



UNIVERSITY OF
ILLINOIS PRESS

the society for
ethnomusicology

Black Like Me: Caribbean Tourism and the St. Kitts Music Festival

Author(s): Jessica Baker

Source: *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (Spring/Summer 2016), pp. 263-278

Published by: University of Illinois Press on behalf of Society for Ethnomusicology

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/ethnomusicology.60.2.0263>

Accessed: 21-03-2017 18:33 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://about.jstor.org/terms>



University of Illinois Press, Society for Ethnomusicology are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Ethnomusicology*

Black Like Me: Caribbean Tourism and the St. Kitts Music Festival

JESSICA BAKER / University of Pennsylvania

Abstract. In recent years the St. Kitts Music Festival has become a platform for popular American, Jamaican, and a relatively small number of local Kittitian-Nevisian artists—a shift that mirrors the changing demographic of audiences who attend the festival. These contemporary artists represent the black faces of Caribbean tourism that have previously been unacknowledged within discussions of mass tourism in the Caribbean. This article questions the stability of categories such as *tourist*, *local*, and *visitor* by examining the St. Kitts Music Festival as an occasion for local engagement with American blackness as one aspect of modern Kittitian identity and Caribbean tourism.

I spent the better part of a Saturday morning in late June 2013 in a living room that was temporarily being used as a full-service beauty salon. As I sat with four Kittitian women in their late twenties, the conversation turned to Christopher Martin, a young reggae artist most popular for his 2011 summer anthem “Cheater’s Prayer.” Martin had performed as part of the second evening of the three-day St. Kitts Music Festival. Among the salon crowd, Martin’s set, at the midpoint of the previous night, was touted as the definitive highlight of Friday’s performances. Amid intermittent chatter about appropriate eyebrow shaping techniques, and the best pomade for slicking down unruly hair “edges,” one of my interlocutors noted in agreement with the others, “his voice did sound sweet—he can *really* sing.” The climax of Martin’s performance occurred when before debuting a new single, “Just Like You,” Martin sat on one of the speakers at the edge of the stage and offered to “take it back [in time]” for the audience. He began an R&B and soul medley by singing the first two ascending pitches of Otis Redding’s 1965 ballad, “I’ve Been Loving You Too Long.” In response to Martin’s a cappella, “I’ve Been,” the largely female crowd quickly anticipated the

© 2016 by the Society for Ethnomusicology

cadence and finished the line for him by singing, “Loving You!” Martin stopped singing and gestured to the audience to be quiet, then jokingly quipped back to the crowd in an exaggerated Jamaican accent, “wait, nuh!” The audience laughed and applauded.

Martin signaled to the band to play an arpeggio, reestablishing the key, and he began singing the line again. This time the audience took heed and remained quiet after Martin sang the opening figure. In the resulting silence, Martin pretended to be both disappointed and surprised that the audience did not sing along with him—tilting his head quizzically. Both the audience and Martin laughed again. After a brief pause Martin emphatically raised and dropped his arm, much in the style of James Brown, to signal the downbeat. He finished the opening line with the lyrics “loving you way too long” then glided across the stage and belted his way through a melismatic rendition of the rest of the chorus.

Martin’s rhetorical use of one of the more intraregional Anglophone Caribbean colloquialisms, “wait, nuh,” in the midst of that particular song was not lost to the audience. It was humorous in its juxtaposition against American soul music, and in the professional and grand setting of the music festival stage. Martin’s use of a thick Jamaican accent in the middle of a slow, Otis Redding love song emphasized both the cultural difference and proximity between the Caribbean, as a geographical area, and African American soul music. His vocal skills were impressive for a dancehall artist, and he coupled them with deliberate soulful head gestures—bowing his head so vigorously that it appeared to bounce. Martin channeled classic soul male groups such as The Temptations by accenting each chord change with subtle knee bends and fist pumps. These movements were markedly distinct from the fluid hip gyrations and the broad, upward hand motions that accompanied his dancehall songs. The rest of Martin’s ode to old school R&B included Sam Cooke’s 1962 hit “Bring It On Home to Me,” and ended with a shirtless rendition of Marvin Gaye’s ubiquitous 1982 single, “Sexual Healing.”

My beauty salon discussions following his performance indicated that there was something special and exciting about Martin’s assuming, perhaps correctly, that in these American R&B classics he and the audience would find common ground. Within that short interaction, Martin and his audience offered a sonic and performative representation of material and cultural currents moving in and through the Caribbean. They alluded to the breadth of Afro-Caribbean and black American music, movement, and speech—modes of pan-black performativity—that have come to define the Music Festival experience in St. Kitts.

Taking the St. Kitts Music Festival as a case study, this article asserts that in St. Kitts the success of the Music Festival highlights American musical expansion as an important symbol of economic and social middle class status. By engaging

with tourism studies and large trends in Caribbeanist inquiry, this article examines the St. Kitts Music Festival as a specific occasion for local engagement with black American music as one aspect of modern Kittitian identity. More specifically, by invoking a Kittitian-Nevisian sensibility of doubleness and repurposing, this article interrogates the stability of categories such as tourist, local, visitor, and national via attention to popular music as it relates to tourism.¹

St. Kitts and the Tradition of Repurposing

With approximately 35,000 year-round inhabitants living on its sixty-five square miles, St. Kitts is a very small place.² In part due to its size, many things on the Eastern Caribbean island lead double, sometimes triple, lives. In the name of conservation, the reuse and reinvention of spaces, people, and things has been a matter of necessity turned tradition. Evidence of this process can be found in grocery store aisles that are stocked with recycled water bottles holding local exports like vanilla or pear essences and homemade juices. On Friday evenings in Basseterre, the capital city, local entrepreneurs funnel small batch hot sauces into emptied rum bottles for sale at weekend markets. During St. Kitts' time as a forgotten British colonial slum in the mid and early twentieth century, children's shirts were crafted from the burlap used to import food staples such as flour and corn meal. Historically, the uncertainty and scarcity of employment in St. Kitts since the beginning of the twentieth century facilitated a culture of occupational multiplicity, and the sheer demographic and geographic smallness of St. Kitts put additional emphasis on the doubleness of people's lives (Richardson 1983: 25).

During one of my fieldtrips to the island during the winter of 2012, I attended that year's Carnival Calypso competition. As I sat in the front row quietly watching the season's finalists perform their first of two numbers, my neighbor in the rowdy crowd poked me. Pointing at Singing Jackie, the most celebrated female calypsonian in St. Kitts, he yelled in my direction, "Boy! She good! Is she teach me, you know?" informing me of her role as both commandeering, master performer, and veteran grade school teacher (Personal communication, December 29, 2012, Basseterre).

Event spaces, too, are multiform. Warner Park, St. Kitts' largest sports arena, and the site of most of the island's notable events, also shares a history of repurposing. Since its official designation as an enclosed park in 1945, Warner Park has been the official event space for varied occasions including international cricket matches and heated political rallies (Forestry 1998: 463). In the 1950s and early 1960s the park served as the main event space for the pomp and revelry involved in the visit of British royal dignitaries, including Princess Margaret in 1955 and Queen Elizabeth in 1966. As such, the park does not just host different events; it is a space that is transformed to suit its varied roles and

audiences. As an example, during the calypso competition in December 2012, there was a bustling back area far behind the rows of gray plastic chairs and the sparsely decorated main stage. This was where men and women tended their temporary stalls selling bowls of goat water, and stewed pork alongside cups of rum and Ting grapefruit soda. In a contrasting display, during the June 2013 St. Kitts Music Festival, instead of locally made edibles, a large, portable Dominoes Pizza stand, an international beer tap, and several popcorn vendors occupied that same space.

The glaring contrast I observed between the two major events in St. Kitts, in many respects, reflects the original impetus behind the implementation the St. Kitts Music Festival. Taking its cue from the increasingly popular St. Lucia Jazz Festival, the first St. Kitts Music Festival was held in Basseterre in June of 1996. The Music Festival's main goal was to eliminate an economic trough during the summer, tourist off-season months, creating a two-pronged cultural tourism sector anchored on one end by Carnival in December and on the other by the Music festival in June. While carnival has essentially been folded into the "sun, sea, and sand" Caribbean tourism model that promotes an "untouched" version of St. Kitts (Kempadoo 1999; Rommen and Neely 2014), the St. Kitts Music festival is the face of a new, unofficial, cultural tourism strategy that presents St. Kitts as both black and modern.

Because there was no local market for jazz, the inaugural music festival was promoted, instead, as a celebration of all forms of music. Accordingly, the initial lineup included varied acts such as The Su Wen-Ching Chinese Ensemble and the popular Haitian mini-djaz group, Tabou Combo. While the three-day concert series initially featured a wide range of performers from various parts of the Americas and Asia, the scope of artists has gradually tightened to include only musical acts that represent an Anglophone black Diasporic community. 2007 marked the year when the festival also changed from four nights (Thursday through Sunday), to a three-evening event, eliminating the Sunday performances, which were primarily reserved for Christian Gospel acts. Due to the close proximity of the concert venue to St. George's Anglican Church, and to dissention from religious leaders who felt that gospel artists should not share the stage with secular acts, festival organizers eliminated the "Gospel Sunday" portion (Interview, Richard Skerrit, July 7 2013, Basseterre). In recent years the concert has mainly been a platform for popular American, Jamaican, Trinidadian and a relatively small number of local Kittitian artists.

The acts presented during each evening of the St. Kitts Music Festival broadly represent three geographical areas of the Caribbean. Wylers (a popular genre of Kittitian-Nevisian Christmas carnival music; see below for a fuller description), and soca acts from the Eastern Caribbean perform on the first evening. Western Caribbean dancehall and reggae artists perform on the second, and

international R&B, soul, and jazz artists from abroad—typically the United States—headline on the final night of the festival. These general distinctions based on geography and genre help festival organizers to compartmentalize each evening as its own cohesive and marketable event. However, as the St. Kitts Minister of Tourism at the time, Richard Skerrit, noted, “everybody wants to think it’s a simple thing. These things aren’t always so black and white” (Interview, July 7 2013, Basseterre). In order to better understand the extent of Skerrit’s comment, the following discussion challenges the “black and white” nature of current academic representations of Caribbean tourism. Specifically, I suggest that similar oversimplifications in representations of tourists and locals as two discrete groups can be nuanced through an engagement with the complexities surrounding the St. Kitts Music Festival.

The Separation of Tourists and Locals

Geographically and demographically small islands have, in large part, been written out of and, consequently, erroneously folded into the overarching history of the Caribbean as a sociocultural area. The scarcity of ethnographic research that focuses on smaller islands like St. Kitts, Nevis, Dominica, and Tortola has placed an overemphasis on the abundance of research centered on islands such as Trinidad and Jamaica. Accordingly, there is an overgeneralized understanding of pervasive themes in Caribbeanist scholarship. This is especially true with regard to topics for which the connection to geography—the physical size and layout of an island—has not been adequately explored. All-encompassing readings of tourism in the Caribbean, for example, tend to miss some of the particular histories that, quite literally, can be mapped onto the terrain of individual islands.³ Within the Caribbean, *mass* tourism has therefore become an easy trope with which to think about all forms of mobility and consumptive travel. As such, the larger history of Caribbean tourism has typically been characterized by a separation of local residents from tourists who seek to be “shielded” from “a whole range of annoyances [such as] unsanitary food, unsightly beggars, importunate peddlers, confident tricksters, pickpockets, oppressive heat, dangerous animals, unwanted noises and odors, or simply disquieting reminders of the surrounding misery” (Berge 2002: 28).

This type of separation is the spatial manifestation of historically informed patterns of movement predicated on both class and race. Scholarly attention to tourism, largely through the frames of mobility studies and cultural geography, has focused on the ways in which certain people can and do move because of the implicit stasis of others (Sheller 2003, 2009; Sheller and Urry 2004, 2006). In the case of Ocho Rios, Jamaica, for example, the practices that keep tourists and locals separate are inherently unequal in that “for the tourist choosing to

venture outside . . . prohibitions may not be enforced, and do not represent forced exclusion” (Brooks 2008: 180). However, there are constraints “for the locals wishing to adventure into the exclusive zone of the tourism space.” (ibid.). St. Kitts, though, as a smaller island, provides an alternative narrative to the generalized understanding of the conceptual and physical (geographical) separation between tourists” and “locals.”⁴

My work here participates in a project also being pursued by scholars in the fields of ethnomusicology, mobility studies, history, and anthropology. Contributors to *Sun, Sea, and Sound: Music Tourism in the Cirum-Caribbean*, for example, have sought to broaden the scope of tourist studies by highlighting the connection between music and the various registers of tourism in the Caribbean. In so doing, they have begun the processes of coming to terms with “how multifaceted a beast ‘tourism’ is” (Rommen and Neely 2014: xiv). My goal here, like that of the authors within that collection, includes the task of first exposing and then wading through the “messiness” attendant to music within the context of tourism (ibid.:xiv).

Tourism is, by and large, the biggest economic export in the Caribbean, and St. Kitts’ move in the early 1990s from being the last sugar monoculture in the Caribbean to a majority tourist economy, has put even more emphasis on tourism than ever before. While, typically, a growing tourist industry would suggest greater exclusivity surrounding tourist attractions, a lack of space is one main factor that has prevented St. Kitts from becoming notably segregated with regard to locals and tourists (Interview, Richard Kelly, December 31, 2012, Basseterre). Officially, the current tourism sector presents St. Kitts as an island that welcomes visitors to “Explore, feel, love, and remember” (“Welcome to St. Kitts” website, 2013). Tourists are encouraged to enjoy the “sweet and simple” life “on this precious gift of nature” as they take advantage of the island’s natural resources, including both “the rolling landscape,” which “is a thousand shades of green,” and the ocean’s “tranquil shade of turquoise” (ibid.). This emphasis on the natural extends to depictions of Kittitians, as well. The official website of the St. Kitts Board of Tourism encourages visitors to “meet the people,” and says this of the islands inhabitants: “Truly St. Kitts is a place of brotherhood and mutual respect, blessed with an abundance of natural treasures, and not a single traffic light. Here we are all brothers and sisters, intent on preserving the beauty of our land” (ibid.).

With unrestricted mobility and access to the island, its resources, and its people—not restrained by even one traffic light—visitors are encouraged to experience all parts of the island. Indeed, this type of unrestricted access is a major selling point for St. Kitts as a small Caribbean island. In this light, it is unsurprising that where tourists (as temporary visitors), and locals are concerned, performance venues on the island are significantly integrated. For

tourists' entertainment there are two large hotels, and "The Strip," which is a row of one-room bars and cafes on the shore of Frigate Bay—the most popular and easily accessible beach from the center of Basseterre. Locals and visitors, alike, regularly visit these main performance venues. St. Kitts does not have a distinct hotel music scene that is exclusive to visitors.⁵ Unlike the notable segregation between local and tourist-driven music scenes in other parts of the Caribbean such as The Bahamas and Jamaica, locals attend the few shows held inside the elite hotels, like the St. Kitts Marriott and Royal Beach Casino. Meaning, if tourists desire to enhance their stays with the type of cultural demonstrations, especially music performances, that have been a hallmark of the Caribbean tourism industry since the 1920s, then they will undoubtedly encounter permanent and long-term residents of St. Kitts.⁶

While tourists and locals visit the same bars and restaurants to see music performances, the type of music and the times at which it is performed have some bearing on the makeup of the audience. Moreover, the proprietors of designated music venues make strategic decisions about what types of music to play for mixed audiences. My experience better illustrates this point. In December 2012, I participated in the pre-dawn tradition of *jouvert* on the morning after Christmas day in Basseterre. The hours before sunrise, and well into the late morning, were marked by thousands of revelers moving, dancing, jumping, and wining through the dark city to the sounds of local wylers music. Wylers is a genre of fast tempo carnival music that incorporates influences from Kittitian-Nevisian Big Drum music, Eastern Caribbean string band aesthetics, and the instrumentation of early 1990s synthesizers. Criticism of wylers music proffers that its party lyrics, and fast tempo preclude the genre from reaching audiences outside of the small-island Eastern Caribbean. However, despite the controversy surrounding the music, it has undoubtedly been the most prominent sound of carnival in St. Kitts-Nevis since the mid 1990s.

Around noon, toward the end of the *jouvert* festivities, there was a major change of pace when on Bank street, on the other side of the large wall separating the cruise ship port from central Basseterre, there was a stationary party called the Wet-Down. Accommodations for the Wet-Down included a DJ blasting a broad range of soca and dancehall from around the region, with a few international pop tunes from previous years. These assorted sounds came booming through large, stacked speakers that resembled those tied to the tractors that led the crowds earlier that morning. At one point during the street party, the DJ switched from the hip-hop-inspired dancehall song, "Swaggerific" by Mr. G to "Gangnam Style," the global hit by K-Pop star, Psy. All of this festivity took place while a man sprayed high power fire hoses over the heads of partyers. The cold water was a welcomed respite from the hot noon sun. This, especially, for revelers who spent the entire morning jamming and drinking the sweet, and

potent rum concoction that was hastily ladled into plastic water bottles and passed through the j'ouvert crowd.

The Wet-Down session that was flanked on either side by well-placed vendors selling hotdogs and hamburgers, coincided with the disembarkation time for a cruise ship. If St. Kitts-Nevis national carnival has been produced as a potential draw for traditional, foreign tourists, the Wet-Down jam represented that aim far more than the pre-dawn festivities. I would venture to say that part of the manufacturing of increased tourist appeal for this part of j'ouvert, outside of its strategic placement, rested in broadening the sonic offerings to include genres other than wylers. Wylers has, over the previous two decades, developed into such a distinctive local sound, that it has been regarded as alienating to visitors for whom the music is not familiar.

In discussions of the economic and social problems plaguing the region, tourism figures as a necessary evil for postcolonial nations such as St Kitts. Shalini Puri has suggested that while postcolonial nation building promotes self-determination as an ideal, this type of sovereignty is seemingly impossible because there is an economic need to cater to foreign tourist sensibilities (Puri 2004:12). Indeed, there is ample evidence supporting this view of tourism in the Caribbean. In discussing changes in the offerings of restaurants in the circum-Caribbean, Lynn Marie Houston notes that in order to “cater to the tastes” of American tourists, “the Caribbean Culinary lexicon expanded to include hamburgers, pizza, and soft drinks” (Houston 2005:122).

Similarly, it has been well documented that music performances in the Caribbean are largely tailored to foreign audiences. The “Janus-faced” character of a tourism-based economy forces performers to literally provide the soundtrack to an experience that toes the line between familiar and safe, and exciting, exotic difference (Sanchez and Adams 2008). Accordingly, many musicians in the Caribbean are forced to perform specific, often simplified or notably westernized versions of local music.⁷ On the flip side of the same coin, others have been discouraged from exploring various types of hybridized musical forms for the sake of preserving tradition for export. In that same vein, Mimi Sheller has emphasized the unequal terrain on which tourism is sustained by focusing on how the Caribbean (both the people and the place) has historically and continues to be consumed by outsider *others* (Sheller 2003). And yet, all of this work that considers travel to the West Indies is overwhelmingly based on historical, quantitative, and ethnographic research that excludes the small-island Caribbean and, consequently, fails to address the specific concerns and on the ground realities of small island tourism.

Returning briefly to Warner Park in its June 2013 iteration, in the case of the St. Kitts Music Festival, within this generalized understanding of tourism, it would likely be assumed that at the repurposed version of the park suitable for

white and/or non-Caribbean “visitors,” the Dominoes pizza and popcorn stalls that replaced the goat stew and salt fish-cake vendors are intended to address the foreign sensibilities of which Puri (2004) writes. As the following discussion elucidates, however, the case of St. Kitts Music Festival contradicts the prevailing understanding of white, and/or non-Caribbean tourists as the only purveyors of foreign or imported tastes.

The actuality of the St. Kitts Music Festival questions the framing of Caribbean tourism via an exclusive distinction between two types of engagement with and travel to the Caribbean. An understanding of Caribbean tourism in which foreign tourists make up one group and “local” nationals make up the other is occluding an accurate picture of the Caribbean, tourism, the mobility of its diaspora, and of their intersections. This is especially true for small Caribbean islands like St. Kitts that necessarily survive thanks to a blended approach to tourism.⁸ St. Kitts and Nevis have, since the late nineteenth century, been at the forefront of migration patterns in the Caribbean (Richardson 1983:20). On geographically larger islands such as Jamaica, emancipated slaves of the late nineteenth century were able to find arable land on which to plant and build communities. In St. Kitts and Nevis, a distinct lack of physical space forced many to turn to migration as the sole means of survival. Early on, as it remains today, migration patterns included not only the initial departure, but also a culturally significant, ostentatious return. Bonham Richardson writes that in the mid 1920s, “The fancy clothes and gold teeth” of Kittitian men who had returned from migrant work, “were unmistakable symbols that they had emigrated, returned, and prospered in the interim” (Richardson 1983:129). Additionally, given the continued importance of remittances and unofficially imported goods to life at home in St. Kitts, circular migration is a matter of necessity and an undeniably significant aspect of local culture.

The St. Kitts Music Festival represents a relatively different approach to tourism that has “done much to generate new tourism demand from the short break travel market, as well as from diasporic and intra-regional tourists, [which are] groupings that are largely omitted in the tourist marketing plans of most Caribbean tourism organizations” (Nurse 2001:xi). Statistically, the majority of the St. Kitts music festival attendees are returning nationals and intra-regional visitors (*ibid.*:ix). And quantitatively, this group is largely comprised of black Kittitians and Nevisians living in North America, with ongoing family connections to St. Kitts and/or Nevis (Nurse 2004). This audience, although not living full-time in St. Kitts, could hardly be considered foreign given their continued connection, culturally and physically, to the island. In this light, the St. Kitts Music festival provides an interesting example of the nuanced nature of small island Caribbean tourism that forces us to think more broadly about tourists and nationals as distinct categories. Further, it questions our scholarly tendency

to read Caribbean tourism products as artificial in their attempt to appeal to “outsiders.”

Black Music, Black Women

Before the inauguration of the St. Kitts Music Festival, the main cultural tourist draw in St. Kitts was the annual Christmas carnival and the activities that surrounded it, including beauty pageants and calypso competitions. The Kittitian version of a music festival initially aimed to distinguish itself from St. Lucia’s jazz festival by eliminating the jazz element in favor of a more all-encompassing celebration of music. Former Minister of Culture, Richard Skerrit, told me in an interview, “in the beginning, we took whatever we could get for free; a Taiwanese orchestra here, a French group from Martinique there” (Interview, 7 July 2013, Basseterre). This type of multicultural event was an attempt to cobble together a weekend of music performances with a very small budget, but also with an outdated vision of what tourists look like, and how they travel.

By 1999, after gaining corporate sponsors, however, the focus turned to promoting the festival to the newly acknowledged, darker faces of tourism—black women (and their families) living in North America (Kelly 2012). At that time, local entrepreneurs began to put on “fringe” events that were intended to capitalize on the influx of potential consumers by providing things to do and see before and after the concerts. In recent years, the fringe events have included beer tastings, P. Diddy-inspired “all white” parties, and slam dunk contests—types of Americanized events that are not prominently featured on the island during any other time. Robert Kelly, the former head of the Kittitian office of North American tourism in New York City notes that the late 1990s were characterized by a “*How Stella Got her Groove Back* crowd of black women,” and the St. Kitts tourism office began more specifically gearing their promotions toward that demographic (Interview, Richard Kelly, December 31, 2012, Basseterre).⁹ From this point onward, the music festival boasted almost exclusively black diasporic acts that were popular among black audiences in the United States. This shift included English-language black music from North America and the Caribbean.

Trimming down the music festival’s offerings to incorporate exclusively pan-black popular music also served to define the target audience as predominantly black women. As an example, the Reggae and Dancehall evening during the 2013 music festival especially featured an array of musical performances of black, male, heterosexuality that was especially geared to a perceived heterosexual female audience. These performances included Beres Hammond’s special brand of Lovers Rock, and Shaggy’s performance of sexual forte in songs like “Mr. Boombastic.” Younger audience members, especially those who posted

frequently on the St. Kitts Music Festival Facebook page, highly anticipated the performance of dancehall artist Konshens. His 2012 song, “Gal a Bubble,” is a party song that encourages female partygoers to show off their expert dancing skills for admiring men.

Despite the narrow target audience, there have been increased efforts to offer differentiated experiences within the music festival. In 2010 the festival committee added a “VIP experience” where for \$850 Eastern Caribbean Dollars (roughly \$315 US dollars), a patron can watch each night’s concert from an elevated tent complete with open bar and passed hors d’oeuvres. Skerritt noted that this addition has increased attendance by about 1,500, over the course of the three evenings. Normal attendance ranges around 12,000 persons over the course of the weekend—with Friday’s Western Caribbean/reggae and dancehall evening drawing in the largest crowd. Adding to these American-style changes, as of 2012, the four-man marketing team inaugurated an annual competition geared toward young women who wish to be “Music Festival Ladies.” Interestingly, the requirements were that the women be “gorgeous, and consummately professional” (“Official Music Festival,” Facebook).

The term “professional” holds extra weight within the context of race and class distinctions among women in the Afro-Caribbean. Respectability has characterized women’s access to social and economic mobility in the Afro-Caribbean colonial and immediate postcolonial era. American style professionalism, however—a certain type of dress, hair styling, and an interest in a particular type of American popular culture—can be seen as the contemporary manifestation of middle class aspirations in the Caribbean. Caribbeanists such as Deborah Thomas and Belinda Edmondson have clearly delineated the connection between colonial mores of feminine respectability and the current trend of affecting American-style professional blackness. Referred to as “professionalism” within feminist, Caribbeanist discourse, American professional black culture has offered an alternative to respectability as the site for current intersections of “social aspiration, nationalism, and pleasure” (Edmondson 2009:16).

Respectability, traditionally, has been tied to an Anglophone Caribbean culture of aspirational middle-classness. Historically, the actual possibility of amassing wealth or moving between classes in many small Caribbean societies was slim. Belonging to institutions such as churches and schools, however, mandated and promoted certain types of behaviors and ideals that, in effect, were considered respectable and thus “middle class,” somewhat irrespective of financial status.¹⁰ Thus, referencing Benedict Anderson, Edmondson has noted, “The middle class is, in a sense, an imaginary community, accessed through participatory rituals like reading certain kinds of books, dressing in certain kinds of clothes, and attending certain kinds of public events” (Edmondson 2009:11). There is a common assertion that middle-class aspirations still define

social mobility across the Anglophone black Caribbean (Thomas 2004, 2012; Edmondson 2009; Freeman 2001, 2005). Caribbean music festivals such as the St. Lucia Jazz festival, the World Creole Festival in Dominica, and the St. Kitts Music Festival have become venues for the modern, postcolonial iteration of this legacy.

By the late 1990s two related shifts occurred simultaneously. First, the St. Kitts Music Festival moved from a multicultural festival geared toward an equally broad and foreign tourist market, to an African American and Caribbean diasporic music festival geared toward a certain type of North American black woman. Consequently, the shift away from catering this particular event to traditional *outsiders* necessarily heralded a move toward selling a version of St. Kitts via black diasporic music—one aspect of black American professionalism—as a status symbol to its own, dispersed community. The working- and middle-class Caribbean communities in the United States and Europe who ritually send home barrels and suitcases full of goods, such as ketchup, shoes, and dishwashing liquid, also send along “cultural ideas” that reflect the new standard of middle-class Caribbean possibility (Edmondson 2009:15). In other words, “The aspirations of the migrant Caribbean community [abroad] are those of the working-class communities at home” (*ibid.*). The aspirations themselves, however, are not imported in the same ways that generalized understandings of the *local vs. foreign* would suggest.

The St. Kitts Music Festival is selling a differently packaged version of the respectability, once espoused by civic clubs and churches, to its own community. In this way, the music festival’s “pandering to tourist sensibilities” (Edmondson 2009:132), is actually a matter of marketing and profiting from long-held Kittitian ideals of middle-classness. In the Kittitian spirit of doubling and repurposing, returning nationals, especially Kittitians and Nevisians living in the United States, use the occasion of the St. Kitts Music Festival to also become—to move and consume—in a manner traditionally characteristic of tourists.

Modern Musical Blackness

The title of this article, “Black Like Me” is borrowed, second-handedly, from the last line of Langston Hughes’ 1926 poem, “Dream Variations.” I initially encountered the phrase through the title of John Howard Griffin’s 1961 book, *Black Like Me*—a non-fiction recounting of a white man’s experiences while posing as a black man in the southern United States in the late 1950s. Using various medicines and tanning regimes to appear African American, Griffin lived according to the de facto and de jure laws of race relations of the time and later dedicated his life to issues of race and social justice based on his experiment. I returned to Griffin’s text through the writing of Caryl Phillips, a Kittitian-born,

British writer whose novels primarily focus on Atlantic blackness. The particular essay that referenced Griffin's work, "Growing Pains," is an autobiographical sketch of Phillips' own varied and interconnected experiences with race, culture, and migration. In his essay, the reader learns that Phillips, for the first time, encounters descriptions of African American plight through Griffin's depiction. Griffin's putting on and intentional affecting of American blackness—ultimately to gain access to the trappings (for better or worse) of belonging to that racial and social group—bears resemblance to scholarship on Caribbean festivals.

The leading trope in academic discussions of music festivals—particularly those in the Anglophone Caribbean—holds that Caribbean music festivals cater to Caribbean audiences who are "putting on" or affecting American blackness as a means of social upward mobility (Edmondson 2009; Freeman 2001; Thomas 2004). Recent scholarship focused on black Caribbean citizenship has discussed the idea of different types of blackness, particularly as a product of neoliberal transnationalism (Thomas 2004; Thomas and Slocum 2003). Common amongst these texts is the notion that whereas blackness routed via African roots is symbolic of heritage and history, Black American cultural products represent a different type of "modern" blackness in many Afro-Caribbean societies (Thomas 2004). Within these understandings, the American pop-culture interventions in the Caribbean since the early twentieth century are the historical precursors to the current transnational scene.¹¹

In this light, Christopher Martin's interaction with the largely black, Caribbean, female audience, with his broad, R&B-inspired singing, at the particular venue of the St. Kitts Music Festival, was not an attempt to appeal to *foreign* tastes or, at least, to the tastes of foreigners. Martin's correct assumption that the audience would be familiar with and respond to his strategic use of regional patois alongside his performance of classic, African American soul music is indicative of how familiar and local this type of transnational blackness is. Martin and his responsive audience offered a sonic and performative representation of the currents that move in and through the Caribbean. Their brief interaction at the St. Kitts Music Festival marked the contemporary Caribbean reality of the travel and movement of people, things, and ideas.

Islands, especially small ones like St. Kitts, are imagined as geographically and culturally isolated places. As evidenced above, the St. Kitts tourist board draws heavily on this trope in its advertising of St. Kitts as a unique and exciting place to visit. The St. Kitts Music Festival, however, draws closer attention to the multiplicity inherent to St. Kitts as a physical place, and to the people who move to and from it. When we acknowledge that the Dominoes pizza and slam dunk contests that characterize the music festival experience are meant to appeal to Kittitian nationals whose understanding of middle-classness is defined by eating, wearing, and listening to certain types of, largely American things, we are

forced take on recycled ideas about how tourism in the Caribbean works, and for whom. Ultimately, I hope, we are pushed to acknowledge that small Caribbean islands like St. Kitts offer new and important ideas to the larger conversation.

Acknowledgements

I am especially grateful for Timothy Rommen, Jerome Camal, and Jocelyne Guilbault who offered thoughtful feedback on an early version of this work that was presented at the 2013 Society for Ethnomusicology annual meeting. Heartfelt thanks to the two anonymous reviewers for their useful comments, and to the members of the Center for Cultural Analysis and Critical Caribbean Studies 2015–16 “Archipelagoes” seminar at Rutgers University, New Brunswick for their encouragement and insight on the final version of this work. Lastly, I thank my host and Kittitian Fairy Godmother, Paulette Leader, for her invaluable help during my research.

Notes

1. It is important to note here that St. Kitts is one island of a twin-island nation. While St. Kitts and Nevis make up the postcolonial nation to which I am referring, each island has its own tourism office and separately regarded tourism industry. Additionally, the two islands are marketed quite differently. Nevis offers much more exclusivity to its tourists via a significantly more expensive tourism product.

2. Neither the United Nations nor the World Trade Organization has made efforts to quantitatively define how geographically or demographically small an island should be in order to qualify as a small island developing state. Instead, an island’s smallness is regarded as directly proportional to its vulnerability. Vulnerability, while still elusive, relates to “ecological fragility, proneness to natural disasters, and [the] concentration of exports on limited ranges of products and markets” (Hein 2004:10).

3. Here I am referring to discussions of tourism based, primarily, on large islands such as Trinidad and Tobago (Puri 2004) and Jamaica (Daye, Chambers, and Roberts 2008).

4. Within Caribbean music scholarship, special attention has been paid to the connection between music and geography especially with regards to separations such as “uptown” and “downtown” in the case of popular music idioms coming out of Jamaica in the late 1970s through the 1990s (Cooper 2004). Cultural geography has also been employed as a frame for the examination of the demise of the local Bahamian music scene (Rommen 2011).

5. In the late 1940s through the ’50s, tourists visiting The Bahamas, especially Nassau, would often attend performances at the “Over-The-Hill” nightclubs where local musicians played. Considering this, I am not suggesting here that the mixing of tourists and locals at various music scenes and venues (as is the case in St. Kitts) is, in itself, notable. Instead, I am suggesting that since the beginning of the local Kittitian tourist industry, these music venues have been open to tourists and locals. The type of performance or performer was more an indication of the audience than the physical venue.

6. While it is accurate to suggest that there are not any music venues that are exclusive to tourists, there are small bars in and around Basseterre that feature sound systems and occasionally local band performances. Tourists do not typically frequent these venues.

7. For an example of this, see Daniel Neely’s discussion of the changes in Jamaican *mento* music in the 1950s (Neely 2008).

8. The World Creole Festival in Dominica is another example of a small-island, cultural tourism event that succeeds in large part due to local support. A limited portion of the audience on any given night is non-local.

9. The 1998 film adaptation of Terry McMillan's 1996 novel *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* chronicles the romance between "Stella," an attractive and successful American black woman in her forties, and "Winston," a younger, carefree, handsome dark-skinned Jamaican man. In addition to depicting a black, professional woman tourist, Samantha Pinto and Jenny Sharpe have noted that this film also offers some insight into the dynamics attendant to sex tourism in the Caribbean. For a review of pertinent texts on sex and sex work in the Caribbean see Sharpe and Pinto 2006.

10. Belinda Edmondson refers to this as aspirational culture.

11. Here I am referring to the influx of American entertainment to and through the Caribbean, especially music, movies, and books that have set the standard for middle-class affects. American R&B music represents one example of this where this genre is the official soundtrack for upscale events. It often represents a sharp contrast to local genres such as *wylers* at nationalist middle-class events such as the Carnival Queen Pageant.

References

- Berge, Pierre van den. 2002. "Risk and Deceit in Transient Non-Repeated Interactions: The Case of Tourism." In *Risky Transactions: Trust, Kinship, and Ethnicity*, edited by Frank Salter, 205–18. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Brooks, Sheere. 2008. "A Squatter in My Own Country! Spatial Manifestations of Social Exclusion in a Jamaican Tourist Resort Town." In *New Perspectives in Caribbean Tourism*, edited by Marcella Daye, Donna Chambers, and Sherma Roberts, 163–87. London: Psychology Press.
- Cooper, Carolyn. 1995. *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender, and the "Vulgar" Body of Jamaican Popular Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- . 2004. *Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture at Large*. First Edition. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Daye, Marcella, Donna Chambers, and Sherma Roberts. 2008. *New Perspectives in Caribbean Tourism*. London: Psychology Press.
- Edmondson, Belinda. 2009. *Caribbean Middlebrow: Leisure Culture and the Middle Class*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Forestry Policies in the Caribbean: Reports of 28 Selected Countries and Territories*. 1998. Food & Agriculture Organization.
- Freeman, Carla. 2000. *High Tech and High Heels in the Global Economy: Women, Work, and Pink-Collar Identities in the Caribbean*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- . 2005. "Neo-Liberalism, Respectability, and the Romance of Flexibility in Barbados." Working Paper. Emory Center for Myth and Ritual in American Life. 40: 1–29.
- Griffin, John Howard. 1961. *Black Like Me*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Hein, Phillip. 2004. "Small Island Developing States: Origin of the Category and Definition Issues." In *Is a Special Treatment of Small Island States Possible?*, 1–22. UNCTAD/LDC New York and Geneva: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.
- Houston, Lynn Marie. 2005. *Food Culture in the Caribbean*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Hubbard, Vincent K. 2002. *A History of St. Kitts: The Sweet Trade*. Northampton, MA: Interlink Publishing Group.
- Kempadoo, Kamala. 1999. *Sun, Sex, and Gold: Tourism and Sex Work in the Caribbean*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Neely, Daniel T. 2008. "Mento, Jamaica's Original Music: Development, Tourism and the Nationalist Frame." PhD dissertation, New York University.
- Nurse, Keith. 2001. "Festival Tourism in the Caribbean: An Economic Impact Assessment." Washington, D.C.: Inter-American Development Bank.
- . 2004. "Diaspora, Migration and Development in the Caribbean." *FOCAL Policy Papers*.

- "Official St. Kitts Music Festival" Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/stkittsmusicfestival/photos_stream accessed 18 April 2013.
- Phillips, Caryl 2005. "Growing Pains." *The Observer*. 19 August.
- Puri, Shalini. 2004. *The Caribbean Postcolonial: Social Equality, Post-Nationalism, and Cultural Hybridity*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Richardson, Bonham C. 1983. *Caribbean Migrants: Environment and Human Survival on St. Kitts and Nevis*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.
- Rommen, Timothy. 2011. *Funky Nassau: Roots, Routes, and Representation in Bahamian Popular Music*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Rommen, Timothy, and Daniel T. Neely. 2014. *Sun, Sea, and Sound: Music and Tourism in the Circum-Caribbean*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sanchez, Peter M., and Kathleen M. Adams. 2008. "The Janus-Faced Character of Tourism in Cuba." *Annals of Tourism Research*. 35: 27–46.
- Sharpe, Jenny, and Samantha Pinto. 2006. "The Sweetest Taboo: Studies of Caribbean Sexualities; A Review Essay." *Signs*. 32: 247–74.
- Sheller, Mimi. 2003. *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies*. London: Psychology Press.
- . 2009. "The New Caribbean Complexity: Mobility Systems, Tourism and Spatial Rescaling." *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 30:189–203.
- Sheller, Mimi, and John Urry. *Tourism Mobilities: Places to Play, Places in Play*. 2004. London: Psychology Press
- . 2006. "The New Mobilities Paradigm." *Environment and Planning*. 38: 207–26.
- Slocum, Karla, and Deborah A. Thomas. 2003. "Rethinking Global and Area Studies: Insights from Caribbeanist Anthropology." *American Anthropologist*. 105: 553–65.
- Thomas, Deborah A. 2004. *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica*. Durham: Duke University Press Books.
- . 2011. *Exceptional Violence: Embodied Citizenship in Transnational Jamaica*. Durham: Duke University Press Books.
- "Welcome to St. Kitts": The Official Website of The St. Kitts Tourism Authority. www.stkittstourism.kn Accessed 8 May 2013.