RHYTHMS OF RAPTURE
SACRED MUSICS OF HAITIAN VODOU
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Live ceremonial music, studio recordings and popular songs from Haiti
Conceived, compiled and produced by Elizabeth McAlister
Notes by Elizabeth McAlister, Gage Averill, Gerdes Fleurent, David Yih, and others
Produced in association with the museum exhibition and exhibition catalog, Sacred
Arts of Haitian Vodou, presented by the Fowler Museum of Cultural History at the
University of California at Los Angeles.

This new release explores the recent innovations and traditional roots of this potent music, and
the enclosed notes examine its political and spiritual base. Included here are well-known
artists such as Boukman Experyans, RaRa Machine, Boukan Ginen and RAM, as well as
more traditional recordings made in Haiti, including some from Vodou ceremonies.

Portion of the proceeds from the sale of this recording goes to benefit Haitian grassroots
community projects.
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3. Bosou Djo Eya–Port-au-Prince Mayi 1:17
5. Legba Plante ‘l Poto/Papa Loko Di Yo Sa–Master Drummer Coyote, Bon Repos 3:56
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Introduction: Voodoo Music and Ritual Work
by Elizabeth McAllister

When you say the word “Voodoo,” most people immediately think of dolls with pins in them and walking ghosts. But for many people in Haiti, Vodou is a way of life. The word encompasses a philosophy, a religious system, a healing system, and also a form of artistic expression. When I was first invited to a Vodou ceremony, I had no idea what to expect. My hosts called it a “dance.” But would it be scary? What kinds of rituals would I see?

When I walked into the room, my eyes ran the length of a long well-lit space with an enormous table at one end laden with cakes, candies, flowers, bottles of alcohol and statues of Catholic saints. The ritual unfolded like a musical jewel from the countryside to learn this music and ritual work. The selectio

When the priestess (mambo) raises her rattle-and-bell (ason) to shake it, the drummers have their cue to roll back and forth louder and louder and “heat up” the space. Then the mamman drum “breaks,” and plays against the rhythm, and the spirit whose song is being called may very well come down and possess one of the dancers (You can hear this in track 6). “Ezili is dancing in Marie’s head,” people tell each other. Or they say that the person is the “horse,” and the bea “rides the horse.” The spirit may well turn to the group, compose a brand new song, and teach it right then and there.

Singing and drumming are a form of devotion and are considered spiritual “work” in Haiti. There are many times when people will sing or make music in addition to intense crowded ritual dances. While working on making objects—drums or flags, or decorating their altars—people will sing to “heat up” the work. In track 20, a priest sings while he makes a traveler’s passport. A woman sings to herself as she goes about her day in track 14. Or a song can be a coded message meant for another person. In track 15, a woman “sings a point” (chante pwen) to her enemies that she will not succumb to their threats because she is protected by angels—another way of saying “free.”

This recording shares with you some of the musical jewels from this Afro-Haitian religious system. The selections presented here give you the chance to listen to Vodou musics in a variety of contexts and a range of places. You will hear recordings made live during dances, music by singers in the tradition who worked to capture the best sound in the studio, and also pop tunes based on traditional music using Rock ’n Roll guitars and synthesizers.

Vodou has long been denigrated by the literate, Catholic, Francophone minority in Haiti, and by bad press in the United States. A small corps of Haitian researchers have rejected the prejudices around them and have spent time in the countryside to learn this music from the
older people. Mimero se Beaubrun, (Track 15), Richard Morse, (Track 4) and Azouke Sanon (Track 2) are among these artist-researchers who offer us songs and commentary on this album. They are part of the "roots movement" in Haiti and in the diaspora that is working hard to validate and maintain the richness of Haitian culture. We also have the participation of scholars who use their formal training to record and study Vodou music, including Gage Averill, Lois Wilcken, David Yih and myself. And we have the help of Professor Gerdés Fleurant, who is a scholar and a Vodou priest. Here on Track 19 he presents the first ever released recording of Bizango music from the Vodou secret societies. Although most of the tracks are recently recorded, we catch a glimpse of the past in Track 5, a recording made in 1949 by the writer and filmmaker Maya Deren.

We made an effort to present a variety of regional styles, so that you can hear music from different parts of Haiti and its diaspora. In the notes below, we take turns talking to you about each song. We tell you which group or soyer (Vodou temple) sings them, where and what year. We all hope that you will enjoy this taste of Vodou music and we invite you to go out and find the albums listed below and listen to more. Ayibobo! That's the Kreyol way to say "Amen!"

The Diversity of Vodou Music
by David Yih

Haiti's unique history has produced a culture of remarkable diversity. This diversity stems, first of all, from the many peoples whose cultures flowed together in Saint Domingue (the French colony that became independent Haiti). The African people that were brought to Saint Domingue as slaves came from regions of Africa ranging from Senegal to the Congo River basin. When they arrived, members of the same ethnic group were purposely separated to discourage communication that might lead to revolt. Throughout the eighteenth century, slaves managed to escape to the mountains and form their own societies. In the wilderness and on the plantations, Africans and creoles of African descent took up the task of cultural reconstruction, adopting elements from both African and European sources. They created a new language—Haitian Creole (Kreyòl) and a religion: Vodou. Vodou music was created in hundreds of locations all over Saint Domingue to serve the needs of the emerging religion; for in Vodou participation is more important than dogma, and participation means, to a large extent, singing, dancing, and drumming.

In the colonial period, Vodou repertoires were fairly isolated. Travel was difficult and slave gatherings illegal. After independence (in 1804), throughout the nineteenth century, and into the twentieth, Haiti's economy and culture acquired a regional character. Seaports like Cap-Haïtien, Port-de-Paix, Gonâves, Saint-Marc, Port-au-Prince, Petit-Goâve, Jeremie, Les Cayes, and Jacmel were active in import and export and flourished as centers of regional culture and commerce. Beginning with the American occupation of 1915-1934, the centralizing function of international trade in the capital city turned these once bustling ports into sleepy provincial towns of faded grandeur, but regional cultures remain vibrant and distinctive. This is especially true of Vodou music and dance.

Vodou has never been subject to any standardizing authority. As a result, every region of Haiti has maintained its own rhythms, its own songs, its own dances, and its own musical instruments. Haitian drums range in size from the little tambou kout, the size of one of a pair of bongo drums, to asoto drums that loom ten feet tall. Although ensembles consisting of three cowhide-covered drums played with sticks are common in many areas, several other kinds of ensembles exist. Goat-skin-covered hand drums sometimes with corded fiber snare, are used in Soukri Danach and (on Track 17), Petro dances in Port-au-Prince. Double-headed drums figure in the Nago ritual of Badjo (Track 16) and in some Kongo ensembles. Southern Kongo groups use as many as eight drums at one, while southern menwa groups feature violin or flute, two tambourines, and a dance caller (on Track 10). The use of the violin in rural Haitian folk and Vodou music dates from the era when slave violinists performed in colonial opera houses and concert halls and for society balls. Slaves' proficiency on the violin was so widespread that competence on violin was often mentioned in colonial newspaper ads describing runaway or offering slaves for sale.

Vodou ceremonies are meant to be beautiful and entertaining, and they are; part of their function, after all, is to regale the spirits with food, drink, music and dance. But Vodou also carries a grave message that testifies to its birth and development in the midst of struggle and conflict. Transmitted through the centuries, the songs reveal the group's response to a history of oppression, persecution, and militarism. Recurring themes and verbal formulas refer to hypocrisy and betrayal and warn against trust outsiders. (See Tracks 4, 15, and 20.)
The Music of Vodou includes many rites, but the best known are the Rada, Kongo-Petwo, and Bizango (secret societies). The Rada rite is historically rooted in Dahomey, while the Kongo-Petwo is based in the kingdom of Kongo. Both rites emerged from the crucible of the plantation slavery system in the Caribbean. Each rite has distinct characteristics and temperament of its spiritual entities, known as, for example, the assistant, the onyenkon, who is the chorus leader. Sometimes a large tambourine, called bas, reinforces the sound of the lead mamban drum. The primary rhythms for the Rada hwa are yanvalou, mayi and zepol, which form an obligatory trilogy, the nago gwan kou, nago cho, mazon, tua riqel, kongo-rada, and dyoubata-matinik. The music of the Rada rite is the most sophisticated of Vodou, and its beauty resides in a series of cross rhythms created by the instruments and the singers.

Kongo-Petwo music uses two conical single-headed drums, smaller in size than the Rada instruments, and tuned by pulling at laces attached to the drum head. They are known as gwo baka and ti baka, and played in call and response with each other in some of the most intricate patterns in Vodou (See Track 17). A bell or ogen plays a continuous timeline, and rattles called echatcha, handled by the song leaders, play in counter rhythms with the other instruments. At times, a third drum smaller in size than the ti baka, called kata, (an onomatopoeia from the sound it produces), is added to the ensemble to “warm up the music” or “chose misik.” The rhythms played for Kongo-Petwo hwa are kita and boumaba.

The Music of Bizango, or secret societies, which are in fact societies for the protection of the community, uses two drums, whistles, and a cracking whip called twit kach (See Track 19). One of the drums, a Kongo-Petwo style instrument simply known as tambou, is played with bare hands, and the other is a double headed tambourine called kes played with two sticks. It is the staccato rolling of the rhythm that marks its distinctive sound. The music played, danced and sung at Bizango rites are the chika and the kongo-soyute.

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Vodou and Pop Music: The Roots Connection

Ever since it has been possible to record music in the studio, Haitian musicians have set out to capture the sound of Vodou music. Beginning in the 1950s, the sacred music of Vodou and Rara have been echoed in popular music by musicians (mostly from the middle class) who have crafted commercially viable roots music hybrids. In the late 1950s, the Haitian Vodou-Jazz band Jazz des Jeunes sang "A nasty little guy is insulting his superior, take him to the cemetery. Crossroads Ooh!" Three and a half decades later, Boukman Eksperyans sang "When we have them at the crossroads, Crossroads, judge these bad guys for me." These two songs about judgement, both addressed to the deity of the crossroads and both making reference to the political struggles of their times, stand at either end of five decades of roots music in Haitian popular song.

This history begins with a musical movement that explored the songs and rhythms of Vodou in post-WW II Haiti. Haitian audiences enjoyed the big band Jazz des Jeunes, female folkloric singers Lumane Casimir and Martha Jean-Claude, and other dzes (dance bands) such as the Orchestre el Saïeh. These performers were inspired by an intellectual and political nativist movement that took hold in Haiti dur-
ing the first American Occupation (1915–1934) in reaction to the racism of the occupation forces and to the history of Haiti's domination by a light-skinned elite which took its cultural cues from France.

After François "Papa Doc" Duvalier (a proponent of the Africanist movement) assumed the presidency, the leftist opposition organized roots-oriented cultural organizations to win the hearts and minds of the peasants. With names like Lamby (conch shell trumpet that signals rebellion) or Karako Blè (blue peasant dress), these groups promoted Kreyòl literacy and Afro-Haitian culture. They were broken up by Duvalierist repression in the late 1960s, and surviving members joined the growing exodus to the United States and Canada, where they formed the backbone of a cultural movement in the diaspora, called kilti libête (freedom culture). Here, Afro-Haitian cultural expressions aided Marxist anti-Duvalierist political organizing. None of the previous movements, however, treated the religious beliefs of Vodou with the reverence that one finds in the more recent mizik ranm (roots music) movement, which has become a Haitian global export in the 1990s.

This current movement began in the late 1970s, when many Haitian youth were listening to Jamaican roots-reggae as well as to American funk and rock. A few groups of young Haitians devoted themselves to learning Afro-Haitian religious music from Vodou percussionists and to blending it with influences from transnational popular music. These were the predecessors of the roots groups Foula, Sanba-ya, and Boukman Eksperyans (on Track 9). Although all of these groups existed before "Baby Doc" Duvalier fled Haiti, the turbulent period of débouakay (uprooting) of Duvalierism laid the groundwork for roots movement's popularity, with its intense search for political, social, cultural, and spiritual direction.

Roots music came to stand for a sympathy with the plight of Haiti's poorest classes, thus assuming a new political relevance. Sakad released a political roots album in New York, aange Robert Mano Charlemagne joined with Vodou drummers and singers to create the ensemble Kalfou Lakay (Crossroads At Home). Other roots bands arose: Zobop, Koudjay, and RAM (Track 4). Impressed by the ability of this new music to speak across language barriers, foreign labels signed Haitian roots artists: Mango released Boukman Eksperyans' first and two subsequent albums. Xenophile signed up the premier album by Boukan Ginen (Track 12). In New York, percussionist Clifford Sylvain organized Rara Machine (Track 1) and signed with Shanachie Records. International acclaim quickly followed: a song by RAM made its way on to the soundtrack of the movie Philadelphia, Boukan Ginen won the French Prix Découverte, and Boukman Eksperyans was nominated for a Grammy Award.

Throughout all of the global exposure, the music has continued to enter into the struggle to give a voice to Haiti's dispossessed and marginalized majority. Although the music wields a political impact, mizik ranm groups emphasize spiritual messages of tolerance, unity, faith, and respect (for the ancestors as well as for the living) as a way out of Haiti's political and economic morass. This movement, which has already done much to de-stigmatize Vodou in Haiti and among foreigners, has begun to build a dialogue among all classes in Haiti while acting as a moral conscience of a troubled nation.
This album is sequenced according to the basic reggae, or rules, of Vodou, to guide the listener through the proper "line" of spirit songs, from the "cool" Rada through the Ogouns, into "hot" Petro and Banda and then to Bizango (secret societies) and Rara. But compact discs can be programmed to play in different orders. Here are some suggestions:

Rada rhythms: Tracks 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12
Petro-Bizango-Rada rhythms: 8, 17, 19
Countrieside: 1, 2, 5, 8, 10, 11, 16, 19, 20
Port-au-Prince: 3, 4, 6, 7, 12, 17, 18
Women’s Voices: 3, 14, 15, 18, 20
Men’s Voices: 1, 2, 5, 7, 9, 12, 13, 16, 17
A capella songs: 1, 14, 15, 20
Rock ‘n Roll and Jazz: 1, 4, 7, 9, 12

Notes on the Selections

1. Badè


This song opens with the blowing of a conch shell (lani) which is used in Haiti to signal to people far away. The song is adapted by a New York based band from a traditional prayer chant sung at the Lakou Souv ans—a spiritual compound known as the seat of Dahomean—based practices in Haiti. Some of it is in langaj—an untranslated spiritual language. The first bit contains parts of the Priye Djò, a prayer sung right after the Catholic prayers. —Elizabeth McAlister

The bone, it walks, it walks, it walks (Chorus repeats)
The body, it walks, it walks, it walks (Chorus repeats) Our life is in God’s hands/
The bone, it walks/Our life is in God’s hands/
Abolizagbadji-a ougan siye/Lisadole zo (repeat 2x)
E Zo E Zo E Zo E Zo/Badékouloudjé o wàn yole (lead repeats after each line)
Anye e za badékouloudjé badè wàn yole (Chorus repeats after each line)
We want things to change/We gather the angels/We call all the children/We call all good people/We call all the children/We gather all

2. Azouke Legba (Dans Kanari)


The instruments you hear in this song are funerary instruments. The low instrument is made out of a clay pot, called a kanari. The gamel water drum answers it. The gamel is made with a log you dig out, put water into, and float three small calabashes in. Then you play the calabashes with sticks. You control their tone with the amount of water. We play these instruments when somebody dies. After one year and a day, we call a dance to liberate the dead person’s spirit, to take it out of the water (rete me nan dlo). We play the kanari all night until it breaks in the morning. That means the spirit has gone. This is how it’s done in the Artibonite.

I interpret this song as a critique about the influence money has come to have over people. Money is such a heavy thing now that even though it’s only paper, it can break rocks. People don’t know how to use the concept of money yet—they kill people for money. That’s not really what money should be. It should be used for positive things. —Gregory (Azouke) Sanon

Azouke Paren Legba ye/Azouke Paren Legba ye/Parent Legba, lajan kò wò/ Azouk Paren Legba ye

Azouke, Godfather Legba Ye/Azouke, Godfather Legba Ye/money cuts through rock, Oh/Azouke, Godfather Legba Ye

3. Bosou Djo Eya (Mayi rhythm)


This performance by the musicians of the Société Jour M’alongé Fôc Nan Point Dieu Devant is under the direction of Célié Estime (songleader) and Ynold Colin (lead drummer). In addition to the three Port-au-Prince Rada drums, this group uses four low-pitched frame drums called bas and an iron idiophone. You can hear also Célié’s rattle and handbell (the sacred aana and klos). This is a typical instrumentation for groups in the active Vodou scene of the Carrefour neighborhood of Port-au-prince.

—David Yih
Pale mal yo l’ap pale m mal/ Zorèy mwòn la m’ape koute yo  
Pale mal yo l’ap pale m mal/Je mwòn la m’ape gade yo  
Pale mal m’ pa mou n isit O/ Papa, mwòn nan mitin yo  

They’re talking me bad/I’m not deaf I can hear them  
They’re talking me bad/I’m not blind I can see them  
I’m not even from around here and  
Daddy, I’m stuck right in the middle of ‘em/Aïbobo  

5. Legba Plante’l Poto/Papa Loko Di Yo Sa  
(Yanvalou Rhythm)  
Master Drummer Coyote, Bon Repos c.1947.  
From Divine Horsemen: Voodoo Gods of Haiti. Lyricist  
Chord L1ST 7341, used with permission.  
The gifted writer and filmmaker Maya Deren  
recorded this music for her 1947–1951 field  
collection made in Bon Repos, a community  
located seven miles north of Port-au-Prince.  
You can hear the voice of the onyenjikon, or chorus  
leader, introducing the songs to Legba, and then  
to Papa Loko, two major lwa of the Rada rite.  
The instrumental ensemble of three drums  
features the late Philcles Rosembère, a.k.a. Coyote,  
hailed as one of the last authentic master drummers  
of the old style. —Gerda Flourant  

Papa Legba plante i poto E/Plante i poto O/  
Tibon Legba plante i poto E/Plante i poto O  
Papa Loko di yo/Atibon Loko di yo sa ye(2x)  
Se ou-menn li soti Jakomel, ou ap bay yo nou-vèl O  
Papa Legba plants his post Ey/Plants his post  

Oh/Tibon Legba plants his post Ey/Plants his post  
Papa Loko tell them/Atibon Loko tell them  
that, Ye (2x)  
You’re the one who came from Jacmel, give them the news Oh

6. Vye Gran O Prete Mwen Chwal La (Zepòl Rhythm)  
Société Soleil Levant, Male Pandye Bon Oungan,  
Port-au-Prince 1993. Recorded by Elizabeth McAlister.  
This is a song for a female lwa called Gran Ezili.  
We sang it at a dance at Papa Mondy’s field  
temple when two men were marrying both Ezili Freda and Ezili Dantò (to marry only one  
would unbalance you). In this part of the service  
you can hear the manman drummer kase, or “break” and slam the drum hard against the  
rhythm. He saw that one of the owners in the  
council was ready to prat lwa, or get possessed  
by Ezili. When Ezili came, she sprinkled Flori­ 
da Water on her grooms, and they all sat while  
a Pré Savannah, or “bush priest,” said wedding  
vows in Latin. After they were married, we all  
ate some delicious pink cake. —Elizabeth McAlister  

Vye Gran O prete mwen chwal-la (3x)  
Chwal-la malad nan do, ou pa wè I pa ka sele?

Old Gran Oh lend me your horse (3x)  
The horse has a bad back, can’t you see it  
can’t be saddled?

7. Simbi Dlo (Yanvalou rhythm)  
Frisner Augustin and La Troupe Makandal,  
Spring Valley, NY, 1984, From The Drums of  
Vodou, White Cliffs Media, Tempe Arizona  
85282, WCM 9338, 1994, used with permission.  
La Troupe Makandal was established in Port-  
au-Prince and emigrated to New York City in  
1981. They come out of the “folkloric” style of  
performance that depicts and stylizes tradition­ 
al culture. The troupe now uses Euro-American  
musicians and instruments (trombone and bass  
guitar) but the Vodou battery remains central.  
Here the drum solos in the interleay with the  
chorus. —Lois Wilcken  

Simbi Dlo yaye Danbala Wèdo yaye (2x)/  
Simbi ou pokon mwen/ Simbi ou pokon mwen la/Simbi Dlo yaye O  
Simbi Dlo yaye Danbala Wèdo yaye (2x)/  
Simbi you don’t yet know me. Simbi you  
don’t yet know me/Simbi Dlo yaye O  

8. Guantanamo Song (Rara Rhythm,  
Southern style)  
Rara Inorab Kapab, Cité Soleil, Port-au- 
This is a Rara band whose members came to live in Port-au-Prince from the southern coastal town of Jeremie. When they arrived in the capital, they found that making a living was still impossible. This song tells about how they decided to sell everything they had and leave Haiti by boat.

Rara is a form of spiritual work in which people parade to natural sacred spots, graveyards and mission during Lent, from Ash Wednesday until Easter. Single-note instruments are played by three or more people, each playing one note to make up a melody in a technique called hocketing. The style you hear here—barbou and voicés, without drums, is typical of Jeremiens Rara.

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Whoa Whoa We ended up at Guantanamo(2x)

We sold our pigs, we sold our goats! To go to Miami.

We ended up at Guantanamo/...Friends' advice is no good Whoa.

9. Konbit Zaka (Djouba Rhythm)


This song is for Kouzin Azaka Mede, the spirit close to farming and country life. When Azaka possesses someone, he dresses in a blue denim outfit and carries a straw djikout, or sack, full of plant medicines. He likes to drink kler noir, with sweet spices in it like cinnamol, cane liquor, with sweet spices in it like cinnamon, cloves and allspice. The rhythm and dance for Couzin Zaka is Djouba, and it is usually played by setting the manman drum on the floor and using both the hands and feet to play. It is danced with the hands on the hips, the feet stepping elegantly. 

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10. Lazerental


Lazerental is an example of the music of kon mizik menw—ensembles prevalent in the south of Haiti that specialize in European court and social dances of the past, ranging from the minuet that contradances and quadrilles to Waltz and polka. These ensembles perform at a type of event called bal lwa (spirit ball) held in honor of the family deities. The instruments are violin and two large tamboorines (with jingles and bells), the dance caller keeps time on an old hoe blade. Lazerental is one of the few pieces that is not for dancing. It takes its name from the serenade music of early Haitian military bands. The spirit ball begins with a performance of premyè ans,

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music that derives from military signal drumming. Then the musicians play three lacerentals and open the dancing with a menwaw, just as eighteenth-century French court balls opened with a minuet.

—David Yih

11. Kadja Kadja Nou Tande (Grennadye Rhythm)


Many Haitians consider the annual Dahomey Festival at Souvenans to be one of the most authentic, elaborate and beautiful rituals of Haitian Vodou. Its uniquely Haitian character is evident in the classification of the deities into two camps: Chasse and Grennadye—designations deriving from the Franco-Haitian military divisions. Each camp has its own cycle of songs. The song we include here is from the Grennadye cycle. Badè and Sobo are brothers, hence "we are two." Like many Vodou songs it includes African words and phrases from the sacred ritual vocabulary known as langèi.

—David Yih

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Kadja Kadja nou tande/Kebyesou manouba E (2x)

Badè nou do/Soou nou de/Kebyesou manouba E

Kadja Kadja we hear/Kebyesou manouba Eh (2x)/Badè we are two/Soou we are two/Kebyesou manouba Eh
12. Tande (Grennadye rhythm)
Listen to the quick cascade of elements that build the texture of this song: the bell alone, intoning the timeline of the grennadye rhythm, Eddy Francois’ powerful and compelling voice singing vocals; the manman drum; rock guitars; chorus; and finally the insistent pulsations of a (synthesized) ason (sacred rattle) —Gage Averill

Hey old brother/Look at the light, I’m telling you/I’m standing in the doorway/It’s been a long time since we played/We’re looking for the light of life/For everybody to go forward/I’m standing at the gate/Open the gate and let us go ahead

Old brother/It’s been a long time since we’ve talked/We’re here/We hear you there/We’re looking for truth/It’s been a long time since we’ve played/Deaf ears refuse to listen/We’re looking for the truth
If there’s light, we have to go forward

Hey, light is what we want/Hey, Hey, give them light/Hey, that’s what we demand/Hey Hey give them light/Hey, light for them, it’s true/Hey Hey give them light/Matisou Legba/Open the door for them/Zilibo Papa/Light the light for them/Blaze a trail please/Agoou se/Open the door for them/Kebiyesou Papa/Light the light for them

In Haiti we have our Vodou/In this country of rituals/Souvenans has good spirits, it’s true/Sokouri Danash O/Lakou Souvenans O/Lakou of the Petwos/Lakou Dahomey/Ton-ton Nwè papa/Talk to them/Talk to the children/Talk with the little ones

(Mereng rhythm)
This song was probably originally a hymn and shows the extent to which Roman Catholic culture has influenced some Vodou repertoires. The last line is in French rather than Haitian Kreyòl. Notice, also, the Western melody and balanced phrases (every phrase is the same length and has the same rhythm). When you hear it, remember the lead drummer, Edris Pierre, who died of tuberculosis in 1991 in his mid-twenties.
—David Yih

Sen Franswa di “priye Dye fò (2x)
Si nou priye avék lafwa/La fòi de Dieu la fòi de l’espérance...”

Saint Francis says “Pray strongly to God. (2x) If you pray with faith/The faith of God the faith of hope...”

14. Chwal Sen Jak Mare Nan Poto (Song for Saint James)
This song shows you how we sing in our religion, in our way of life. Whatever you are doing — going to the market, making food, washing clothes or sheltering peas — you sing. It’s not like singing only for the times you do a big ceremony and the other days you’re “off.” It’s every day, every moment.

This song speaks in metaphors. It’s saying that St. James’ horse (the person who is a spirit medium for St. James) has a problem. The image of being tied to a post represents a problem. St. James is saying, “I’m not asking anybody to help me. Even if you see her in a terrible state, I’m not asking anybody to help because I will help her.” —Mimerose Beaubrun

Chwal Sen Jak mare poto/M’a priye pèson O ba li lavi pou mwen/ (2x)/Men mwen vè nou wè/ Sen Jak O ba li lavi pou mwen

Saint James’ horse is tied to the post/I’m not asking for anybody to set him lose for me (2x)/He may have worms, you might see he has sores on his back/Saint James Oh, set him lose for me

15. Ogou O Wa De Zanj (Song for Ogou)
This song came to my grandmother while Ogou was in her head [while she was possessed]. She was a market woman. Other women in the market were her rivals, and they used to do wang [magic] against her. But she had an angel, a jib. It’s the Jib who wrote this song. Now they sing it in services in Ouranamithé [in Northern Haiti]. The first verse of the song is traditional.
This song is sung in two voices. Ogou and his horse (medium) are talking. The horse is saying to Ogou, “The jib [trickster spirit] says he’ll eat me.” And Ogou says “It’s not true, because there is God, the saints, and the angels.” It’s a conversation between a horse and the master of his
head. A "djali" doesn't have to be a person doing something to you. Whenever you face a problem, it's a "djali" who's "eating" you, your imagination, your intelligence, and that makes you unable to solve your problem. In this song Ogou is assuring his child that since he is there, the djali can't eat him; the problem will be resolved. —Mimose Baatru

Ogou O, wa dè zan/ Lè m sonje pitit an mwen chawl an mwe/ Chawl an mwe parenn Ogou chawl an mwe/ Lè m sonje pitit an mwen chawl an mwe

Ogou O, djab-la di lap manje mwen si se vre/ Pa fout vre/Ogou O djab-la di lap manje mwen si se vre/ Men gen Bondje O gen lèsn-yo/ Diab la di lap manje mwen se pa vre/ Sa pa vre ti moun—yo se pa vre/ Sa se jwèt ti mou—yo sa ka sèlag

Ogou Oh, king of angels/ I miss my child, my horse/ My horse, Godfather Ogou, my horse/ I miss my child, my horse

Ogou Oh, the spirit says he'll eat me, is this true? It's not true/Ogou Oh, the spirit says he'll eat me, is this true? But we have God, Oh we have the saints/ The spirit says he'll eat me, it's not true/ It's not true/ Children, it's not true/ That's a game, children, that's a joke.

16. Pié Aleman Batala Lemosi (Nago Rhythm)

The Badjo mystical compound is based on the Nago rite. It is based on what our Yoruba ancestors brought with them. I recorded this song on January 6th, the day of the three magi. It is the day the kings saw the star of Jesus. But the kings and the star, for us, are actually Nago spirits. Each January 6th we have a feast and a dance. —Gregory (Azouke) Sanon

Pié Aleman Lemosi Batala yey (2x)/ Aleman se nèg difò ou ye
Pié Aleman Lemosi Batala yey (2x)
M'ap rele Pié Aleman Lemosi nèg Feryay/ Ogou n se nèg difò ou ye
Mwen Feryay se nèg difò mwen ye/Pié Aleman Lemosi Ogou O Batala yey...

Pié Aleman Lemosi Batala yey (2x)/ Aleman se yon moun-an
Pié Aleman Lemosi Batala yey (2x)
I'm calling Pié Aleman Lemosi Man of Iron hey/ Ogou Oh you are a man of fire/ I Feryay am a man of fire/ Pié Aleman Lemosi Ogou O Batala yey...

17. Gangan Move Tèt O (Petwo Rhythm)
Rasin Mapou de Azor, Port-au-Prince, 1994. From Rasin Mapou de Azor, Louis Records LR 001317, used with permission.

This music was recorded in the studio by a group of oumis, or chorus members of a Vodou temple. This song, along with other studio recordings like it, are favorites of many Vodou-ists. People play them at home, as they do their housework, and sing along. Listen to the rich, full voice of Azor, the lead singer. —Elizabeth McAlistcr

Gangan move tèt O, m'a rele. Gangan move tèt O (x2)/ Prete m fizi ou la pou m'al tire zwaço/ Prete m fizi ou la pou m'al tire zwaço nan bwa/ M'a pote ke-a bay yo, gangan move tèt O

Lè Azor mouni O, n'ap sonje dantän/ Lè Azor mouni O, n'ap sonje dantän/ Lè Azor, O se pou jou-a

Se lwa k fè m sa anye/ Se lwa k fè m sa wàpi/ Se lwa k fè m sa anmwe
Se lwa mman nan ki fè m mante charite

The healer—priest is mean, Oh I'm calling, the healer—priest is mean/ I can go shoot a bird/ I can shoot a bird so I can shoot a bird in the woods/ I'll bring its tail back to them, the healer—priest is mean

When Azor dies, Oh, you'll miss his good times/ When Azor dies, Oh, you'll miss his good times palmanan/ O on that day

It's the spirits who did this to me Anye/ It's the lwa who did this to me Whosa/ It's the spirits who did this to me, help me/ My mother's lwa made me go beg for charity

18. Brave Guede Banda
(Port-au-Prince Banda Rhythm)
Wawa and his group, From Le Voudou Haitien Vol. 3, Marc Records, Marc 353, used with permission.

This rhythm and song are for Gede, the irreverent, worker-healer spirits who are mediators between life and death. Most manbo and oumis—priestesses and priests—work very closely with their own Gede spirits, whom they call to possess them when clients come to them in crisis. Gede's dance, also called Banda, is centered on the pelvis, which rotates and gyrates. When you hear the drum break, the dancer performs a move called "yas," and slams the pelvis from front to back. Drummers and dancers are locked in close communication for Banda. —Elizabeth McAlistcr

Anmwe mache, prese O kouri non, mache Diab-la nan baryè-a l'ap tann mwen
Help, walk, hurry. Oh run, walk
The spirit is at the gate, he's waiting for me
20.

19a. Rara Ya Sezi (Rara)
Lakou Kanno (Verettes, Artibonite), Easter Sunday, 1993. Recorded by Elizabeth McAlister.

This Rara band calls themselves "Ya Sezi," meaning "They'll be surprised," because their friends and neighbors doubted they could form a band. After they started, they were so good they were adopted as the personal Rara band of Papa Dieupè, a Sanpwèl (secret society) Emperor. Here you can hear them "animating" the Lakou, or compound, for Papa Dieupè on Easter Sunday.

In the mornings, Rara bands tend to sing prayer songs for the Mè from the Vodou repertoire. In the afternoon, the bands become silly and rebellious. The banbou here are playing a melody which has words that go along with it. It says "Groès bagay sa, m wèn pa kapab avè l," which means "The size of that thing, I can't do it with that." It is one of the funny, sexual songs that Rara is known for. - Elizabeth McAlister

19b. Bizango Song for Kalfou (Chika Rhythm)

This song was recorded during a Bizango, or secret society, ritual in Arcachia, a city some forty miles north of Port-au-Prince. The song invokes Mèt Kalfou, the spirit of the crossroads, and the first lwa of the Kongo-Petwo rite that must be saluted at the start of a secret society ritual. The instrumental ensemble consists of one tangu, one kès, and rattles which play in a series of dialogues in cross rhythms with each other and the chorus. - Gerdès Fleurant

Kalfou O Toro bann mwen/Nan pwen kote m rele ou Pou pa antre/Kalfou1 Kalfou2 Kalfou3

Kalfou our protector/Whenever I call on you You always come/Kalfou1 Kalfou2 Kalfou3

20. Djab-la Fouye Twou-li

This song is from a private ceremony in Jacmel. A young ounan named Doudli offered to make a pass chemen for me—a kind of safe conduct or Vodou passport that would provide me with protection and access to Vodou gatherings wherever I might go. I agreed. Making the pass chemen involved holding a small ceremony. After a few songs, a lwa (spirit) arrived, and interviewed me for a few minutes. Doudli then instructed me to eat some of the food offerings, and I tasted a delicious akasan—a cornmeal pudding; the remainder was scattered on the ground outdoors to be consumed by the spirits. The next day I had my pass chemen, an ornate document garnished with several elaborate signatures. - David Yih

Djab-la fouye twou-li li rạngre ladan li/Badesi fouye twou li li rạngre ladan li/(repeat)M' di jou m'angaje m an kôle/jou m'angaje m kôle la/Badesi fouye twou li li rạngre ladan li/

Pito pito se lwa leman e/Pito pito se lwa leman e/M'di ma rele mèt Osan-iy O/Ma rele mèt Fery O/M pa ve djab-la toumante m

The spirit digs his hole he crawls into it/Badesi digs his hole, he goes inside (repeat)/I say, the day I have problems is the day I'm angry/When I have problems I'm angry/Badesi digs his hole, he crawls inside

Pito Pito the spirit of magnet force/Pito Pito the spirit of magnet force/I say I'll call Master Ossangne Oh/1 will call Master Feraille Oh/1 don't want this problem to torment me.

A man possessed by a Gede spirit dances bandé photo by Chantel Regnard
Other recommended recordings of Afro-Haitian religious musics:

- Roots of Haiti Voodoo: Many Volumes on Mini Records, MRSD 1063
- Music of Haiti: Three volumes Recorded by Harold Courlander: Folkways 04403.
- Selected Bibliography:

About the Authors

- Gage Averill, Ph.D. teaches in the Music Department and in the Latin American Studies Program at Wesleyan University. His work has appeared in Ethnomusicology, Latin American Music Review, and in edited volumes.
- Mimerose Beaubrun holds a degree in ethnography from the Faculté d’Ethnologie in Port-au-Prince. She is a founder, songwriter and vocalist for Boukan Eksperyans.
- Maya Deren is the author of *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*, a classic book on Afro-Haitian religion. She also produced a film and an album of the same name. She recorded Track 5 in 1949 using a wire recorder hooked up to a car battery.
- Gregory (Azouke) Sanon is an artist and independent researcher of traditional Haitian music. He was a vocalist and guitarist for the band Sanba-Yo, and is now a founding performer in the group Vodou Le. He recorded Track 16 with a Sony D Bet recorder and stereo mic.

Credits

- Conceived, compiled and produced by Elizabeth McAlister
- Field recordings and liner notes by Gage Averill, Mimerose Beaubrun, Maya Deren, Gerdès Fleurant, Elizabeth McAlister, Gregory (Azouke) Sanon, Lois Wilcken and David Yih
- Associate Producer: Holly Nicolas
- Production Supervised by Anthony Seeger and Matt Walters
- Mastering by Malcolm Addey
- Final Mastering by Joe Gastwirt, Oceanview Digital
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This album is dedicated to Ti-Loune, Toutouba, Tiya, Djimi, and the future singers, dancers, and drummers of Haiti.
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On cassettes, with brief cover notes, from Cook Records:

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On Cassette, with liner notes, from Paredon Records:

**Atis Independan: Ki Sa Pou-N Fe? (What is to be done?)** (1975) Pare01031

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