

## MUSIC AND FOLKLORE IN THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

The United States Virgin Islands boast an eclectic, many-faceted folk culture spawned by the diverse origins of the population and the many influences that arrived through international commerce. This multiplicity is evident in the music of the Islands, especially when viewed from a historical perspective. African and European elements blended during the course of the eighteenth century. Influences from the North American continent were added in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, new forms were brought by travelers and migrant workers from other Caribbean islands, as well as by Virgin Islanders returning from seasonal work in Cuba.

## COLONIZATION

The U.S. Virgin Islands—St Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John—constitute the northwestern tip of the Lesser Antilles island chain. They were a Danish colony for about 200 years, until 1917, when the United States assumed their administration after purchasing them for \$25 million. In spite of the small sizes of the islands (84, 28, and 20 square miles, respectively), they were sought for their strategic potential: through the purchase, the United States prevented any other military power from gaining a base there for possible control of the Panama Canal.

During the early eighteenth century, the Danish West India-Guinea Company divided the islands into plantations that were sold to entrepreneurs from various European countries. The majority attempted to raise sugar cane, but this crop proved to be economically important only in St. Croix. Dutch planters predominated during the eighteenth century; as a result Dutch Creole came to be the language spoken by everyone. During the early nineteenth century, people from the British Caribbean islands, as well as from Ireland and Scotland, immigrated in such large numbers that English Creole soon supplanted the Dutch Creole.

Since the deep natural harbor of St. Thomas—and the surrounding town of Charlotte Amalie—became an important hub of the slave trade, the planters of the Virgin Islands easily acquired slaves from diverse regions of West Africa. The exact origins of the slaves have not been exhaustively documented. The Moravian missionaries, however, began their work in the Islands during the 1730s; they eventually had influence over a relatively large part of the slave population and carefully recorded the converts' origins. In the Moravian records, the ethnic names that appear most frequently are from the following four areas: (1) the region of the Mande-speaking Mandinga, Bambara, and Kanga peoples who live in present-day Senegal, Gambia, and Mali, (2) the region of the Akan, Ewe, and Ga peoples in present-day Ghana, Togo, and Benin, (3) the southern part of Nigeria, home of the Ibo, Calabar, and Mokko peoples; and (4) the region of the Bacongo people around the lower Congo River and of the Loango people along the Atlantic coast north of the Congo estuary

## EMANCIPATION AND ECONOMIC DECLINE

The emancipation of the slaves in 1848 meant the loss of cheap labor for plantation owners. In addition, the sugar economy suffered from the reduction in harvest yield resulting from soil depletion as well as from stiff European competition based on a new technology for making sugar from the sugar beet. The economy of the Virgin Islands declined steadily during the nineteenth century, and the vast majority of the population was left poverty-stricken.

After emancipation, most plantation owners in St. Thomas and St. John distributed their land holdings to their former slaves and left the Islands. The former slaves who stayed on in the rural areas made a scanty living from fishing and agriculture. Charlotte Amalie became a market not only for local cattle breeders, farmers, and fishermen, but also for those from the British Virgin Islands.

In St. Croix, the plantations were not turned over to the former slaves as readily. After emancipation, the population of freed slaves was kept in feudal conditions and many workers left the Island. Nevertheless, some efforts were made to revitalize plantation agriculture in St. Croix. Workers were commissioned on a large scale from Barbados during the 1860s, and later from India and Puerto Rico. These workers came on renewable one-year contracts. Living conditions remained wretched however, and in 1878 a riot swept the western part of St. Croix. The uprising is remembered in local history as the "Fireburn," because angry laborers burned much of the town of Frederiksted, many surrounding plantations, and the central sugar factory. At the time of the Fireburn, half the laborers were from the British Caribbean islands.

In St. Thomas, the harbor began losing importance after 1801 when the slave trade was outlawed in the Danish colonies. Nevertheless, as steamships gradually replaced sailing vessels, Charlotte Amalie was still important as a coaling station. However steamship design eventually improved enough that ships could travel from European to North American ports without refueling in the Caribbean. Thus, St. Thomas also lost its importance as a bunkering station by the end of the nineteenth-century. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Islands were severely depopulated. Many residents left for good; others became seasonal workers in the Dominican Republic. St. Thomas, meanwhile, had become a refuge for even poorer, French-speaking immigrants from St. Barts. They, too, either fished or farmed and were able to sell both fish and produce in Charlotte Amalie.

## UNITED STATES PURCHASE AND DEVELOPMENT

Upon the transfer of the Islands from Danish to American rule on March 31, 1917, administration was placed under the jurisdiction of the United States Department of the Navy. Economically, though, the Islands fared no better under the Navy's administration. In fact, when President Hoover visited in 1931, he was shocked by the poverty he saw and called the Islands "a poorhouse." In the same year, the administration of the Islands was assumed by the Department of the Interior and in 1936 the Islanders received United States citizenship through the Organic Act. In 1954 the Islands gained the status of an unincorporated territory, and since 1969 they have elected their own governor.

A fledgling tourist industry began to improve the Islands' economy in the late 1940s, but the real transformation occurred in the 1950s when America's post-war conflict with Cuba made Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands newly attractive to vacationing statesiders. Today, tourism draws one and a half million tourists a year who visit the Virgin Islands for their picturesque beaches, tropical trade winds, and duty-free shopping. To boost the economy further, an oil refinery and an aluminum processing plant were built in St. Croix in the early 1960s.

The demand for workers to fill jobs in hotels, restaurants, domestic services, and the industries of St. Croix has attracted immigrants from other Caribbean islands. Of the entire U. S. Virgin Islands population of 96,569 (1980 census), less than half are native-born.

## THE SCRATCH BAND

Most folklore traditions gradually were forgotten as the economy shifted from agriculture to tourism. Not only did immigrants pour in from other islands, but Virgin Islanders began emigrating to the United States continent, or at least spending more time there, pursuing education and economic opportunities unavailable at home. Perhaps in reaction to the extensive outside influences and their suppressive effect on the folk arts, the traditional “scratch band” or “fungi band” began to regain popularity in the early 1970s.

A scratch band is made up of an instrument playing the melody and/or a singer, along with various string and percussion instruments. The melody was usually played on the violin in the nineteenth century, and on accordion or flute—often a wooden one with six holes—in the first half of the twentieth century. The string instruments usually were guitars but since the 1930s other strings have been added—banjo-mandolin or banjo-ukulele, cuatro, ukulele, and/or mandolin—sometimes all of these 2 at one time. The percussion instruments were guïro, triangle, and tambourine. In addition, the bands often included a “pipe” on in St. Thomas and St. John, a washtub bass.

The guïro, onomatopoeically called the “whichero,” is also known as “squash” as it is made of a dried, hollow gourd with ridges etched into its surface. The guïro is played by scraping the edges with a hair pick or with segments of bicycle spokes fastened into a small wooden block

The triangle, also called “steel,” is a piece of iron rod bent into a triangle about eight inches on each side. With another piece of the same rod, the musician strikes the steel while he lets the triangle hang on a short loop of string which he has slipped over his left thumb. The typical playing technique is to strike, from the inside of the triangle, its base and one side while the fingers of the left hand close and open around the top angle. In this manner muted and resonant beats are produced and add the dimension of differing timbres to the basic rhythm.

The pipe is a piece of tubing from a water pipe or car muffler four to five feet long and one and a half inches in diameter. Blowing into one of the raw ends while letting the lips vibrate, the musician produces a very low tone as well as another one that is higher by an octave and a fifth. The exact pitches do not matter as long as they are relatively low. Although, strictly speaking, the pipe is a wind instrument its main function is that of a rhythm instrument, as well as that of giving the band a fuller sound.

Today's scratch bands are not all comprised of the same instruments as the scratch bands of earlier times. They have undergone changes to satisfy modern tastes and to compensate for instruments or players no longer available. Only the banjo, the guïro, and the triangle are still used in the same form as they were before the middle of the century. A pipe is rarely heard; usually a conga drum substitutes. The high and low pitches of the pipe are imitated with strokes near the edge and in the center of the conga membrane. The tambourine is not found at all anymore, and the guitars are either electric or amplified. The use of the electric bass guitar today is most likely due to the influence of popular music, as is the use of the drum set and a substitution of cowbell for triangle by at least one band in St. Thomas. The alto saxophone usually functions as lead instrument nowadays —this is a sign of the strong impact of American dance bands and big bands. The flute, metal or wooden, is used less frequently as a lead instrument and the accordion has practically disappeared.

## DANCE MUSIC

All of the scratch band repertoire is dance music. It includes instrumental pieces of European and North American origin, songs of local provenance called “quelbey,” and songs from other Caribbean islands. The songs are usually sung by one band member if they are sung at all (and not just played by the lead instruments). Traditionally, it was considered in poor taste to sing these songs in polite society at formal gatherings such as balls and parties. Their texts usually contained hidden meanings and sexual innuendo, and many of them ridiculed individuals for their words or actions. A few songs, however, immortalize political event such as a boycott or workers' revolt. On the other hand, some dance tunes originally known as instrumental pieces have had text added. Such vocal renditions of old tunes had their place during moonlit nights or at other times when no accordion, flute, or violin player may have been available to carry the melody.

Older Virgin Islanders name the following dances as once part of any ball; quadrille, lancers, two step, seven step, waltz, schottische, jig, polka, and mazurka. This is due to the fact that during the nineteenth century, the people of the Virgin Islands gained considerably more exposure and access to outside goods and culture. Thus, Islanders became familiar with the European dances that were fashionable in ballrooms throughout the western world. With the economic decline of the Virgin Islands towards the end of the nineteenth century, though, contact between Islanders and the entire outside world was gravely reduced and the Islands were no longer as subject to foreign influences as they had been before. Island fashions did not change readily; therefore a number of dance fads remained prevalent much longer in the Virgin Islands than they did elsewhere.

## QUADRILLE

While most of the old social dances are not popular today, the quadrille is still performed occasionally in St. Croix. The quadrille is danced by any even number of couples standing in two lines facing each other or in a large oval. A quadrille set usually comprises five or six parts or “figures,” each danced to a different tune. The progression of each figure is determined by a floor-master who calls out the names of the different

steps while the band plays. Since the floor-master does not inform the musicians of his ideas,—he may even let himself be inspired on the spur of the moment—he and the lead instrumentalist need to be alert to each other.

The lead musician begins the tune without a signal to the other players, who fall in shortly once they recognize the beat. While the musicians play the piece over and over again, the melody is varied at each repetition. The floor master forcefully calls the steps, carefully fitting them into the timing of the musical phrases. When he calls a step in a somewhat different tone of voice shortly before the final cadence of the tune, the musicians know it is time to end the figure, and the lead musician may give the melody an unusual twist just before it ends.

## MASQUERADES

Another occasion for bands to play either string or drum music was during masquerading or “massing,” the Island term. During every major holiday, groups of people in costume, each with its own musicians (or “set of music” as the Islanders say), performed in the streets of the towns. In rural areas, the groups roamed from one plantation to the other on the way to town. They stopped by houses along the way, played and danced for those inside, and received gifts of food or coins.

More than any other occasion, masquerading provided the poorer classes of society with the opportunity to show all their musical, oral, and theatrical gifts. Every type of folk music could be heard, fife and drum ensembles most of all. The drums usually included a barrel drum and a snare drum. The barrel drum was called either “boom boom” because of its low sound, or simply “keg” because it was made from ordinary kegs used as containers to transport goods. Snare drums were made by the islanders themselves from a cooking pot or a bucket; this practice probably gave rise to the Islanders' term “kettle drum.” (The term is not to be confused with the kettle drums used for western art music.)

In St. Croix, the groups which best combined theater, oratory, music, and dance were those performing the “masquerade jig” and the David and Goliath play. Both were shown occasionally as evening entertainment to an audience that paid an entrance fee of a few cents. Both probably came to the Island with the laborers from the British West Indies. David and Goliath was, in essence only, an enactment of the story in the Bible; very often, the actors made witty comments on matters far removed from the original subject of the play. The masquerade jig was a series of monologues (“speeches”) to which every performer added a jig, similar to the Irish jig.

## BAMBOULA AND CARISO

Two other types of music and dance always included in holiday celebrations were “bamboula” in St. Thomas and “cariso” in St. Croix; both were also performed at other times. Each seems to have evolved on its particular island since the time of slavery. More than any other music in the Virgin Islands, these forms show very distinct African characteristics; those evident in bamboula can be traced to the wider area around the Congo River.

Bamboula existed in St. Thomas until the early part of the twentieth century and included drumming, dancing, and singing. The song text focused on local news and scandals. The songs sometimes took the form of four-line verses with refrain, sometimes that of a litany with each line divided between a solo singer and a chorus. The singing was accompanied by two musicians playing on one barrel drum lying on the ground. One drummer sat astride the drum and used both hands and at least one heel for playing. The other player sat by the side of the drum and played on its body with two “catta” sticks.

Whereas both men and women joined freely in bamboula singing, cariso was sung exclusively by groups of women in call and response style while a man played a barrel drum. Women who sang the solo part well were respectfully called “cariso queens.” The last queen died in the 1940s, taking the tradition of her art to her grave. Today cariso is sung only by a few elderly ladies during a festivity or upon request. These ladies were once the younger relatives or neighbors of former cariso queens. Today the songs are performed without a chorus. Such renditions are detached from the original cultural context of cariso and the singing is probably somewhat different from that of the queens.

Frequently there was also a more formal setting for cariso, that of an evening entertainment; each member of the audience paid a small entrance fee. The songs were probably performed in a style that combined declaiming and singing. This assumption is supported by the nature of both melody contour and rhythm of Crucian (1. Of St. Croix, or from St. Croix.) speech.

## CONCLUSION

Most of the examples of folklore traditions included in this collection are valuable relics of the past. Much of the old-time music is remembered only by the elderly who enjoyed it in their youth. A few musicians—the most notable ones are featured in this collection—have made an effort to save at least scratch band music from oblivion. As a result, a great number of Virgin Islanders still enjoy listening and dancing to the old tunes. —Margot Lieth-Philipp, Ph.D.

## NOTES ON THE RECORDINGS

### 1. MATTY GRU

*Joe Parris Hot Shots, St. Croix, 7/27/79*

The lyrics of this song were often sung as part of the King George play, however this purely instrumental performance is a typical example of how scratch bands treat songs when playing for dancing within polite society.

### 2. SLY MONGOOSE

*Sylvester McIntosh with Joe Parris Hot Shots, St. Croix, 7/27/79*

This song, well known throughout the Caribbean, is not really about the mongoose. In fact, the animal and its character are used to allude to sexual liaisons between the master of the house and the cook or between the mistress and a worker.

*Sly Mongoose, all the dog them know your name,  
Oh, yes, sly mongoose, all the dog them know your name.  
You went into the mistress' kitchen,  
Take out one of she fattest chicken,  
Put it into your waistcoat pocket  
Sly mongoose.*

### **3. ZOOP ZOOP ZOOP**

*Maude Andreas, St. Croix. 6/27/79; followed by Jamesy and the Happy Seven, St. John 5/4/79*

Songmakers in the Virgin Islands may freely use parts of pre-existing tunes or texts in order to create new songs. Maude Andreas remembers "Zoop Zoop Zoop" as a children's song and probably a circle game. Parts of her version, comprised mostly of nonsense syllables perhaps based on an African language, can also be heard in the rendition by Jamesy and the Happy Seven. The composition of the latter version is usually attributed to Alexander Michael (1892-1957), a Frederiksted songster known best by his nickname, Ciple.

*When Daddy make he step, Daddy big foot pull he down,  
When Daddy drink he rum, Daddy big stone pull he down,  
Daddy the barber, he went to shave he papa,  
Daddy the barber, he went to find he mama,  
Daddy the barber, he went to shave he papa...(lyrics repeat)  
He say lay a lay a lay, mama, lay a lay a lay,  
Poppy tell me mommy say get them already,  
Tell me mommy say wallow,  
Tillie was a girl so dearie, wallow, wallow, wallow.  
Mama lay a lay a lay a lay a (Zoop Zoop Zoop).*

### **4. MAZURKA**

*Jamesy and the Happy Seven, St. Croix, 7/27/79*

The mazurka, originally a Polish folk dance, became a social round dance in the United States around the middle of the nineteenth century. From the mainland, the dance came to the Virgin Islands, where it remained a favorite until around 1950.

### **5. CIGAR WIN THE RACE**

*Sylvester McIntosh St. Croix 11/17/85 followed by Jamesy and the Happy Seven, St. Croix, 11/27/79*

Soon after the racetrack opened at Estate Mannings Bay on Easter Monday in 1904, a famous race matched the horses Cigar Black and Dutchman. A local fortune teller used bones to predict the outcome of the race. When he picked the wrong horse, people had something to sing about. Here, Sylvester McIntosh's lyrics are juxtaposed with an instrumental variation played at a dance.

*Well, who no hear that Cigar win the race last year?  
Ah, who no hear that Cigar win the race?  
Well, who ain't know that Cigar win the race last year?  
And the Dutchman gone a Robe's Hill (The name of a sugar plantation or estate), bush, he  
gone go hide.  
It's a shame about me brother, Andrew James.  
It's a shame to call he name.  
When they call on he to match Beaupickram with the Black,  
Will he match he with a dead man bone? (Repeat)*

## **6. MR. MOORE**

*Jamesy and the Happy Seven, St. John. 5/4/79*

Songs in the old tradition are often modified today by scratch band musicians. James Brewster, who sings this song, re-created this version after an incident that occurred while the band was playing at a party.

*He say Mr. Moore, your jackass in me yard, (I going home!)  
And I want you take him out.  
Mr. Moore, your jackass in me yard,  
And I want you get him out.  
And when I went to chase you jackass,  
He left foot stick me in me a,-a,-ass....*

## **7. POLKA MAZURKA**

*Jamesy and the Happy Seven, St. John. 5/4/79*

The polka mazurka was developed in the United States as a round dance combining the steps of the polka with those of the mazurka. This dance remained popular in the Virgin Islands until the middle of the twentieth century.

## **8. QUADRILLE**

*Narrative: Adam Petersen, St. Croix, 1977: followed by Jamesy and the Happy Seven  
with Curtis E Williams, Floormaster, St. Croix, 7/27/79*

Adam Petersen (1900-1978) was one of the greatest Crucian floormasters. His narrative is followed by a "mahop," a dance that is frequently used as the Fourth Figure in a set of quadrille. It is characterized by the advancing of each gentleman to the next lady upon the floormaster's command "Contrary." At the time the band was recorded, quadrille dances were a weekly event in Frederiksted.

*Each piece of music have the beat And the beat—you, the floormaster have to put it in the  
dancers. You cannot have a quadrille if you don't have a floormaster. You must have a  
floormaster since it's the quadrille dance. Oh, the floormaster do the calling, give the  
orders to the dancers. They have to do as he say. The livelier the floormaster is, the more*

*livelier the dancers is. It gives the musician a good spirit when he has a lively floormaster, and also the dancers. So a very bright floormaster carries a very good name.*

*Company, Balancez, Tournez, Ladies Change Away, Ladies Alone, Clap Your Hands, Stamp Your Feet, Tournez, Contrary, Tournez, Clap Your Hands, Stamp Your Feet Tournez, Contrary, Tournez....*

## **9. TWENTY CENTS FOR THE PAN COVER**

*Whim Handicapped Band, St. Croix, 7/21/79*

The Whim Handicapped Band is a very special scratch band whose members live in the Whim Garden Home for the Aged near Frederiksted. This group provides a good example of instrumentation used in traditional-style playing, prior to 1960. Although the band includes a conga drum and a No. 10 electric bass, it features the flute instead of the saxophone and includes the pipe, quite in keeping with "old time" custom.

## **10. CARBAY MAN**

*Impromptu group of musicians, St. Croix, 7/21/79*

The song alludes to a woman who threw her boyfriend out of her house and then took him back to help pay the rent. The word carbay, sometimes spelled carbé, means goat; it's also used to indicate stupidity or foolishness.

*Me no want the man again,  
Me no want this carbay man,  
Me no want this man at me door mouth. (3 Threshold; entrance)  
But when I drive he, let he go,  
I gon' treat he, let he go,  
I gon' treat he like the worst of rova dog.*

## **11. ALL GONE IN THE LAGOON MOUTH**

*Ten Sleepless Knights. St. Croix, 7/21/79*

This is an instrumental version of a song that tells the story of a man named Coleban who was almost swept out to sea while attempting to cross a flooded lagoon. The flutist, Stanley Jacobs, learned to make and play flutes from Wilford Pedro (flutist in The Whim Handicapped Band) in an effort to continue an important tradition in an authentic manner.

## **12 SPANISH RETREAT**

*Sylvester McIntosh St. Croix, 1/17/85*

Sylvester McIntosh learned this guitar piece by ear from his father Ivan McIntosh (1903-1974), who in turn may have learned it from someone who played it from sheet music.

## **13. BAA, BAA, HVIDE LAM**

*Eliso Pedro, St. Croix, 4/5/79*

Elisa Pedro was born in 1900—"Danish time"—as Virgin Islanders refer to the period prior to the Islands' transfer to the United States. When Ms. Pedro was a schoolgirl, Danish was a mandatory subject; during her lessons she learned this song. It's comparable to the English "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep."

#### 14. CLEAR THE ROAD

*Marie Richards, St. Croix, 1957*

This cariso expresses the hardships of slavery and remembers the events that led to the proclamation of freedom on July 3, 1848. Marie Richards (1890-1960), the performer of this song, was born on the island of St. Maarten and came to St. Croix as a young woman. Although she was not a cariso singer she sings this cariso song as she remembers it. The song demonstrates what must have been a characteristic element of cariso and clearly shows the African influence on this song style: the rhythm of the melody "floats" relatively freely while a strict meter is kept on the drum; only shortly before the end of the phrases do the accents of the singing and the drum beats coincide. This recording was made in 1957 by Raymond and Hazel Higdon, owners of the first radio station in St. Croix.

*Clear the rood, all you clear the road,  
Clear the road, let the slave them pass  
We a go for a-we(4. All we; our) freedom.  
Hardship in the morning, suffering at night  
No-one ever help us; it is only Father Ryan.  
They bring we ya from Africa, that we bornin' land. (5. "Borning" land; native land)  
Bring we ya in slavery, in the land of Santa Cruz. (6. Santa Cruz is an old name for St. Croix.)*

*(Chorus)*

*We no want no bloodshed, not a drop of bloodshed,  
What we want is freedom, oh, give we a-we freedom.  
Come let all we go to town, there we meet the General,  
General name is Bordeaux, he gon' give we freedom  
(Chorus)  
Governor von Scholten, that Governor von Scholten,  
Stretch he power 'til it crack, and he write down a-we freedom.*

*(Chorus)*

#### 15. QUEEN MARY

*Schoolgirls, St. Croix, May, 1977*

"Queen Mary" was one of three young women who led the Great Fireburn uprising in 1878, when field workers revolted against an abysmally low wage scale. Of all songs in the Virgin Islands, this one is probably the best known. For the native population, the song is an expression of pride in the heroes whose strength overcame oppression.

*Queen Mary, oh where you gon' go burn?*  
*Queen Mary oh where you gon' go burn?*  
*Don't ask me nothin' at all. Just give me the match and oil.*  
*Bassin (7. Bassin was the old French name for Christiansted; it referred to the harbor.)*  
*Jailhouse, ah there the money there.*  
*Don't ask me nothin' at all. Just give me the match and oil.*  
*Bassin Jailhouse, ah there the money there.*  
*Queen Mary, oh where you gon' go burn?*  
*Queen Mary, oh where you gon' go burn?*  
*Don't ask me nothin' at all. Just give me the match and trash. (8. Remains of the sugar*  
*cane stalk after the juice has been ground out.)*  
*Bassin Jailhouse, ah there the money there.*  
*Don't ask me nothin' at all. Just give me the match and trash.*  
*Bassin Jailhouse, ah there the money there.*  
*We gon' burn Bassin come down,*  
*And when we reach the factory, (9. Sugar factory) we'll burn am level down.*

## 16. PAYNE DEAD

*Ethel McIntosh, St. Croix 1/30/80*

This song is the remorseless guilty plea of a woman who felt she had a right to murder a man because he was her own husband. Since the song text refers to the court as Grand Session, a term used in the British West Indies, it is possible that the murderess was an immigrant laborer. The song was probably made in the 1850s when Danish Major Jacob Heitmann van Gyllich (1795-1868) was police master and fire chief of Frederiksted. He officiated at the Police Court at the time of the incident.

*There's a crying in the market, they say Payne dead,*  
*Payne dead, Payne dead, Payne dead.*  
*There's a crying in the market, they say Payne dead,*  
*Mama, me no kill nobody man than me own man.*  
*And I wish Grand Session was tomorrow,*  
*I wish Grand Session was tomorrow,*  
*I say me wish Grand Session was tomorrow,*  
*Let me get to faja Major Gyllich independent!*

## 17. WHITE FROCK

*Ethel McIntosh, St. Croix, 2/14/80*

"White Frock" is a cariso song that may have arisen out of a musical battle between cariso queens. In such a situation, a cariso singer might well boast about herself while deriding her opponent. The creator of "White Frock" is bragging about having had a silk wedding dress and servants at her wedding.

*I buy one white frock for married in,*

*Me no married in a shirtin.'*  
*I want white silk frock for married in,*  
*Me no married in a shirtin.'*  
*The frock what you married in,*  
*Them a call you back for alter.*  
*If you shame for bring 'em back,*  
*You must send 'em with you daughter.*  
*And when I had married,*  
*I had servant all around me.*  
*I never left me man a house*  
*To go peep in a pot a kitchen.*

#### **18. LAZZY BARRY**

*Maude Andreas, St. Croix, 8/10/79*

Cariso songs frequently mocked individuals for unusual or bad behavior. Lazy Barry became a target of ridicule when he sent for a mail order bride instead of marrying a local girl. Barry was a farmer who owned an estate near Christiansted until his death in 1960.

*Oh, Lazy Barry, man I got something for tell you.*  
*Oh, I got something to tell you, man,*  
*What the nigger them a talk you.*  
*Some say you stupid, mam, and some say you foolish,*  
*To sent in America for get a darling for suit you....*

#### **19. BOSS BORINE**

*Ethel McIntosh, vocal. Maude Andreas, drum, St. Croix, 2/16/80*

"Boss Borine" focuses on a field laborer named Borine who had been teased by co-workers because of a chigger foot affliction. Some time later he became supervisor of a convict work crew and was thus in charge of some of the same people who had taunted him. When his erstwhile persecutors tried to placate him by calling him "Boss," he took revenge with a rattan whip.

*When you been a your massa estate,*  
*You come call me Boy Borine.*  
*Now me come in a from the estate,*  
*You da call me Boss Borine.*  
*Me say Boy, me no boss for you.*  
*Work up your row, work up your row,*  
*Boy me no boss for you,*  
*Rattan a rass a your boss. (10. A rattan (whip) on your ass is your boss.)*

#### **20. ME MOTHER HAD TELL ME**

*Ethel McIntosh, vocal. Maude Andreas, drum, 2/16/80*

"Me Mother Had Tell Me" advises St. Croix maidens not to marry the Barbadian laborers who came to St. Croix during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Since it was difficult for the natives to earn a living, they resented the Barbadians not only for their ability to make money, but also because of the sheer number of them. Although Barbadian husbands seemed likely to be good providers, they were also reputed to beat their wives.

*Me mother had tell me not to marry to no Bobajan.* (11 Barbadian.)  
*Don't you left none of Santa Cruz' blossom* (12. Saint Croix's maidens)  
*Go marry to no Bobajan.*  
*Bobajan, Bobojan, man, them Bajan are the worst kind.*  
*They gon' feed you well and clothe you well,*  
*But macrone* (13 Cripple.) *you for your lifetime.*  
*What me go do with them?*  
*Ah, what me go do with them?*  
*Bajan are ten for cent and two for brata,* (14 Free something extra, as in a baker's dozen.)  
*What me go do with them so?*  
*(What) me go do with them?*  
*Me no know what for do with them,*  
*Bajan are ten for cent and two for brata,*  
*What me go do with them?*

## 21. ASK MR. JACKSON

*Evelyn Gordon, St. Croix, 8/10/79*

David Hamilton Jackson (1884-1949) was a teacher who was very active in helping to organize the field laborers. In 1915, after workers had raised money for his passage, he went to Denmark to plead the workers' case before the Danish king. He returned with authorization to found the first newspaper free of government control. Later he became an attorney and a judge. Today he is respected as a hero in the history of the Virgin Islands, although some controversy surrounded his activities and inspired this cariso song in which the singer, addressing the general public (gel), makes ironic remarks about Jackson's educational background.

*Oh, gel, ask Mr. Jackson, gel a which part he get he learnin'.*  
*He say "Ah na ya for garlin and a pelican ya for sprat* (15 This expression may be a proverb or may be ridiculing Jackson for putting on airs.)  
*Me father was a minister, me grandfather was a teacher,*  
*Me mother went to college, so I bound to get me learnin."*  
*Oh, le' he 'lone, oh, all you, le' he 'lone.*  
*Then you better let Mr Jackson 'lone,*  
*All you no been know he.*  
*I talkin' to a Crucian, gel,*  
*And not no `nother nation.*  
*Jackson wouldn't land in St. Thomas,*  
*Wa they 'fraid they been paralyze he.*

*(D. Hamilton Jackson.)  
Oh, le' he 'lone, oh, all you, le' he 'lone.  
Then you better let D. Hamilton Jackson 'lone,  
All you no been know he.*

## **22. LABEGA CAROUSEL**

*James Brewster with Joe Parris Hot Shots, St. Croix, 7/28/79*

This song bears witness to the labor unrest of the early part of this century. A man named Carl LaBega, who owned a carousel in Christiansted, became infamous when he voiced his opinion that the laborers were not worthy of a pay raise. The song voices the intention of boycotting the carousel.

*I rather walk and drink rum whole night,  
Before me go ride on LaBega Carousel  
I rather walk, man, and drink rum whole night,  
Before me go ride on LaBega Carousel.  
You no hear what LaBega say  
"The people no worth more than fifteen cent a day"  
You no hear what LaBega say man,  
"The people no worth more than half a cent a day"  
I am walking, I am looking I am begging,  
Before me go ride on LaBega Carousel  
I am walking, I am looking, I am begging  
Before me go ride on LaBega Carou...Whoopla!*

## **23. CRAB AND GARLIN**

*Ethel McIntosh, St. Croix, 7/26/79*

Before radio and television became widespread in the Virgin Islands, both adults and children enjoyed storytelling. Many stories, such as the one about the crab and the garlin (a long-necked wading bird related to the egret), explained how an animal might have come to look or behave a certain way. Virgin Islands tales often include short songs; in this respect, as well as in their content they comply with West African traditions.

*You notice a crab have a dent in his back? And the garlin neck how it stretch? How a garlin neck stretch? Welt they say 'tis a crab stretch a garlin neck. Because crab was in he hole, and mosquito was always being in crab hole. So the garlin does eat mosquito. So garlin went in crab hale—shove in he head—to catch the mosquito. And crab there down in he hole, and he hold garlin neck and stretch it. Garlin had to pull, and that's what make garlin neck stretch. So, when garlin meet crab came out now to feed, garlin came dawn and he put a dent in he back—break he back—for stretching he neck. Garlin say: Crab, le me 'lone, do buddy crab.  
Me no come here for nothing do buddy crab.  
He say garlin gon' broke you back, do buddy crab.  
Crab, let me 'lone*

## 24. ONE BRIGHT SUMMER MORNING

*Beatrice Mopsey Johnson, St. Croix, 1980*

A Tea Meeting is an opportunity to demonstrate the valued tradition of speechmaking in Afro-Caribbean cultures. During the Meeting, which may last from early evening until dawn, eloquent discourses on pseudo-scholarly topics alternate with hymns and nineteenth century sentimental parlor songs and ballads. The singer was born on the island of Nevis (then a British colony) and came to St. Croix with her family in 1920.

*One bright summer morning as I was walking,  
One bright summer morning, so early one morn,  
Whom shall I met up, my dear darling damsel,  
She was wrapped up in flannel most colder than clay.  
Oh come dearest mother, come and sit down besides me,  
Oh come dearest mother, come and pity my crime,  
My sad heart is aching, my poor heart is breaking,  
I am deep in salvation, and surely must die.  
Oh send hr the young man that first introduced me,  
Oh send for the doctor although it is late,  
For if he would've told me the tricks he would've sold me,  
For I am a poor girl cut down in my prime.  
Six jolly young sailor; come and carry my coffin,  
Six jolly young sailor; come and walk by my side.  
And a bunch of primroses to put on my coffin,  
For the people will smell me when I'm passing along.  
For my name is Loretta, but don't call my name.*

## 25. MASQUERADERS: "THE DEVIL" AND "THE WILD INDIANS"

*Narrative: Eulalie Rivera, 1/28.80; Music: Frank Charles, Eldred "Edgie" Christian Jr., Stanley Jacobs, Sylvester McIntosh, Alexander Williams, St. Croix, 7/21/79*

Eulalie Rivera recalls her experience of meeting the masquerader known as "The Devil" in the early 1920s when she was a child in a Frederiksted orphanage. Her account is followed by fife and drum music typical of the "Wild Indian" masquerading troop.

*They had the Devil! And he would beat the drum and he would dressed up, like a Devil—like what we imagine a devil to be. Oh gosh and he was a fierce creature! He used to run after children and if the children bothered him! And it was such a sight. I remember one day the Devil was coming down the street and I was hanging over the fence in Ebenezer Orphanage. And in my haste to get away my foot caught between the posts. And that man came with the lash up his teeth grinning—he had two horns on his head; his face was painted black and red and—and I was so scared, that I froze to death! And he hit me one lash! I never forget that day—and I thought I was—had pass out. And that was masquerading!*

## 26. KING GEORGE PLAY

*Maude Andreas, Arthur "Doctor" Brown, Frank Charles, Hubert Edney, Charles Haynes, Ethel McIntosh, St. Croix, 1979-1980*

When people recall the masquerade jig today, they often speak or sing bits of text derived from medieval British folk dramas or mummers' plays. The West Indian tradition of acting these plays combines oratory, music, and dancing. Performers or even audience members may interrupt to recite a rhyme or riddle. Set speeches are often interspersed with improvised ones; each speech is followed by a call for music and vigorous dancing.

*I have danced masquerade jig too! (yeah?) I was first showboy (Yes, Ha Ha.  
Oooh! During the Christmas!) I was the first one opened the play Y'know? (Yes)  
Y'see? Well my speech was this: (First showboy!):  
Good evening good evening to ladies and gentlemen all!  
My master, King George, send me tonight to pay you all a visit.  
The visit is this and the visit is that.  
Who can't find the window, find the door.  
Who can't find the door, find the roofer.  
Who can't find the roofer; find the keyhole.  
Who can't find the keyhole, rumble.  
Who can't rumble, tumble.  
For my master, King George, will come out with the wood and brass sword,  
And put ladies and gentlemen to the King broad road! Root them!  
That's when we used to pay the money! That's when we used to pay the money!  
That's the first showboy!  
Whenever I hear a long-tail hog get a short-tail pig,  
You hardly could dance a common showboy jig!  
Ha ha heeee! After he done say the speech, say "Music!" and then the music start.  
That's when they jigging!  
Heavy boy heavy boy heavy all over... (repeats)  
Jig, boy, jig, boy, do your master work!  
Heavy boy, heavy boy, heavy all over.  
The music start; and you dancing you know?  
Yeah, and they dancing they jigging!  
Fella, fella, stop! Yeah.  
I were young and in my prime,  
I had the girl them so many time!  
But since I come so old and dim,  
I can't do a damn thing.  
In Amsterdam there are many,  
Holland wanted much.  
Found in every timber,  
Not in any church.  
Found in every mountain,  
Not in any tree.  
Tell me what that can be.*

*Then they say "Music!" then the music start again— dum dum dum dum dum  
 DUM—And they jig and they jig and they jig. Then they say "Fiddler, fiddler, stop!"—  
 again!  
 He got some lady to the head of the town.  
 They wearing their straw hat without any crown!  
 The jig came out and sing that. He say,  
 Think you say that John can't eat—  
 When I meet he last night in me guinea com (16. Guinea corn is sorghum.) piece! (17.  
 Field. [A cane piece is a sugar cane field.])  
 He had bag on he head and a bundle in he hand.  
 I run the nigger man 'til he drop down dead!  
 Music! Music!  
 Heavy boy, heavy boy, heavy all aver...(repeats)  
 Fiddler, fiddler, stop!  
 Yeah, stop the music. You know he make that sign. And then he say another  
 speech. THEN!  
 Yonder corner I saw a great light.  
 Say Silk and Satin began to fight.  
 Say Silk appear and Satin your bow.  
 Boy, if you gimme sweet nickel,  
 I'll dash you through the door!  
 Then you call "Music!" again.  
 Music! Heavy boy, heavy boy, heavy all over... (repeats)  
 Come boy, come boy, come boy come boy!*

## **27. JIG**

*Cold Goose Gang, St. Thomas, 7/23/79*

The jig danced to this music is a couple dance in a formal social setting; it sometimes concludes a quadrille set. It is not to be confused with the solo dance of the masquerade jig.

## **28. SEVEN STEP**

*Cold Goose Gang, St. Thomas, 7/23/79*

This social dance is derived from a German folk dance called "Siebensprung" and was introduced into the ballroom setting during the nineteenth century. Like other round dances, it probably came to the Virgin Islands via the United States.

## **29. FRENCH POLKA**

*Cold Goose Gang, St. Thomas, 5/10/79*

This recording is a very rare example of a scratch band with an accordion as the lead instrument. Magnus "Mungo" Niles, the accordion player, learned this polka from his father. His father's band was a favorite at weddings and christenings of the French-speaking immigrants.

### 30. TWAY SHE SHE

*Gerda Benjamin, St. Thomas, February, 1980*

This song in English Creole alludes to two sisters who lived with the same man. In its proper context, it might have been sung in alternation between a solo singer and a chorus, the solo singer beginning each phrase and the chorus answering with "shoo wa wa." It is very likely that this is a bamboula song, since Ms. Benjamin's mother was Miss Clara, the "Queen of Bamboula" (1887-1963). In this recording, Ms. Benjamin slaps her hands on the arms of her chair to simulate the catta stick rhythm.

### 31. FOUR WHITE HORSES ON A RAINBOW

*Schoolgirls, St. Thomas, 6/8/82*

This hand-clapping game was performed by eight- and nine-year-old girls during recess at school.

*Four white horses on a rainbow,  
Eh, eh, eh, up tomorrow,  
Up tomorrow is a rainy day,  
Come on down to the shadow play,  
Shadow play is a ripe banana, Eh, eh, eh, up tomorrow....*

**PERFORMERS** (Cut numbers appear in parentheses)

**Lorenzo Acosta:** conga (9)

**Maude Andreas:** guïro (9) vocal (3, 18), drum (19, 20, 26)

**Gerda Benjamin:** vocal (30)

**Linda Brewly:** vocal (31)

**James N. Brewster:** vocal (3, 6, 22), guitar (3,4,5,6,7,8)

**Arthur "Doctor" Brown:** rhymes (26)

**Toya Carty:** vocal (31)

**Frank Charles:** banjo-ukulele (9,1) drum (26), riddle, narrative (26)

**Arthur Christian:** alto saxophone (27, 28)

**Eldred "Edgie" Christian Jr.:** triangle (25)

**Herbert Christian:** guïro (27, 28)

**Anselmo Clarke:** guïro (3,4,5,6,7, 8)

**Dmitri J. Copeman:** alto saxophone (1,2,22)

**Leopold Derricks:** guitar (9)

**Hubert Edney:** triangle (9), narrative (26)

**Hansina Edwards:** vocal (31)

**Vernon Emanuel:** guitar (27, 28)

**Emile Fergus:** triangle (1,2,22)

**Cecil A. George Sr.:** drums (27, 28, 29)

**Lambert George:** cuatro (27 28,29)

**Evelyn Gordon:** vocal (21)

**Milton E. Gordon:** upright electric bass (4,5,8)

**Bushner Harley:** guïro (29)  
**Callixtus Harrison:** triangle (3, 4, 5,6,7 8)  
 Charles Haynes: guitar (9), rhymes, narrative (26)  
**Paul Horiford:** electric bass guitar (3,6,7)  
**Stanley Jacobs:** flute (11,15,25)  
**Beatrice Mapsey Johnson:** vocal (24)  
**George Johnson:** triangle (10)  
**Walter Johnson:** conga (11)  
**Cyprian King:** banjo-ukulele (11)  
**Alexander Lang:** banjo-ukulele (1,2,22)  
**Lydia Lewis:** vocal (31)  
**Ethel McIntosh:** vocal (16,17 19,20, 26), story (23)  
**Sylvester McIntosh:** vocal (2,5,10), electric bass guitar (10), acoustic guitar (12), bass drum (25)  
**Maxwell Maduro:** alto saxophone (27 28)  
**James Miller:** flute (10)  
**Leroy Miller:** guitar (10)  
**Joseph "Paddy" Moore:** tail pipe bass (9, 10)  
**Nathaniel "Soda" Moore:** banjo-ukulele (3,4, 5,6,7, 8)  
**Magnus "Mungo" Niles:** guitar (27, 28), accordion (29)  
**Tanya Niles:** vocal (31)  
**Viggo Niles:** upright electric bass (27, 28,29)  
**Percival Nurse:** saxophone (2728)  
**Joseph Parris:** electric guitar (1,2,22)  
**Elisa Pedro:** vocal (13)  
**Wilford Pedro:** flute (9)  
**Adam Petersen:** narrative (8)  
**James I. Petersen:** conga (1, 2, 22)  
**Vernon Phillips:** guïro (1, 2, 22)  
**Jean Ray:** cowbell (27 28)  
**Marie Richards:** vocal, acoustic guitar (14)  
**Eulalie Rivera:** narrative (25)  
**Luis Saldana:** triangle (11)  
**Ira A. Samuel:** alto saxophone (1, 2, 22)  
**Granville Simmonds:** electric bass guitar (1, 2, 22)  
**Stanford Simmonds:** guitar (1)  
**Benneth Smith:** electric bass guitar (11)  
**Michaela Swanston:** vocal (31)  
**Lloyd Thomas:** conga (3, 4, 5 6,7 8, 10)  
**Christian "Te" Thompson:** conga (15)  
**Alexander Williams:** guïro (10,11, 25)  
**Ohaldo Williams:** alto saxophone (3,4, 5,6,7, 8)  
**Curtis Williams:** floormaster (8)  
**Charmaine Viera:** vocal (31)  
**The Cold Goose Gang** (27, 28, 29) was recorded at Bluebeard's Castle Hotel, St. Thomas, May 10,1979, and at Krigger's Flower, Garden, St. Thomas, July 23, 1979.

**Jamesy and the Happy Seven** (3,4, 5,6,7,8), were recorded at Fred's Bar in Cruz Bay, St. John, May 4,1979 and in St. Gerald's Hall, Frederiksted, St. Croix, July 27 1979.

**Joe Parris Hot Shots** (1,2,22) were recorded at the Smithfield Inn, Frederiksted, St. Croix, July 27 1979.

**The Ten Sleepless Knights** (11) were, recorded at a birthday party in St. Croix on, July 21, 1979.

**The Whim Handicap Band** (9) was recorded at St. Gerald's Hall, Frederiksted, St. Croix, July 21,1979. 12

Special thanks to Leroy Arnold Sr, Robert Baron, Irvn "Brownie" Brown, Kevin Burke, Tim Burnham, Stuart Cody, Vincent Harris, Arnold Highfield, Ph. D., Tony Kahn, Jill Knowles, the Kusterers, June Lindqvist, Camille "Derby" Macedon Jr., Marianne Magras, Janice Maidman, Kirk McKend, Ethel McIntosh, Mary McIntosh, Sylvester McIntosh, Leonard Monsanto, Louise Ambler Osborn, Pell Osborn, Donald Palmer, Melvin Petrus, Marjorie Prager, the Rinzlers, Dan Sheehy, Jae Sonsini, Blythe Sterling, Paul Sullivan, Lauchland Tonge, Christina Trimble, and Gladys Venzen.

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Produced in association with the Virgin Islands Family Institute and Training Center, Inc.

This recording was made possible with grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, Francis Goelet, and the Virgin Islands Council on the Arts. Additional support from Bose Corporation, Cardow Inc., Dimension Sound, Frederiksted Hotel, Maho Bay Camps, National Car Rental of St. Croix, Michael Paiewonsky, A. H. Wise Gift shops; Rotary Club of St. Thomas Foundation, Saint Patrick's Church of Frederiksted, Villa Morales Restaurant, and Virgin Island Seaplane Shuttle. Traditional Music and Folklore of St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John

- 1 Matty Gru (2:15)
- 2 Sly Mongoose (1:58)
- 3 Zoop Zoop Zoop (2:10)
- 4 Mazurka (2:10)
- 5 Cigar win the Race (2:52)
- 6 Mr. Moore (3:03)
- 7 Polka Mazurka (1:55)
- 8 Quadrille (3:34)
- 9 Twenty Cents for the Pan Cover (1:29)
- 10 Carbay Man (1:29)
- 11 All Gone in the Lagoon Mouth (1:53)
- 12 Spanish Retreat (2:03)
- 13 Baa, baa, hvide lam (0:41)
- 14 Clear the Road (1:41)
- 15 Queen Mary (1:05)
- 16 Payne Dead (0:27)
- 17 White Frock (0:25)
- 18 Lassy Barry (0:34)
- 19 Boss Borine (0:20)
- 20 Me Mother Had Tell Me (0:43)
- 21 Ask Mr. Jackson (0:52)
- 22 LaBega Carousel (2:22)
- 23 Crab and Garlin (1:03)
- 24 One Bright Summer Morning (1:51)

- 25 Masqueraders: "The Devil" and "The Wild Indians" (2:08)
- 26 King George Play (2:52)
- 27 Jig (0:57)
- 28 Seven Step (1:25)
- 29 French Polka (1:13)
- 30 Tway She She (0:39)
- 31 Four White Horses on a Rainbow (0:55)

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