

CARIBBEAN CURRENTS:
Recent Studies in Caribbean Music

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CENTRAL AFRICA IN THE CARIBBEAN: TRANSCENDING TIME, TRANSFORMING CULTURES. By Maureen Warner-Lewis. (Kingston: University Press of the West Indies, 2003. Pp. 450. \$45.00 paper.)

CARIBBEAN DANCE FROM ABAKUA TO ZOUK: HOW MOVEMENT SHAPES IDENTITY. Edited by Susan Sloat. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002. Pp. 400. \$39.95 paper.)

THE CITY OF MUSICAL MEMORY: SALSA, RECORD GROOVES, AND POPULAR CULTURE IN CALI, COLOMBIA. By Lise A. Waxer. (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002. Pp. 416. \$24.95 paper.)

CUBAN FIRE: THE STORY OF SALSA AND LATIN JAZZ. By Isabelle Leymarie. (London, New York: Continuum, 2002. Pp. 400. \$29.95 cloth.)

Current studies in music of the Caribbean demonstrate the vitality of the research happening in this region. Some scholars continue to work motifs, such as the creolization process, that have long defined studies in the Caribbean. Others are developing new frameworks to confront contradictory musical developments within particular cultural contexts.

Among these are cultural continuities between the African continent and the African diaspora. Although the Africanisms debate may seem old fashioned to some, there are times when it is appropriate, particularly when Afro-Caribbean scholars are undertaking these inquiries as a larger project of legitimating African-based cultural practices within their own postcolonial cultural environments. In her meticulously researched volume *Central Africa in the Caribbean* Maureen Warner-Lewis seeks "to explicate, illuminate and interpret Caribbean thought and practice by comparison with Central African world view and custom" (xxii). In this, Warner-Lewis is something of a linguistic archeologist, uncovering many linguistic survivals surrounding all aspects of culture, including "personal names, lexical cognates, food types, conceptual, artistic and motor behaviours which link the Caribbean with

Central Africa and which replicate themselves at varying points in Caribbean space" (xxx1–xxii). As in her earlier work *Trinidad Yoruba: From Mother Tongue to Memory* (1995),¹ Warner-Lewis argues that the inimical conditions of slavery, rather than leading to deprivation of culture, led culture bearers of Central African descent to resolutely hold onto aspects of their cultural identity vis-à-vis both colonial society and other African-based sociolinguistic groups in the Caribbean, such as the Yoruba speakers described in *Trinidad Yoruba*.

While Warner-Lewis agrees that the relative number of Central Africans was small compared to other African linguistic groups, she argues that "the survival and/or continued use of even one African lexical item in a West Atlantic location is evidence of an integral link, at some point in time, between the particular ethnolinguistic group—or even one individual of this group—and the practice and belief to which this term relates" (xxii). While some readers might find this a tautology, one must realize the resistance to Afrocentric ideas that persists in West Indian intellectual circles, which has been one of the central features of Warner-Lewis's scholarly works.

These Pan-Caribbean projects have occupied Warner-Lewis for the past thirty years, resulting in a book that contains a wealth of information useful for any scholar even casually interested in the region. Music scholars have much to find useful in this work. In addition to the many maps, photos, and diagrams, the author includes over forty song transcriptions she made from interviews with informants in Trinidad and Guyana during the 1960s and 1970s. Interestingly, Warner-Lewis has interwoven discussion of musical and artistic expression with all aspects of life in the region under investigation. Thus, researchers in music will not want to limit themselves to any one chapter but take the work as a whole.

Caribbean Dance from Abakua to Zouk is a comprehensive look at the Caribbean region, and includes the viewpoints and experiences of a variety of contributors, from ethnomusicologists to choreographers and cultural leaders. The twenty-two essays in the volume are organized by country, and include the "small islands" that tend to be overlooked in such studies (specifically St. Croix, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Curaçao). Each author has tried to emphasize music/dance genres that concern matters of identity (both personal and communal). "Each island has dances that connote place and belonging, that have become 'national.' This can be particularly important in places that have not been until recently, and in some cases still are not, allowed the status of nations" (viii–ix).

The contributors to this volume offer many insights that even the seasoned scholar will find useful. Yvonne Daniels's essay "Cuban Dance:

1. Maureen Warner-Lewis, *Trinidad Yoruba: From Mother Tongue to Memory* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996).

an Orchard of Caribbean Creativity" illustrates Cuba's vast influence on the rest of the region. "Cuban dance/music is to the Caribbean as African-American dance/music is to U.S. American dance/music, an indelible and ever-present part of the broad, Caribbean cultural fabric" (24). "In Search of the Limbo" by Molly Ahye and "The Moko Jumbie: Elevating the Children" by Patricia T. Alleyne-Demers give deserved attention to the historical origins and cultural complexity of expressions that are too frequently seen as tourist spectacles. Instead, such expressions "function like landmarks, which provide the necessary movement out of the pain of self-negation and dispossession into a New World of self-affirmation" (286).

In general, *Caribbean Dance* documents a vast array of cultural practices, some of them little known outside their place of origin. It also demonstrates the key importance of music and dance in maintaining Caribbean identity in the North American and European cities to which Caribbean citizens have migrated in recent decades. Numerous photographs, a lengthy bibliography, and a detailed glossary (with references to pertinent essays alongside definitions) greatly enhance the book's value.

Although Cali, Colombia does not lie within the borders of the Caribbean, like Latinos in New York and Miami, Caleños have adopted salsa as a central aspect of their cultural identity. The process by which Cali became "the world capital of salsa" is the subject of *The City of Musical Memory* by the late Lise A. Waxer. In her study, Waxer takes the unusual approach of examining the localization of salsa in Cali through sound recordings, and how the use of sound recordings in public contexts often supercedes the emphasis on live music making in Cali (3).

The initial chapters of *The City of Musical Memory* contain a detailed history of the rise of Latin music and salsa in New York City, the spread of what Caleños call *música antillana* to Colombia, and the general features of the music adopted by Caleños as a key symbol of their cultural identity. While it may seem unusual that Caleños looked outside of Colombia for musical identification, Waxer argues that this makes Caleño music fans more insular because they are going against hegemonic ideas of national identity. However, the most interesting aspect of Waxer's volume is her documentation of the "expressive record-centered practices" that Caleño music enthusiasts have developed over the years. These include distinctive forms of salsa sociability, such as the *viejotecas* where people gather to listen and dance to old salsa recordings. As with everything else in her book, Waxer is very thorough, devoting two chapters to "Memory and Movement in the Record-Centered Dance Scene" and "Life in the Vinyl Museum: Salsotecas and Record Collectors."

The second half of Waxer's book details the live scene that emerged during the 1980s and 1990s. Waxer admits "the expansion of Cali's scene

was spurred both directly and indirectly by financial support from the burgeoning Cali cocaine cartel" (192). Cali's cocaine barons flew talent in from New York and Puerto Rico, but local musicians and fans found that the boom in the local economy helped expand the opportunities for live entertainment in general. This expansion of Caleño music education included salsa orchestras in the school system and the continued prevalence of salsa bands composed of children and adolescents. This climate also benefited women musicians, and Waxer observes that there were at least a dozen active *orquestas femeninas* during the period of her fieldwork in Cali.

In short, Caleños consider themselves the guardians of salsa today.

Not only did this music provide a stylistic vehicle for the growing cosmopolitan identity engendered by new economic and social links: the burgeoning cosmopolitics of thinking and feeling beyond the nation underscored by listening and dancing to salsa and *música antillana* was vital for negotiating tensions over Cali's difference from the rest of the nation and the city's history of social heterogeneity and race mixture. (257)

Waxer will long be remembered for her detailed analysis of Cali's contribution to the world of salsa music as well as her theoretical analysis of the localization of global music within a particular community.

Cuban Fire is a beautifully illustrated and detailed volume by the French documentary filmmaker Isabelle Leymarie of the various performers that contributed to the rise of Afro-Cuban music to international prominence, and its transplantation to the United States and Puerto Rico. Leymarie begins her survey with "the Roots: from African liturgies to Creole rhythms" (9), enhancing her discussion of Cuba's best known sacred and secular genres—including the music of Santería, Carnival, rumba and danzón—with numerous musical examples and photographs. This chapter would be especially useful for both scholars and general readers interested in becoming acquainted with the rich musical heritage that Afro-Cubans have given to the world.

Subsequent chapters take the reader sequentially through the twentieth century: the rise of Havana *son* in the 1920s; the golden age of Cuban music in the 1940s and 1950s; the *pachanga*, the boogaloo, and Latin soul of the 1960s; and trends from the 1970s until today, including up-to-the-minute chronicles of *songo* and *nueva timba*. Leymarie wraps up her volume with "The Rest of the World," discussing how Cuban and Puerto Rican music have influenced musicians in Mexico, France, Spain, and the African continent. This conclusion is a bit scant in detail compared with the rest of the volume, but can be forgiven in light of the depth of detail provided in the earlier chapters.

In general, Leymarie has written a richly detailed and well-organized volume. Moreover, her accessible prose makes for a very good read regardless of the reader's orientation.