

Caribbean Currents

Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae

REVISED AND EXPANDED EDITION

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with

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The Caribbean at a Glance (Country, Capital, 2004 Country Population)

THE DUTCH CARIBBEAN

Netherlands Antilles (Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, St. Eustatius, St. Maarten) (Neth.): Willemstad; pop. 218,126.
Suriname: Paramaribo; pop. 436,935 (31 percent African, 37 percent East Indian, 15 percent Javanese).

THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING CARIBBEAN

Anguilla (U.K.): The Valley; pop. 13,000.
Antigua and Barbuda: St. John; pop. 68,320.
Bahamas: Nassau; pop. 299,697.
Barbados: Bridgetown; pop. 278,289.
British Virgin Islands (U.K.): Road Town; pop. 22,187.
Cayman Islands: George Town; pop. 43,103.
Dominica: Roseau; pop. 69,278. English and French creole spoken.
Grenada: St. George; pop. 89,357.
Guyana: Georgetown; pop. 705,803 (30 percent African, 51 percent East Indian, 14 percent mixed).
Jamaica: Kingston; pop. 2,713,130.
Montserrat (U.K.); pop. 9245.
St. Kitts-Nevis: Basseterre; pop. 38,836.
St. Lucia: Castries; pop. 164,213. English and French creole spoken.
St. Vincent and the Grenadines: Kingstown; pop. 117,193.
Trinidad and Tobago: Port of Spain; pop. 1,096,585 (43 percent African, 40 percent East Indian, 14 percent mixed).
Turks and Caicos Islands (U.K.): Grand Turk; pop. 19,956.

U.S. Virgin Islands (St. Croix, St. John, St. Thomas) (U.S.): Charlotte Amalie; pop. 108,775.

THE FRENCH CARIBBEAN

Guadeloupe (France): Basse-Terre; pop. 444,515.

Haiti: Port-au-Prince; pop. 7,656,165.

Martinique (France): Fort-de-France; pop. 429,510.

THE SPANISH CARIBBEAN

Cuba: Havana; pop. 11,308,764.

The Dominican Republic: Santo Domingo; pop. 8,833,634.

Puerto Rico (U.S.): San Juan; pop. 3,897,960

I

Introduction: The Caribbean Crucible

The global impact of Caribbean music constitutes something of an enigma in world culture. How could music styles of such transnational popularity and influence be fashioned by a population numbering 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 farther back in time, what made the Caribbean Basin so dynamic that its Afro-Latin music and dance forms like 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, alas, does not propose to answer these questions, although a few tentative hypotheses might be suggested. On a metaphorical level, the Caribbean has been likened to a fuse that connects the Old Worlds—Europe and perhaps 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 would otherwise not have happened. Much of the richness of these original music cultures was lost in crossing the Atlantic, but much was retained. And 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-fertilizations—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. Others, as we suggest later, have contended that the uniquely modern and expressive power of Caribbean musics has derived from their inherently 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 timba singer can earn thousands of dollars a month while a doctor earns only \$20, or that legions of young Jamaican men dream of being a dancehall deejay, with a Benz, a gold chain, and a “truckload of girls.” Jamaicans are well aware that artists like Bob Marley and Buju Banton are famous throughout much of the world—certainly more so than their political leaders. We can also well imagine the incommensurate renown that a Kevin Little enjoys in little St. Vincent when he produces a platinum-selling hit such as “Turn Me On.” 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 Abu Bakr attempted to seize power in a 1990 coup, one of his first 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 world cultural history as well as that of the Caribbean. Ultimately, Caribbean music can scarcely be compartmentalized as a local, regional entity when some 5 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 Vietnamese urbanites dance the bolero, Caribbean music has truly become world music and, in its own way, world history, as well.

THE INDIAN 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 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.

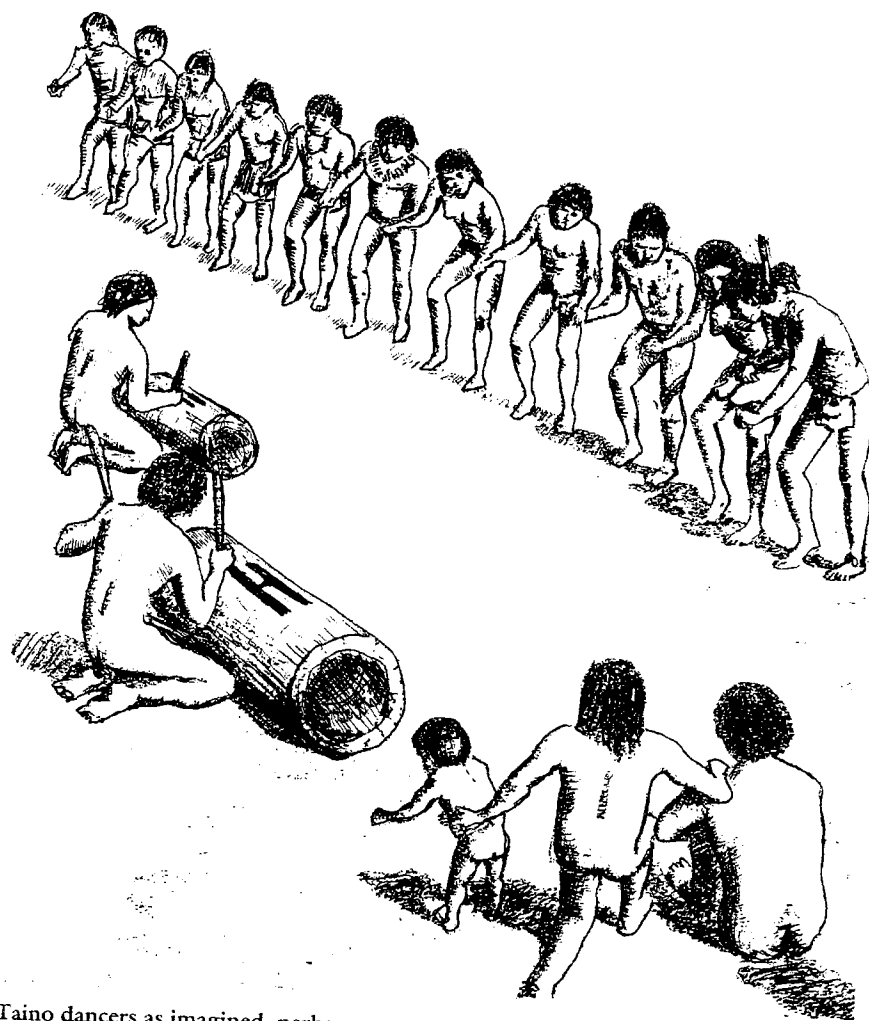
Indigenous Caribbean music centered on a socioreligious ceremony called *areito*, in which as many as 1,000 participants danced in concentric circles around a group of musicians. The musicians sang mythological chants in call-and-response style, playing rattles (later called maracas), gourd scrapers (*güiros*), and slit drums called *mayohuacán*. These last 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 absence of mammals bigger than rodents prevented the making of drums with skin heads.

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 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 Indians had on the whole passed into history, taking their music with them. Today they and their language survive only in a few villages in Dominica and in the form of the African-intermixed “Black Caribs,” or Garifuna, of St. Vincent, later exiled to Honduras and Belize. 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.



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

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 if Indian culture and music are largely lost, the Indian past has continued to be invoked as a 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 their country’s music derived mostly from an



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, 1982])

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—for instance, in the Dominican Republic, where a negrophobic ideology has led many to refer to themselves euphemistically as *indios* or *indios oscuros* (dark-skinned Indians).

If the Amerindian heritage has played little role in post-Columbian music, then 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 million 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 size. Moreover, just as Afro-American musics and their derivatives, like 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 or claiming 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 the historian Eugene Genovese's influential *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (1974). In recent decades, the scholarly pendulum may have swung a bit too far in the direction of emphasizing the ability of slaves to retain and construct their own cultures. 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 tend throughout the world to be more conservative than secular musics, preserving archaic features. Thus, in music associated with Afro-Caribbean religions like Cuban Santería and Haitian Vodou, one finds song texts in West African languages and a few

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, Christianity in Africa—whether imposed by European colonial rulers or by modern evangelists—has eroded many of the local religious practices that in the colonial period provided the sources for New World entities such as Santería.

Perhaps 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 relative cessation of contact with 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 lacking 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, 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 any 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 typically 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 non-musicians.) 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

Musical Example 1. A basic polyrhythm

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 time line, the *kidi* drum establishes the duple pulse with the following rhythm, alternating muted ("x") with open ("X") strokes:

x X X X x x x X X X x x

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.

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.

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 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 of Afro-Caribbean communities in different regions to maintain cultural autonomy over the generations. Why, for example, are polyrhythms and neo-African musics common in Haiti, with its population of only 6 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 some 30 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 is in some respects 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 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 these countries than in the former British colonies or in Haiti, whose own slave imports ended with the Haitian Revolution in the 1790s. In this way also, 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 and French colonies to buy their own freedom (manumission) than it was in North America, and slaveowners were much more likely to free their mulatto children. 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 slaveowners. Counter-Reformation Iberian Catholicism, with its elements of saint worship, ritual, and folk beliefs, blended more easily with African religions than did Enlightenment-oriented, spiritual, and inflexible Protestantism. The early Spanish and Portuguese colonists, unlike the bourgeois, more economically advanced English, were in some ways premodern, precapitalist 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 some 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 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 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. Most Cuban blacks are descendants of slaves brought in the 1800s, and quite a few know the specific ethnic ancestry of some of their great-grandparents. 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.)

Perhaps the most important factor involved in the different degrees of African retentions is the difference between plantation colonies like Jamaica, whose 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. 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, more important, the various

folk and popular songs and dances of contemporary Europe. Thus, more influential than the rarefied music of Bach and Beethoven were the innumerable sailors' chanteys, church hymns, military marches, and, especially, social dances like the quadrille and contredanse. The contredanse—brought from England to the Caribbean by the French—spawned all manner of local incarnations, from the rowdy, thunderous neo-African *tumba francesa* of eastern Cuba to the elegant, Chopinesque piano pieces of Puerto Rican composer Manuel Tavárez. The related quadrille and other "set" (i.e., suite) dances were popular throughout the Caribbean as played on ad hoc ensembles of fiddles, guitars, fifes, and whatever else was around. As in Europe, most were round or line dances led by a caller, although ballroom-style couple dancing gradually became popular. As performed over the generations by Afro-Caribbeans, the dances eventually became creolized and came to incorporate typical syncopations and other distinctly local features.

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 (not to mention the African practice of dancing in lines, as in a contredanse). 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, had traditions of seasonal carnivals with festive music. Further, most European folk musics, like African music, were 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 only by 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 brilliant orators, from Eric Williams to Fidel Castro.

The nature and extent of European influence have varied in accordance with several factors, some of which we have already mentioned—for example, the distinction between culturally repressive plantation colonies, where large slave populations were managed by a handful 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 generally 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 musics. 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, 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 like the familiar Andalusian Am–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 no 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 concept 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 subsequently becomes 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 language—also tends to involve a certain self-consciousness, well evident in the Haitian verse cited 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 their 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 Africans (mostly from West Africa) and Europeans (mostly Spanish, British, and French). Other groups, like 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 recombined 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 most subtle, rarefied sort 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 are, in a preliminary sort of way, creole entities.

A more definitive sort of creolization occurs when African- and European-derived musical styles and elements combine in more overt ways. In many cases, this creative mixing started among the Afro-Caribbean lower classes, whose products, such as the early calypso or Cuban *son*, were generally denounced by Eurocentric elites (whether black, white, 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 habanera partly because it was a local creole invention rather than an archaic product of despised Spain; part of what distinguished the habanera was the use, however diluted, of Afro-Caribbean syncopations. With the emergence of the Cuban *danzón* in the late 1800s, the Afro-Caribbean element became more overt 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 quite 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 *negritud* movement 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. For that matter, the Cuban Revolution, although dominated by whites, has made particular

progress in integrating the nation's black underclass into the economic and cultural mainstream of society.

Historically, creolization depends on an attitude of cultural openness and flexibility. Late-nineteenth-century Cuba would constitute one fertile petri dish of creole creation, with its lively urban interactions of free black and mulatto professional musicians and white patrons. A receptivity to new musical ideas can also be instilled from above, as when colonial policies dictate a rupture with the past, whether through prohibitions or persuasion. The British were especially effective at getting the slaves to adopt a colonial mentality that regarded everything African as backward. Hence, an 1823 visitor to Jamaica, after describing the African-style dancing to the goombay drum, 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 Prize-winner 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 drum."

In the twentieth century, urbanization, emigration, the mass media, and the internationalization of capital have 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. As such radio signals crisscross the sea and satellites transmit MTV International, musical trends spread and proliferate in weeks, not decades, and geographic, linguistic, and international boundaries seem to melt into the airwaves. In metropolitan hubs like New York, Toronto, and Birmingham, 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 Spanish-language reggae to merengues in Hindi. As creolization reaches a new level and the internal and external musical borders of the region dissolve, any book attempting 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.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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's *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997).