festival, with distinctive dance and music, associated with local *cofradías* dedicated to St. John the Baptist.

- segon.** An accompanying drum in Haitian Vodou music.
- seis.** (1) Literally, “six.” (2) The most important subgenre of Puerto Rican peasant (*jibaro*) music. (3) A kind of simple dance done by altar boys in the cathedral of Seville, Spain.
- shak-shak.** In the West Indies, a shaker or maracas.
- shotta.** Shooter, gangster.
- ska.** A Jamaican popular music that emerged in the early 1960s derived in part from American rhythm and blues.
- soberao.** In bomba dancing, the ring of people around the dancer.
- son.** The most popular Cuban music and dance genre of the twentieth century.
- songo.** A modern Afro-Cuban dance-music rhythm popularized in the 1970s by Los Van Van.
- soukous.** A popular Congolese dance-music genre.
- spouge.** A creole Barbadian song form, or the distinctive rhythm used therein.
- subidor.** In Puerto Rican bomba, the lead drum.
- tabla.** A North Indian drum pair used in classical and light-classical music.
- tambora.** The double-headed drum used in Dominican merengue.
- tambú.** (1) A genre of neo-African music played in western Jamaica that is rhythmically similar to kumina music. (2) A Maroon genre of drumming and song within Kromanti Play that has been influenced by kumina music. (3) In Curaçao, a traditional voice-and-percussion genre that shares some features with Cuban rumba.
- tanbou.** A single-headed animal-skinned covered drum of Haiti.
- tan singing.** Guyanese term for Indo-Caribbean “local-classical” music.
- tassa.** A shallow kettle drum and the ensemble that it leads (also containing *dhol* barrel drums), derived from India, currently used in Trinidad to entertain at Hindu weddings and enliven the Shi’a Muharram or Hosay commemoration.
- taziya.** In Shi’a Muslim Muharram (Trinidad: Hosay) processions, the imaginative replica of the tomb of the martyr Hussein, which is paraded through the streets.
- tcha-tcha.** The Haitian term for maracas (small gourd rattles).
- telenovela.** Spanish: literally, “television soap opera.”
- tembleque.** A “shuddering” dance move done especially by Cuban women, especially associated with timba music.
- tigueraje.** (1) Literally, “tigerness.” (2) Dominican slang for feistiness, vigor.
- timba.** (1) Cuban dance music that emerged in the 1990s and typically features aggressive, jazz-informed horn riffs, shouted multiple *coros*, and lyrics commenting wryly on contemporary street life. (2) In traditional Cuban parlance, (a) sexuality (e.g., “*tener timba*”); (b) a group of gamblers; (c) rowdiness, noise excitement.
- timbales.** In Latin music, a pair of metal drums, usually mounted on a stand, with a cowbell.
- típico.** (1) Typical (especially, typical of a given country or region). (2) Traditional.
- toasting.** A type of indigenous Jamaican rapping by deejays that came to dominate Jamaican popular music during the dancehall era of the 1980s.
- toque de santo.** A Santería ceremony with music and dance.
- tres.** (1) Literally, “three.” (2) A Cuban guitar-like instrument with three doubled courses, usually tuned D-G-B.
- trova.** In Cuba, the general term for singer-songwriter *canciones* and boleros of the early twentieth century—that is, the music of *trovadores* (troubadors). (Hence, *nueva trova* as its 1960s–70s reinterpretation.)
- tuk.** Barbadian ensemble featuring snare and bass drums and flute.

tumba (1) In Curaçao, a creole genre nowadays most often played by a horn-based dance band in fast 6/8 rhythm. (2) In early nineteenth-century Santo Domingo, a creole dance genre.

tumbador. The lower-pitched congas used in rumba.

tumba francesa. (1) A Haitian-derived mutual-aid and social-recreation society of eastern Cuba. (2) The characteristic music and dance form of such societies.

twoubadou. Haitian Creole: “troubador.” A Haitian singer of topical or popular songs, usually accompanied by guitar, maracas (*tcha-tcha*), *malimba*, and *tanbou* drum.

vaksin. A bamboo trumpet used in Haitian Rara and Dominican *gagá* bands.

vallenato (*música vallenata*). An accordion- and vocal-dominated folk and popular music of northeastern Colombia.

vejigante. In the Fiesta de Santiago Apóstol of Loíza, Puerto Rico, a ghoulishly costumed stock character (from the Spanish *vejiga*, “bladder”).

velación. In the Dominican Republic, a night-long ceremony and social dance with Afro-Dominican music.

Vodou (voodoo, Vodun, Voudoun). The Afro-Haitian religion, primarily of Dahomeyan and Congolese derivation.

wine. In West Indian parlance, to dance with exaggerated pelvic pumping (whether lateral or forward; from “wind” [one’s waist]).

yambú. One of the three extant forms of Afro-Cuban traditional rumba, with a rhythm and dance style similar to that of the *guaguancó* but somewhat slower.

yanvalou. A polyrhythmic Haitian Vodou rhythm and accompanying dance.

yeve. The 1960s Haitian term for rock music (from the Beatles’ “She loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah”).

yuba. (1) A *tumba francesa* dance during part of which a man dances in front of a drum laid horizontally on the floor. (2) A term for other archaic, now extinct Afro-Caribbean dances.

zapateo. A Spanish-derived, nearly extinct Cuban folk dance that features heel stomping (cf. Spanish *zapateado*).

zarabanda (*sarabanda*). (1) A Congolese spirit worshiped in Cuba. (2) An Afro-Latin music and dance genre, perhaps originating in New Spain (Mexico), that flourished in Spain in the decades around 1600. (3) A seventeenth-century Baroque classical stylization of the Afro-Latin music and dance genre that flourished in Spain around 1600.

zarzuela. Spanish and Cuban light opera.

zouk. A popular dance music of Martinique and Guadeloupe.

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