AMRI to Host Public Event in St. Croix

THE GENERAL PUBLIC IS INVITED to attend a special program presented by the Alton Augustus Adams Music Research Institute (AMRI) at 8:00 p.m. on Friday, March 26, in the Cafetorium of the St. Croix campus of the University of the Virgin Islands. The event will feature a keynote address by the Honorable Rex M. Nettleford, Vice Chancellor of the University of the West Indies and founder of the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica. Following Dr. Nettleford's address, Rockefeller Resident Fellow Dominique Cyrille will be joined by two local scholars, Bradley Christian and Dimitri Copemann, in a panel discussion of quadrille tradition in the Virgin Islands. Mr. Christian will also host the St. Croix Heritage Dancers in a performance-demonstration of quadrille, with music provided by Stanley Jacobs and the Ten Sleepless Knights.

This special program is part of the ongoing public programming that is being presented by the Alton Augustus Adams Music Research Institute in St. Thomas and the Center for Black Music Research in Chicago. The event is free and open to the public and will conclude with an informal reception.

Rex M. Nettleford
Dr. Rex M. Nettleford, Vice Chancellor of The University of the West Indies (UWI), Jamaica, is a well-known Caribbean scholar, lecturer, social and cultural historian, and political analyst. He is also the (continued on 3)

Quelbe is Official Music of the Virgin Islands

ON DECEMBER 17, 2003, the Senate passed a bill by Senator Shawn-Michael Malone to adopt quelbe as the official traditional music of the Virgin Islands. Another bill, also sponsored by Senator Malone, recognized the contributions to quelbe music of Stanley Jacobs and the Ten Sleepless Knights.

A ceremony was held at Government House on Christiansted on January 30, 2004, during which the bill was officially signed into law by Gov. Charles W. Turnbull. The event featured music played by the Claude O. Markoe Quelbe Band, a discussion of quelbe by Dimitri Copemann, and a performance by the St. Croix Heritage Dancers. The act making quelbe the territory's official music charges the Education Department with making quelbe "a component of the instruction on the Virgin Islands and basic Caribbean history."

From left, in front: V.I. Senate President David S. Jones, Senator Shawn-Michael Malone, Governor Charles W. Turnbull.

(continued on 3)
Quelbe Past and Present

A capacity crowd filled the Fort Frederik Courtyard area on a September evening for the St. Croix Rotary clubs’ “Quelbe Past & Present,” a Jumbie Productions show.

At 7 p.m., the conch shell call by Wilfrid “Junie Bomba” Allick announced the beginning of the evening’s event. Willard John, in a costume of the traditional madras, traced the history of quelbe in the Virgin Islands, and nearly every paragraph he spoke was punctuated with a musical selection by Stanley Jacobs and the Ten Sleepless Knights, enhanced by other bandmasters, including Dr. Olaf Hendricks, Dimitri “Pikey” Copemann, and James “Jamesie” Brewster.

Starting with religious African rites, magic, and drums, John traced the history of Virgin Islands music as it picked up portions of bamboula, cariso, calypso, and military fife and drum. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, slaves—mostly women—used the music to communicate in code and discuss issues. The band presented “Clear de Road” as an example. In 1672 and 1733, Danish law forbade African dance and drumming, so slaves incorporated European forms into their music: mazurka, Scottish dance “schottische,” quadrille, and polka.

As time passed, cariso was adapted into instrumental music, which was smoother than its vocal “news-carrying” form. Among the early instruments were the bamboo flute, triangle, and drum. By the late 1890s, flute and at least one guitar had been added, along with tambourine, homemade bass drum, and tailpipe. A musician came forward to demonstrate the sound of an embellished piece of discarded car part—with a bass beat that substituted for the drum. In the 1930s, the banjo was added, in the 1950s and 1960s, alto saxophone and electric guitar—and a merengue beat.

John, well known as a mocko jumbie for twenty-four years, recounted the story of the “LaBega carousel,” which was brought by a St. Croix ice plant from Puerto Rico and which the plant’s workers derided and boycotted. Courtesy of Jamesie, the audience heard the very first workers’ protest song: “I’d rather walk and drink rum all night than ride LaBega’s carousel.”

“Sly Mongoose,” “Guavaberry,” and “Queen Mary”—the No. 1 Caribbean protest song, about the Fireburn’s 16-year-old worker Mary Thomas—were presented by the seasoned tradition bearers as other examples of the important role of music in daily life.

John pointed out the following musicians as especially important to VI music:

- Sylvester “Blinky” McIntosh, who in 1987 became the only Virgin Island musician ever to win the Folk Heritage Award in Washington, D.C. John also cited McIntosh’s band, Blinky and the Roadmasters.
- Stanley Jacobs, who as a boy heard bongo drums next door and was in later years inspired by the people that he met while working at the Herbert Grigg Home.
- James “Jamesie” Brewster, who has played music for sixty-one years.
- Dimitri “Pikey” Copemann, a musician for thirty years who formed the band Native Rhythms in 1992 and did much of the research for John’s historical commentary.

The formal part of the program closed with these words from John: “The best way to preserve culture is to live it.”
Public Event (continued from 1)
founder, artistic director, and principal choreographer of the internationally acclaimed National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica and is regarded as a leading Caribbean authority in the performing arts. Dr. Nettleford has served in key roles with several international organizations dealing with development and intercultural learning, including UNESCO and OAS. He is editor of Caribbean Quarterly and has published a number of books, including The Rastafarians in Kingston Jamaica (with F. R. Augier and M. G. Smith); Mirror, Mirror: Identity, Race and Protest in Jamaica; Manley and the New Jamaica: Roots and Rhythms; Caribbean Cultural Identity; and Dance Jamaica: Self-Definition and Artistic Discovery.
He is the recipient of Jamaica’s Order of Merit, the Institute of Jamaica’s Gold Musgrave Medal, the Living Legend Award from the Black Arts Festival (Atlanta, Georgia), and the Pinnacle Award from the National Coalition on Caribbean Affairs.

The St. Croix Heritage Dancers
The St. Croix Heritage Dancers was founded in 1981 to preserve the cultural dances of the Virgin Islands, a mixture of the cultures left by the seven countries that colonized the Virgin Islands. The troupe, which performs the French and German quadrille, has appeared throughout the Virgin Islands, including at Government House, at hotels and on cruise ships, and on a telecast from the Virgin Islands for Good Morning America. It has performed at the Festival Cultural de La Caribe Guadalupe, in St. Thomas Carnival, and for many organizations both inside and outside the USVI. Mr. Bradley Christian, who is one of the guest panelists on the program, is the president of the St. Croix Heritage Dancers.

AMRI to Host Rockefeller Fellow Colloquium in St. Croix

During the weekend of March 26–27, the Alton Augustus Adams Music Research Institute (AMRI) will host a two-day private colloquium in St. Croix that will allow the 2003–04 Rockefeller Fellows who have been in residence at the AMRI in St. Thomas and at the CBMR in Chicago to interact with internationally renowned scholars who are specialists in the broad field of Afro-Caribbean music and culture. The fellows, Dr. Dominique Cyrille and Dr. Ken Bilby, each will make a formal presentation on their respective research projects to a group of scholars including Judith Bettelheim (Caribbean festival arts; San Francisco State University), Jocelyne Guilbault (music of the Francophone Caribbean islands; University of California, Berkeley), Michael Largey (Caribbean music, especially Haitian classical and religious music; Michigan State University), Rex M. Nettleford (Vice Chancellor, University of the West Indies, and founder of the National Dance Theatre of Jamaica), Gilbert Sprauve (Professor Emeritus of Linguistics, University of the Virgin Islands; St. John), and Cheryl Ryman (Jamaican Jonkonnu traditions; Jamaica). In addition to responding to the work presented by the Rockefeller Fellows, the scholars also will make short presentations in their respective areas of specialization.

Dr. Nettleford will also provide the keynote address for a public event that the AMRI will present on March 26 in the Cafeterium of the St. Croix campus of the University of the Virgin Islands. The keynote address will be followed by a panel discussion on the practice of quadrille in the Virgin Islands featuring local scholars Dimitri Copemann and Bradley Christian, as well as Dominique Cyrille; local performance practice of quadrille will be demonstrated by the St. Croix Heritage Dancers and Stanley Jacobs and Ten Sleepless Knights (see page 1 for additional information on this free event, which is open to the public).

The presentations made by the Rockefeller Fellows and the visiting scholars will be archived at the AMRI in St. Thomas and the CBMR in Chicago, where they will be available for use by researchers.
The Adams Institute Becomes a Reality:
The Opening Ceremony

The Alton Augustus Adams Music Research Institute (AMRI), long a developing idea, attained its physical reality in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, with a site opening ceremony on November 8, 2003.

The originators of the idea of the AMRI—Dr. Samuel Floyd Jr., director emeritus of the Center for Black Music Research at Columbia College Chicago (CBMR), and Alton Adams Jr., son of the honored bandmaster and composer Alton Augustus Adams Sr.—were part of the ceremony, which took place at the Adams family home. Alton Adams Sr.'s children Althea and Enid, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren were part of the day. Sadly, his daughter Gwendolen, who had taken on the task of sorting her father's extensive archives, died earlier in the year at the age of 85.

Dr. Lois Hassell-Habtes was mistress of ceremonies, and Rev. Stephan Kienberger gave the invocation and benediction. Alwyn "Lad" Richards, an elder tradition bearer who has been involved with AMRI since it became a St. Thomas presence, played his saxophone and captured the audience with his witty humor.

The speakers included Dr. Floyd and Mr. Adams, Columbia College Chicago’s Associate Provost Janice Keith Garfield, and CBMR director Rosita M. Sands. St. Thomas residents who spoke were Dr. Doris Baptiste, Associate Chancellor of the St. Thomas campus of the University of the Virgin Islands, Mr. James O’Bryan, Assistant to the Governor for Public Affairs, and Mrs. Ruth Moolenaar, a historian and longtime friend of the Adams family.

Also in attendance were special guests Mrs. Betty Mahoney, director of the VI. Council on the Arts; Bradley Christian, chairman of the board of the VI. Cultural Heritage Institute; Myron Jackson, director of the VI. Office of Historic Preservation; and several members of the AMRI Advisory Board.

The ceremony was followed by a reception that included tours of the Institute’s premises and presentations of the extensive archives of Alton Adams Sr., which have been scanned onto CDs and are available on computer for use by researchers at AMRI.

Later in the afternoon, the first CBMR/AMRI Rockefeller Fellow in residence, Dr. Dominique Cyrille, lectured at the campus of the University of the Virgin Islands on quadrille and French contredanse. The planned one-hour event evolved into two hours, as the audience participated in a lively discussion, particularly about the madras patterns that are associated with the dance.

The Past: How the AMRI Idea Began

About thirty years ago, Dr. Floyd encountered references in his research to a Negro Navy bandmaster in the early twentieth century who was associated with the Virgin Islands. That cannot be, he thought; the U.S. Navy had no Negro officers so early. He called the public library in St. Thomas and spoke to June A. V. Lindqvist, longtime curator of the Von Scholten Collection of Caribbean and Virgin Islands research materials, and posed the question: “Can that be?” Miss Lindqvist said, “Just a moment,” returned to the telephone, and said, “Here’s the phone number of Mr. Alton Adams Sr. himself. Call him.”

And thus began the knowledge, friendships, and professional associations that have culminated in the Alton Augustus Adams Music Research Institute as a branch of CBMR. Dr. Floyd and Mr. Adams talked that day, and for many years after that, Dr. Floyd frequently visited St. Thomas. After Mr. Adams’ death in 1987, the communication continued between Dr. Floyd and Alton Adams Jr., centering on the son’s desire to organize and preserve his father’s vast archive of personal and professional materials. The idea grew in the minds of both men and has resulted in the Site Opening Ceremony of AMRI on November 8, 2003, at the Adams family homestead in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas.
The homestead was built in 1799 and purchased by Alton Adams Sr. in 1933, according to information published by historian Edith deJongh Woods. Its construction is plaster over rubble masonry, and on the first floor, the walls are thirty inches thick. The original detached kitchen will become a conference room for the Institute and business now housed in the building.

The Future: What Is in Store
During its first year, the AMRI offices and resource center will be open four days a week, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., staffed by part-time employees: site manager Martin Lamkin, resource center manager Shirley Lincoln, and office manager Gloria Yarrow.

The site contains a library of black music reference materials, focusing on the circum-Caribbean; a reading room with a powerful computer terminal; a reception office area; and a separate office for the Rockefeller fellows who will be in residence for several months at a time.

Dr. Cyrille concludes the St. Thomas part of her fellowship in mid-January, and Dr. Kenneth Bilby, also a CBMR/AMRI Rockefeller Fellow, will take up residence for the next several months. Dr. Bilby’s specialty is Junkanoo, or Jonkonnu, and he will lecture in May 2004.

Workshops for residents who were interested in becoming interviewers and preservers of the words and music of tradition bearers have taken place on both St. Croix and St. Thomas. A “Summit of Tradition Bearers” culminated both workshops with public events—programs of the words and music of tradition bearers, held at the university on St. Croix and at the Marriott Frenchman’s Reef Hotel on St. Thomas. Plaques in AMRI’s reception area identify the tradition bearers who were recognized at the summits. The site will support workshop graduates in their continuing interview projects and will make these materials available at the site. It will also support workshops in the future, including sessions on preservation methods and for teacher professional development.

Audio and video recordings of music-related events in the Virgin Islands, old programs and photographs, and donations of music-related materials will be sought, collected, and preserved in AMRI’s Resource Center. It is hoped that future researchers will provide residents and the larger audience with important histories of music in the Virgin Islands and in the larger Caribbean, starting from the nucleus of the archives of Alton Augustus Adams Sr., bandmaster, composer, and musician.

Cariso Chronicles: The Original Music

by Monique Clendinen Watson

In tribute to Leona Brady Watson, who preserved the artform of cariso singing into the twenty-first century.

Eliza walks up the long winding path to the old red and white well to draw water. From the corner of her eye, she sees two women across the road, one sitting, one standing under the shade of the old tipit tree. She hears a laugh, an ear splitting cackle, coming from the woman sitting on the ground, with her empty bucket between her knees. Her long bony friend with her hand on her hips, bends over to whisper something and points in her direction. Eliza recognizes the two as Iona, de woman wha’ people se been wid her Charlo’ las’ week, she and her buckteeth friend, Cheryl.

“Nuh!” she thinks to herself and sucks her teeth. “Not today! Me’n puttin’ up wid non a dem deh today!” Turning her back to the pair, Eliza goes to the well and begins to draw water. The cackler has started to chant, and while the words to her song tell of an old unwashed queen, (continued on 6)
Eliza knows they were meant for her.

"... roll de drum an' leh we dance fo' duty Victoria!"

Angry at yet another assault, she decides not to dignify them with a glance, but instead remembers a song her mother has taught her about a woman who was showing off in borrowed clothes. As she passes the taunting pair, she strikes up her tune, and a hush falls over the two, who of course are wearing the only clothes they have ever owned, their mistress's hand me downs.

"... tek care meh petticoat tear, meh petticoat wid de insertion lace, tek care meh petticoat tear!"

Eliza smiles silently as she makes her way back home with her bucket of water, down the hill and around the bend; another small victory won.

Such could have been a long-ago encounter on St. Croix between women who used the art of cariso to express their feelings for each other in a particular situation. This was one use of cariso music, an improvised song form and vocal style developed in the Virgin Islands during the slave era. According to Dimitri Copemann, St. Croix musician and music historian, cariso was derived from West African singing styles, balladry, and ritual chants and songs.

The women of St. Croix used music to communicate with each other as they worked the sugarcane fields of the island, shopped at the vegetable and fish markets, or visited with each other in the towns and villages. Some learned the art of cariso, the sending of messages in song, from their African ancestors who came to the Caribbean as slaves. These messages told of history, current events, and the personal lives of the people. Copemann writes: "Cariso was a means for slaves to communicate with each other secretly, by singing out what they wanted to say. It can be described as a topical folk song performed mostly by women to the accompaniment of one or two drums" (n.d.).

According to Leona Watson, who learned the art from her elders in the northwestern part of St. Croix in the first half of the twentieth century, singers needed an alert mind and a quick tongue to sing cariso. Much of it was improvised from day to day to "throw words" or send messages to one's friends and enemies alike. Although melodies and drum rhythms carried on from generation to generation, new verses were improvised on the spot, using double entendre, by taking the original words of any song and giving them a whole new meaning based on the situation at hand.

Having a strong and melodic voice, Leona Watson kept the artform alive by committing a repertoire of songs to memory and teaching them to her children, grandchildren, and others who performed with her in cultural celebrations across the islands. She is most famous for keeping alive the songs associated with Virgin Islands cultural holidays and history. Her renditions enhanced local celebrations of Emancipation Day on July 3; Fireburn' or Contract Day on October 1; and Liberty or Bull and Bread Day on November 1.

In a 1995 interview, Leona Watson said that cariso is important because "it preserves most of our history in song when we couldn't write it down." Cariso music embodies many aspects of St. Croix culture. Listening to a song is an experience of storytelling, linguistic history, music, and historical people and events.

One of the most famous cariso songs is "Clear de Road," which commemorates the emancipation of the Danish West Indian slaves in 1848. It tells the story of Buddhoe, the free black general who led and controlled the revolt; Governor Peter von Scholten, the Danish governor general, who much to the consternation of his peers, declared that "all unfree in the Danish West Indies are now free"; and others who played a role in that bloodless liberation. Because of the cultural preservation work of Leona Watson, the refrain, or ansa, is known throughout the islands. Schoolchildren celebrating the historic July 3rd event join in the singing:

Clear de road, ah-yo clear de road, clear de road leh de slave dem pass, we goin' for ah-we freedom.

Cariso music is more than song, it is a cultural experience that relies on environment, circumstance, and spontaneity for its life. It was inextricably linked to dance, drums, and messages and was a music made for the rural
openness of villages and the communal life of small towns. It was outdoor music not something one would hear in a parlor. It required a certain attitude of its singers—proud, defiant, and determined to survive. Cariso was not always welcome in polite Virgin Islands society. An adept singer could bring shame and embarrassment to another whose intimate life details could be shared with one and all. It was also used to insult and bring mêlée.

Historical reference to cariso music is found in a January 1872 Harper's New Monthly Magazine article, where a travel writer described what he saw on a trip to the Virgin Islands, including St. Croix. In a very detailed description of the people, their habits, folkways, and environs, he writes: "Many of their dances were brought by their ancestors from Africa and transmitted through generations of descendants with scarcely any change in figures or motion and are always accompanied by the voice."

Famous Virgin Islands musician and music historian Wilbur "Bill" LaMotta (1975) wrote: The slaves on local estates conducted festive rituals called the "drumhead." It stemmed from their tribal practices. To the beat of the bamboula drums, a storyteller would evoke a chant, improvising lyrics based on a given topic. The crowd would participate, depending on how catchy the melody line was and the music generated. Later someone else would introduce another subject or "drumhead." This continued until the most popular "drumhead" idea caught fire. These songs spread throughout the islands and were thus preserved.

A link can be made between LaMotta's references to the bamboula drums and an article written by renowned St. Croix teacher and cultural historian Charles H. Emanuel circa 1961. Emanuel describes the dances on St. Thomas brought "by African slaves over 200 years ago" and writes: "judged by the songs that invariably accompanied the dancing... As developed in the Virgin Islands, the bamboula functioned as the eyes and ears of society. As a matter of fact, it served as the local tabloid and scandal sheet all rolled into one."

Although Virgin Islands historian J. Antonio Jarvis (1971) of St. Thomas wrote in one of his books that the Virgin Islands and Virgin Islanders had no music of their own, cariso was sung as recorder of history and as a social disciplinarian on the neighboring island of St. Croix. It could have been that Jarvis, from the urbane St. Thomas, had never heard the music, or it could be that he just considered it part of the song and dance of the bamboula ritual, without recognizing that the lyrical chants had unique meaning. He did write about the bamboula, in poetry and essay, and described the dances still performed on St. Thomas in the early to mid-twentieth century. In his poem "Bamboula Dance," he writes:

I still can feel, when drumbeats call,
the pulsing blood new rhythms take;
As garments like refinements fall
Unconscious longings spring awake!

(Jarvis 1935)

It would seem that you could not witness the dancing without hearing the songs. But Virgin Islanders moving from rural St. Croix to commercial St. Thomas could have left the songs behind, because they were sung in the tongue of the elder generation. In fact, although Virgin Islanders from both St. Thomas and St. Croix are familiar with the cariso and quelbe melodies as the music that accompanies quadrille dance, few know the words to those songs, which tell the stories of both big events and small.

While cultural references to the bamboula as a dance are found in articles and reminiscences about St. Thomas or by St. Thomians, references and reminiscences about cariso music are found mostly on St. Croix and among Crucians. Could it be that bamboula and cariso, or "goombay" as it was called in some references, were one and the same? Could it be that the dance form survived longer on St. Thomas, whereas the song form survived primarily on St. Croix? Could it be that it developed from different West African tribal practices that are different only in slight variation? And as quelbe evolved on both islands into quadrille music and the now popular calypso form, what were the different influences on each of (continued on 8)
Cariso Chronicles (continued from 7)

the islands that make the music we enjoy today both similar and distinct? These are questions that have to be answered by further research and observation.

Copemann (n.d.) believes that this is possible, especially in light of the migration of people between commercial St. Thomas and agrarian St. Croix during the first half of the twentieth century. Like most surviving cultural forms by people of African descent brought to the New World, cariso and bamboula were tempered by secrecy, prohibitions and outright bans, synthesis with other cultures, social acceptability, and fading memories.

What survives today is as unique as the descendants of the people brought to the Virgin Islands, the wider Caribbean, and the Americas as a whole. In cariso, we have songs sung in the tongue of the originators, some as old as two hundred years, with intriguing vocal inflections and drum rhythm patterns. In quelbe, we have a fusion of African and European music, a mixture of bamboula rhythms, cariso melodies, military fife and drum music, jigs, and various quadrilles. And today’s Virgin Islands music has been influenced over the decades by Latin music from Puerto Rico, calypso from Trinidad, reggae from Jamaica, driving rhythms from Antigua and St. Kitts, zouk from Dominica and St. Lucia, and even rhythm and blues, soul and now rap from the United States. Cariso represents the music in its elemental form: the drum, the voice, and the story it has to tell.

References


Dominica (continued from 12)

culture of Dominica, the performances of quadrille and bèlè are mandatory in the competitions. Both genres have been traditionally practiced in Capuchin, a small community in Northeastern Dominica. The Capuchin Cultural Group is known nationwide for its beautiful rendition of the quadrille and has often won the competitions in this category. This year, while I was carrying out fieldwork in Dominica, I had an opportunity to meet with Gilles Caban Jno Baptiste on Gala Day. Gilles is 42 years old and the leader of the Capuchin cultural group. She was only four years old when the first heritage celebrations were organized. During the course of our conversation, she shared her experience of the folk dances of Dominica.

DC: Gilles, one of the reasons I wanted to talk with you tonight is that I saw your quadrille. I mean, I saw the kids dance in Cabrits, and I wanted to know if you know where your quadrille comes from and also how it came to be the way it is right now.

GJB: What I can share is that my father, his ascendants came from Martinique after the eruption of Mount Pele in 1902. My mother’s father came from Guadeloupe. They worked on estates in Capuchin. And because of the people they have there, there are some of the European dances that they danced. Black people were not really allowed to participate, but they looked on. So, persons are getting involved because, although you are a master, you have children and they are now Dominicans. They take on a different style of talking to the people who work with them. They start intermingling. And questions were asked. And the quadrille we
dance now, it came as [the result of] what they were told not as the result of what they were seeing.

DC: What they were told . . . by the parents?
GJB: By the parents.

DC: So the parents were white or black?
GJB: Not white parents. The parents were black but the information came from the children of whites. But what happened is that every generation has a different style of dancing. It is like . . . the way I dance quadrille, the stepping of my son when he reaches my age will slightly differ because they have rap, you understand? So, it has changed slightly. The steps remain basically, but because we are Caribbean people, you know, we go with the rhythm.

DC: So the basic steps come from . . .?
GJB: Yes, Europe.

DC: Now, according to you, why are there differences between the quadrille you dance and the one people do in Petite Savanne, for example?
GJB: Because they came from different parts of Europe. They [Europeans] came down, and if they settled in Capuchin, they danced that particular quadrille. I am of the opinion that is why we have so many different quadrilles. Because of the persons who came down. But we had a lot of French settlers, that is why we have so many French names in Dominica. So they came with what they knew, and they passed it on. It is like my husband is from Engleston. If I were to leave Capuchin and go to Engleston, I would teach them the quadrille that I know.

DC: In your area did people do bèlè in the past?
GJB: Yes! As a matter of facts, my great-grand-aunts, they told me. Also, when I was my little boy's age like three years and so, my father would take me where they used to dance bèlè, and I used to dance. But you know when you grow older, your mother becomes more . . . what have you. So, she doesn't allow you. So, I guess it was in my genes, that's why I came to it. But there is a place in Capuchin we call the Junction, and I remember as a child they used to have a lot of bèlè.

DC: So, you grew up dancing bèlè and you learned the quadrille because your mother thought it would be better?
GJB: Yes.

DC: And what did your father think of that?
GJB: Well, nothing, my father is a dancer.

DC: Of bèlè or quadrille?
GJB: He used to sing for bèlè, and he danced quadrille.

DC: So you did both in your area.
GJB: Yes, we did both. I remember on our feast days in our home, my mother would put everything in our bedroom, and then we had the hall, and then the musicians would come. And there was a sofa that the musicians would sit on, and then they played all day and all night until the wee hours of the morning. And we had people from Penville and Vieille Case coming.

DC: So you are telling me that when you were young, you had dances held at your parents' house that were not like the stage performances, like right now?
GJB: No. Everybody came, they just played, and everybody came to dance.

DC: And do they still do that in your area?
GJB: No, because they have strayed from that. They started building little places, that way it became commercial. So they moved away from the houses, because when you come to the house, then you don't pay. But you would buy some coffee to drink, bring some bakes. But since it became more commercial, then they stayed, and then they removed the village feast from weekday to Sundays and, you know. . . In Penville it was the same thing, because Penville and Capuchin, they more or less have the same style of culture, the way they do things.

DC: Are there older people in your area who still talk about the way they used to dance in their time?
GJB: Well, there is one in particular. He is Mr. Carret, Harrold Carret. (continued on 10)
Dominica (continued from 9)

He is one of our famous dancers. He is almost ninety, if he is not ninety as yet, but he is still there. He is one of those when we have our feast days he would come.

DC: What does he say of the way you dance?

GJB: It is not exactly like the way they danced it. Because he feels that there was a little more grace. I get the feeling that it is not [that] he is not satisfied with the way we are dancing, but it is just that we've put it for a stage. And they never had a stage. It was always ballroom for them. So when you had the jacket and you had to dance quadrille all night, you had to dance in a way that you would not be too hot. But, when you take the package and you put it on a stage the mix is slightly different.

[DC: Here, I must add that, although the majority of Dominicans enthusiastically approve of the adaptation of their traditional dance and music genres for the stage, some feel restrained at times by the strict rules of staged competition. As an example, this year, because it was the twenty-fifth anniversary of Dominica's independence, the annual competitions were replaced by a festival. This means that the judges evaluating the performances were not simply grading them in order to select the best in each category, but they were also trying to include as many cultural groups as possible in the national celebrations on Independence Day. Moreover, all the storytelling styles, dances, and music genres that compose Dominica's cultural mosaic had to be showcased for this special event. Many cultural groups, therefore, could only contribute one piece to the gala. In addition, in order to limit the overall duration of the gala, each cultural group was asked to keep their performance under fifteen minutes. This time limit seemed a strong disadvantage to quadrille performers, because the set is comprised of four dances. Because other group leaders with whom I spoke during my visit to Dominica had discussed this time limit, I also wanted to have Gilles' view on the issue.]

DC: And how about this timing? The fifteen minutes. Do you think, too, that it takes off some of the grace and changes more of the style?

GJB: Yes, it takes off some of the grace, it takes off some of the grace. Especially in the last figure where you have the round dance. It does not enable you to do what you want. I remember when Daryl [Phillip] did his research, that was one of the reasons he recommended twenty minutes. So that there can still be some level of decency. Because it's a graceful dance. It is a grand dance. Even when we go to leader's meeting, when we talk about maybe we should leave out quadrille for one year the accordionists then will tell you that if they are not going to play quadrille they are not going to play at all. Because that's what everybody looks forward to play; the quadrille. It gives them some . . . you know?

DC: So, quadrille has a higher status among all the dances? How come?

GJB: Because you need your couples to feel family, that's how I see it. To be family.

DC: Family?

GJB: Yes, you're more interactive. When you select a partner to dance in quadrille, it's like you have to know the person like the back of your hand. So if you cannot do that, you get hitches in quadrille. You have to keep eye contact, you know like . . . any movement. The eye contact will tell you what the next move is that the person is going to make, and you will be able to move along with it. Unlike heel-and-toe or mazouk, you hold and the partner just carries you. So, I believe that because you have to be so into each other, that is why everybody feels it has to be higher standard.

Well, from what we heard, the mistresses of the house, when they did that particular dance, they would elegantly dress. It is like they would use any other thing to dance the other dances, but when you're going to do that dance they would put on an extra something.

DC: So, Gilles, what makes grace? What makes decency?

GJB: Hmm . . . the movements of your body, . . . the expression.
DC: What would be not graceful?
GJB: Not graceful would mean that you dance like dancehall.
DC: You mean like wining and gyrating?
GJB: Hmm . . . well, depends on how you wine. Being vulgar, in your wine. Because you can wine and not [be] vulgar. And maybe to do the dance as if you are dancing a reggae or something. Because the lady you’re dancing with, the gentlemen has to make her feel she is a lady. So you need to be graceful, you cannot just take her hands and take her along.
DC: And what about the decency?
GJB: Decency in the sense that when people look at you, there is a calmness they see you dance with, and somebody who is not decent does not have that kind of composure when they are dancing. Decency in that sense.
DC: Are there lots of people in your area who can dance the quadrille, even if they are not members of the cultural group?
GJB: Plenty of them, and there are some children. I must say that the parents graduated from it, because they danced as children, [but] now they are taking a backseat and their children continue to dance. Some of them, they play the instruments and their grandparents did it. There is a little girl who danced the bèlè for us; her grandfather was one of the best bèlè dancers.
DC: So they continue doing it in the families?
GJB: Yes, yes. Our drummer, the guy who plays the accordion . . . he has how many generations who played both bèlè and tamboubass for quadrille.
DC: What does he play in bèlè, the drum also?
GJB: Yes.
DC: But then, when he plays tamboubass, doesn’t it feel like bèlè?
GJB: No, no, no. It’s a different feel. But it is drums. I don’t know, I must say that they have it in their genes because even when we teach it, it’s like the people who have a family history with those things, it’s like they are quicker to catch up than those who are not . . . who don’t have a family background in it.

DC: When it comes to children, how is it received? I mean, you are having children dancing the quadrille, right? You said earlier that it was ballroom dances, it was more adult people dancing it. So, how do people react? What do people say about it in general? Do the musicians agree with that, do the dancers agree with that? The elders in your community, what do they think in general?
GJB: Well, it is well received with the children because, although it is a ballroom dance, all of them recognize that if the children don’t dance—because most of them are bedridden and some of them are passed on to the life already—then it’s going to go extinct. So they really applaud the children, you know. Learning to dance and learning to play the instruments also. They really applaud it and encourage them. Because they really feel it is a discipline. So my responsibility and the rest of the adults’ is to encourage them: “Yes, you can do it, and maybe you can even do it better than so and so.” It gives them the jive to go and to do it. I really want them to take it on. It’s like, if I were to stop now for whatever given reason, all my efforts and the sacrifices I have made over the years would be in vain if none of them, you know, would want to check it out.
DC: Do people think that the competition during the national celebrations have changed the quadrille a lot?
GJB: I don’t believe that people feel that they changed the quadrille a lot. I think people feel that theirs is the best, but I don’t know. I have learned, and I have come to understand, because of all the research that Daryl has done with us, [that] we need to respect each other’s quadrille and accept it the way it is. We just need to respect because when the people came to Capuchin they taught us what they knew, and when they went to Petite Savanne they taught Petite Savanne what they knew. So, why should you change Petite Savanne to accommodate Capuchin? It means that what is in Petite Savanne is going to die, and we want to keep all of them alive.
Dance Competition, Tradition, and Change in the Commonwealth of Dominica

BY DR. DOMINIQUE CYRILLE

IN THE COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA, people celebrate their Creole heritage every year during the month of October through a series of state-sponsored cultural events and competitions that are part of the “Heritage Festival.” The festival, which features traditional storytelling, dances, and music making, ends with a special gala that takes place on Independence Day, November 3. Only the best performers in each category can participate in the final show. In order to prepare for this event, communities nationwide organize themselves in cultural groups where adults and children learn about their own traditional art forms, as well as about dances, music, and stories from other communities against which they compete during the heritage celebrations. Although competition can be rather intense between rival cultural groups, these yearly celebrations foster strong feelings of connectedness among Dominicans. “Dominica is an island of enclaves,” historian Lennox Honychurch explained. In past centuries, the rugged relief of this volcanic island forced the European settlers to dwell in narrow valleys separated by extensive cliffs, which, until recently, made communication nearly impossible. Thus, having little contact with one another, each community fostered its own versions of quadrille, bèlè, storytelling styles, and all of the art forms that now comprise the traditional repertoires of Dominica.

By mid-twentieth century, many of these stories, dance, and music styles seemed on the brink of disappearance. Because they had emerged during the colonial era, many Dominicans viewed them as backward and inappropriate, so cultural activists Mable “Cissie” Caudeiron and Premier Edward Oliver LeBlanc began to work toward a reversal of the then-widespread negative view in which Dominicans held their culture. In an effort to promote the Creole language, the music, the dance, and the traditional dress, the two Creole nationalists organized stage performances and competitions showcasing the traditional repertoires. Hence, in 1965, as Dominica was taking its first steps toward national sovereignty, the first heritage celebrations were organized on National Day.

As symbols of the considerable contributions from the African and European forefathers to the Creole (continued on 8)