



Caribbean Studies

ISSN: 0008-6533

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Instituto de Estudios del Caribe

Puerto Rico

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INTERROGATING CARIBBEAN MUSIC: POWER, DIALOGUE, AND TRANSCENDENCE
Caribbean Studies, vol. 36, núm. 2, julio-diciembre, 2008, pp. vii-ix
Instituto de Estudios del Caribe
San Juan, Puerto Rico

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INTERROGATING CARIBBEAN MUSIC: POWER, DIALOGUE, AND TRANSCENDENCE

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Interrogating Caribbean Music: Power, Dialogue, and Transcendence examines the rich diversity of Caribbean music, presenting studies of both secular and sacred styles ranging from Puerto Rican *salsa* to Jamaican *mento*, Trinidadian *parang* and several genres in Haiti. The authors include senior scholars as well as fresh voices. In what we might consider the edition's centerpiece, Melvin Butler uses the term transcendence to reference the mind-body altering effects of Afro-Caribbean religious music. I suggest that we extend the notion of transcendence to the transformative power of Caribbean music in general. The articles in this edition interrogate the roles that music plays in transforming power relationships not only among musicians and their audiences, but, employing richly reflexive voices, they raise provocative issues about researchers' roles in on-going dialogues between scholars and cultural practitioners.

Gage Averill's "Ballad Hunting in the Black Republic: Alan Lomax in Haiti, 1936-37" is a fitting opener in that it treats the early stages of Caribbeanist ethnomusicology. Averill documents the story of Alan Lomax's seminal research trip to Haiti which resulted in "the most significant archive of Haitian culture in the early century" (p. 3): more than 1,500 recordings of genres ranging from Vodou music to romances employing fiddles, Medieval themes, and archaic French language. This narrative of Lomax's Haitian sojourn talks of the ups and downs that inevitably accompany the fieldwork experience and boasts a cast of characters amounting to a veritable who's who of seminal Caribbeanists: Melville Herskovits, Zora Neale Hurston, and Harold Courlander. Averill critically examines scholars' "personalities, perspectives, and passions," elucidating power relations and dialogic strands of cultural representation and demonstrates that Lomax is "both a towering and controversial figure" (p. 4). Like his colleagues Herskovits and Hurston, Lomax was motivated by the struggle for the rights of African-descended people, but at the same time, his field notes also betray troublingly "essentialist discourse of race" (p. 21). Averill concludes that he is grateful to Lomax not only "for bequeathing a prolific legacy of recordings and

fieldnotes, but also for the puzzles, paradoxes,... and even the foul moods and the failings [which] ... remind us of the human element in which we know the world" (p. 26).

Melvin Butler's article entitled "The Weapons of Our Warfare: Music, Positionality, and Transcendence among Haitian Pentecostals" elucidates the paradoxical ways that musical "weapons" can be simultaneously "spiritually amalgative" and "socially divisive" (Abstract).

On one hand, he employs Antonio Gramsci's theory of "positionality" to elucidate Haitian Pentecostal music's negotiation of identities in opposition to "a host of social, historical, political, and spiritual others" (p. 13). At the same time, he employs standard ethnographic methods as well as perspectives gleaned from his own status as a Pentecostal practitioner to document the ways that Haitians "sing and dance their way across a boundary between earthly and spiritual realms, transcending the self" (p. 7). The result is richly nuanced and rigorous, and Butler's dialogical stance, which combines thick description with interrogation of his own positionality, is especially poignant in silhouette with the story of Lomax's Haitian sojourn more than 80 years ago.

While conventional wisdom propagates a narrative of the decimation of Native American culture in the Caribbean, Amelia Ingram's "Reading History, Performing Carib: The Santa Rosa Festival and Amerindian Identity in Trinidad" demonstrates music's role in re-imagining indigenous identity. Ingram foregrounds cultural actors' categories and agendas, describing the ways that Trinidad's so-called "mixed" Creole population descended from Spanish settlers, Amerindian groups, and others use music and other forms of performance to re-write history and carve a space for a living lineage of "Carib consciousness" (p. 35). The island's oldest continuous festival, founded in 1786 and dedicated to Santa Rosa (the first saint in the Americas) and its associated musical style, *parang* (cf. Trinidadian *parranda*) were central to this movement: "Although the music is sung in Spanish and typically associated with Christmas in Trinidad, in the context of the festival the music was (and still is) considered Amerindian music" (p. 18).

Richly humanistic in its attention to nuances of local speech in Jamaica, Daniel Neely develops extended metaphors in "Haul and Pull Up: History, *Mento*, and the eBay Age." The article interrogates globalized relationships of power in the digital world, looking at the ways the Internet can decontextualize local material culture and disempower local cultural bearers. Collectors around the world accumulate recordings of Jamaican music with what they "haul" from eBay, but the appropriation local material culture "fragments" local cultural history: regrettably, Jamaicans' historiography of their own music sometimes becomes only a "local counter-history" (p. 28) to narratives that are widely disseminated

on the Internet. Scholars also play roles in this process, and Neely critically examines his own experiences as a scholar and collector of Jamaican music recordings. While interrogating his own positionality, Neely foregrounds the voices of Jamaican cultural actors, thereby making an important contribution to the literature on Jamaican music.

Marisol Berríos-Miranda and Shannon Dudley's "El Gran Combo, Cortijo, and the Musical Geography of Cangrejos/Santurce, Puerto Rico" shows that while salsa has important roots in Cuba and developed in New York City, Puerto Rico is of central importance to this music. Stressing the crucial role of location, they focus on the San Juan neighborhood of Santurce, where Cortijo y su Combo developed their unique and influential style which incorporated authentic *bomba* and articulated an ideology of black pride. Delving farther back in time, they show that this same locus, previously known as San Mateo de Cangrejos, was founded in 1663 as an area where the Spanish Crown granted refuge to escaped slaves from all around the Caribbean. *Bomba* developed from a rich intermarriage of various Afro-Caribbean styles in this culturally rich zone of empowerment. This African-based pan-Caribbean legacy laid the groundwork for salsa and Puerto Rican culture generally which, the authors argue, is "inclusive, flexible, and attuned to the wider Caribbean" (p. 19). El Gran Combo and other Puerto Rican *salseros* consolidated the Cangrejos legacy as passed down by Cortijo, offering a powerfully African-based challenge to power relations in Puerto Rico, the U.S. mainland, and around the world.

Berríos-Miranda writes from the center of the story she tells, for "El Gran Combo, Cortijo, and the Musical Geography of Cangrejos" is inspired by her mother's personal memories of musical life in Santurce. This makes for a different perspective than we find in the edition's other articles, but I am struck by the dialogical nature of this collection as a whole.

Perhaps, the subjectivity of musical experience demands reflexivity; indeed, music is an ineffable art whose affects are profoundly individualized. At the same time, these articles demonstrate the central role that music plays in negotiating identity formation and power relations in Caribbean communities at local, regional, and global levels.