



Compas! Compas! Compas!

Legends of Haitian Music, Part 2

By CC Smith and Gerard Tacite Lamothe

Wicked guitar lines, hair-raising key changes, tension and release, call and response, and dramatic shifts in texture and color characterize compas, the popular music of Haiti, at its best. The rhythmic counterpoint between the cymbal and the floor tom produces a sensual, rocking beat unlike anything else in the Caribbean, although the multilayered polyglot sound of compas (pronounced COM-pah) can include touches of salsa, soca, jazz, funk and even highlife.

As discussed in Part 1 of this series (*Beat*, Vol. 6 #2, 1987, "Legends of Haitian Music: Locking Horns"), popular Haitian music has grown and changed in roughly 10-year cycles since the late '40s, beginning with the big-band-style music of René Saint-Aude's Super Jazz des Jeunes. Nemours Jean-Baptiste and Weber Sicot followed with their orchestras, gaining massive public attention by maintaining an extended "polemic" of traded insults and oneupmanship between 1958 and 1965. Nemours' "compas direct" rhythm became the hallmark of Haitian music up to the present.

This 10-year pattern is a phenomenon that we noticed while researching this article. It was also confirmed by Johnny Toussaint ("Ti-Fre") of Skah Shah in a recent interview: "I think every 10 years, we got some change, every 10 years — '65, mini-jazz start and '75, Exile One came...." Then, 1985 brought the advent of Kassav' and the beginning of the zouk revolution. The impact of zouk on Haitian music is a story that has just begun to be told.



the late '60s were an unsettled time in Haiti, as they were in much of the world. The repressive regime of "President-for-Life" François "Papa Doc" Duvalier had developed its full force, with the result that anyone who could fled Haiti for New York or Miami.

It was the end of an era for Haitian music and the advent of a new direction. A truce was called in the rivalry between Nemours and Sicot in 1965, as announced by Sicot's "Polemik Fini." Both men continued to play and record music but their creative genius was pretty well exhausted. Without the competitive edge of the polemic, neither seemed to generate the same excitement. Nemours gave up the distinctive sound of the accordion for a cheesy-sounding synthesizer and uninteresting "modern" arrangements. Sicot added a Hawaiian guitar and traveled frequently to the French Antilles, where his music received greater acceptance. After a decade of listening to what was essentially the same song over and over again, it is no wonder that the huge Haitian audiences were looking for something new.

Enter the Beatles. The Liverpool sound revolutionized popular music all over the world, and Haiti was no exception. The revolution came in the sound and style of music as well as in the realization by the teenagers that they, too, could play music and have a sound that identified their generation.

The first wave of the youth movement in Haitian music occurred in 1963-65. Groups like Les Copains, Les Consuls, Les Corvington, Blousons Noir, Loups Noir and Les Virtuoses played rock 'n' roll copied from French artists like Johnny Halliday, and covered American hits like "Doo Wah Ditty," "Dey Doo Run Run" and "Dream Dream Dream" with French lyrics. The stage was thus set for the next big change in direction.

In 1963, Fred Dejean and five of his brothers formed Les Frères de Petion Ville, later to become Les Frères Dejean, a band with one foot in the '60s and the other searching for a niche in the future. It was a big band with a horn section, but the members were quite young.

Two years later the sound emerged that was to distinguish the popular music for another decade. It was dubbed "mini-jazz" by a dj at Radio Haiti, referring to the fact that the bands were about half the size of the big orchestras and also to the young age of the musicians. A typical lineup would have about nine members: two guitars, bass, drums, percussion, vocals and usually a single saxophone. The first mini-jazz band is generally acknowledged to have been Ibo Combo, although, like so many innovators in music history, they never received full recognition for their invention.

At the beginning, it was primarily a live music scene, with seemingly every neighborhood producing a small combo. The Port-au-Prince suburb of Petion Ville was fertile musical ground, producing Les Difficiles de Petion Ville (now known as DP Express), Tabou Combo and the aforementioned Frères Dejean. Other towns produced such groups as Diablos du Rythm de St. Marc and Les Fantaisistes de Carrefour.

Most of the bands were formed by high school students or slightly



Les Fantaisistes' first lp, containing the hit

"Ti Zoiseau," was released in 1968.

At the beginning, mini-jazz bands were formed just for fun or to attract girls.

older neighborhood youths; their concerts were frequently given in the afternoons, since their audiences were too young to stay out late at night. During school vacations and holidays, some bands played nearly every day at house parties.

The mini-jazz bands followed the compas direct rhythm established by Nemours, but the arrangements and the topics covered by the lyrics were completely different. Vacations and volleyball were favorite subjects, along with love, mother, the beauty of nature and, of course, teenage girls. At the beginning, bands were formed just for fun or to attract girls. There was usually no plan to become "stars" or professional musicians. In fact, to be a musician had a disreputable connotation and, in most cases, did not receive parental approval. Loubert Chancy, Skah Shah's saxophonist since 1974, remembers: "It was very difficult for young people to get involved in music, because once you were involved in music, you were considered as being a bum. I didn't go to school for music, there were no music schools in Haiti. My parents, if I went to play a party, when I would come back at 2 or 3 in the morning, they would not open the door to me, and I would have to rely on a friend of mine to [put me up for the night]..."

The seminal band Shieu Shieu began in 1965, led by sax player Tony Moise. The band would go through at least three incarnations, as producer Dada Jackman lost each group he managed to the New York exodus, but each transformation became a highly popular, trend-setting group, featuring one excellent horn player. The first Shieu Shieu went off in 1970 to become Original Shieu Shieu of New York. The second moved to New York in 1974 and became Skah Shah, with Loubert Chancy on sax. Jackman's third attempt took off for New York after only three months and became Diet-X, a group featuring another great saxophonist of the mini-jazz era, Gerard Daniel.

Les Ambassadeurs came together on July 23, 1966, with alto saxophonist Ernst Menelas as maestro and a Chinese-Haitian, E. Fong Cap, as vocalist. Their first record was released three years later by Marc Duverger's Marc Records in Brooklyn, containing a trend-setting carnival song, "Carnaval Cizo."

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The first Shieu Shieu lp (1967) contained odes to Haiti, vacations, volleyball, fishing and three young girls.





Tabou Combo's first record, 1969. By 1970, they were one of the leading bands in Haiti.



Bossa Combo—still together after 20 years.

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Les Fantaisistes, led by alto saxophonist Carmin Bichotte, was formed in the summer of 1967. They came out with an album containing "Ti Zoiseau," their first hit, along with "Vacances," in 1968. Their own version of "Valley Ball" ("Volleyball"), included on their second lp (Ibo ILP 143), hit in the summer and was played constantly at the many parties, barbecues and soccer games. In 1968, Bossa Combo started in the neighborhood of Wané, Carrefour. They were a little older than some of the groups and featured a saxophone, three guitars, Adrien Jeannite on piano and bandleader Alfred Michel on tambours.

With the contradictions inherent in Haitian society, it was almost inevitable that a polemic would arise among the young bands as well. The rivalry between Shleu Shleu and Les Fantaisistes developed along the lines of uptown vs. downtown, middle-class suburbs against inner-city youth, although the music of the two was very similar, using the same themes and instruments.

Mini-jazz was putting pressure on the big orchestras just as Nemours had challenged Jazz des Jeunes in the '50s.

According to Eddie Poulard, bassist for Formula One Haitian Band in Los Angeles: "Shleu Shleu was an elite band, because they had a Syrian, a mulatto (Jackaman), as manager. He had money and pushed Shleu Shleu all the way. But Shleu Shleu would not go beyond a certain point in the country (wouldn't play in the poorer sections). Les Fantaisistes said, 'We've got to have something for the masses.' That's how this band was created. This is why there was competition between the two. They were playing the same kind of music, same instruments. People would pay high prices to go see Shleu Shleu because they played 'uptown' gigs."

Then, in 1967, yet another young group of middle-class boys from Petion Ville convinced their parents to buy them some instruments and started on a path that would bring them local fame and eventually world renown. First known as Los Incognitos de Petion Ville, the band was led by guitarist Albert Chancy, with his brother Adolphe on bass. In a departure from the usual mini-jazz lineup, the group contained an accordion,

but no horn. They soon changed their name to Tabou Combo and won the Radio Haiti mini-jazz competition in 1968. Their first album, *Haiti*, came out in 1969 on Ibo Records, complete with effusive liner notes that describe the various members as irresistibly attractive to the feminine heart. By 1970, they were one of the leading bands in Haiti.

The net result of all this youthful activity was the decline of interest in the music of Nemours and Sicot. Mini-jazz was putting pressure on the big orchestras just as Nemours had challenged Saint-Aude's Jazz des Jeunes in the early '50s. The Ibo Records catalog, which had been exclusively the provenance of Jazz des Jeunes, Nemours and Sicot from the beginning, was invaded in 1968 when Haiti, *Mon Pays* by Groupe Les Chleu-Chleu [sic] (ILP 139) (Shleu-Shleu's first record) appeared, followed by Les Fantaisistes' second (ILP 143). A Nemours lp, appropriately enough, *Reminiscence* (ILP 145), follows that; and finally, Tabou Combo's first album (ILP 146) in 1969. The liner notes on the Chleu-Chleu album comment on how the band was bringing a new breeze to Haitian music that had fallen into lethargy. ("Les Shleu-Shleus on apporte un souffle nouveau à la musique haïtienne qui était tombée en léthargie.")

In an interview in Brooklyn in August 1987, we asked Yvon Andre ("Kapi"), percussionist of Tabou Combo, if there was a generation gap developing between the music of the parents' generation and that of the younger generation coming up, as was happening all over the world. He replied: "Yes, that's right. Also, that created a conflict between the older generation and the younger generation of musicians, because they saw a threat, a competition coming for them. As a matter of fact, Nemours Jean-Baptiste used to have a gig at El Rancho Hotel every year, it was a tradition. But all of a sudden, Nemours was cancelled and Shleu Shleu was taking over. . . ."

"It was time for them [the big bands] to fade away, because the younger generation was taking over all the gigs. Shleu Shleu was playing at Cabanne Choucoune (Nemours' old club), and there was a new wave of younger people getting more involved in the music scene, and they went for younger musicians. Of course the music was hipper than what Nemours was playing. . . . Nemours used to play at the Rex Theatre. Ambassadeurs took over, kicked Nemours out. Tabou Combo used to be at Paramount [the first band to play at this high-class movie theater]."

Weber Sicot's standing gigs at the El Dorado Theatre in Port-au-Prince were taken over by Shoupa-Shoupa; his weekly appearances at Don Petro and Hotel Beau Rivage were replaced by Les Fantaisistes and Bossa Combo.

Tabou Combo relocated to New York in 1971. The band's original leader, Albert Chancy, left to go to college, and the band reorganized under the direction of Adolphe Chancy, who continues to manage it.

In the absence of Tabou and Shleu Shleu, the *Difficiles* and *Les*



Skah Shah's Message: their first album using the full horn section, 1978.

Gypsies de Petion Ville became the leading bands in Haiti. The Gypsies (later renamed Scorpio) was formed in 1970 when Les Difficultés' lead guitarist Robert Martino split off to form his own band. Yet another musical polemic developed between the fanatics that followed each group. A group from inner-city Port-au-Prince, Les Loups Noir, held their own in third place, but could not escape the cachet of Petion Ville's domination. Les Ambassadeurs, pushed by Marc Duverger's efforts, traveled frequently between Haiti and New York and maintained a strong hold on the audience. Their specialty became slow boleros meant for cheek-to-cheek dancing, with vocals reminiscent of Parisian singer Charles Aznavour.

Early in 1974, Tabou Combo hit big with their manic, accordion-driven "New York City," a million-seller in Europe and vastly popular among the Spanish-speaking New York audience as well as the Haitian. The debut of Skah Shah (made up of members of the second Shileu Shileu) in June of that year, however, established their superiority over all other Haitian bands and they remained on top until 1977. The audiences preferred Skah Shah's sweet melodies meant for "colé colé" (cheek-to-cheek) dancing over Tabou's uptempo compas, nicknaming the band "L'orchestre des Amoureux" (The band of the lovers). Although based in New York, their records also captured the market in Haiti.

The third Shileu Shileu band was formed in Haiti in April 1974 to fill in the gap left by the second incarnation's departure for New York. By June, they traveled to Martinique, and by July, they also went to New York. Seventeen-year-old saxophonist Gerard Daniel and two other members remained and put together Diet-X. The band released many albums featuring Daniel's lyrical horn playing, but youth and management tensions took their toll in 1984. After a three-year hiatus, the band has once again reformed and is starting to perform and record.

Frères Dejean came out strong with "Marina," a huge carnival hit, in 1975, but despite their technical superiority, they still were never appreciated by the audience they deserved. In 1979, lead vocalist Isnard Douby and other band members split off to form System Band. With their snappy arrangements and choreographed horn section, System has become a serious challenge to the popularity of Skah Shah and Tabou Combo.

Meanwhile, on the island of Guadeloupe, a new sound was developing. By 1975, Gordon Henderson had merged the music of Haiti and Trinidad into a fast, bouncy new beat he called cadence-lypso, based on Nemours' compas direct rhythm and borrowing the name from Sicot's cadence rampa. His band, Exile One, featured the golden sax of Pierre Labor and some topical themes of the time like women's liberation ("Aki Yaka (Année de la Femme))" and timeless subjects like "Gadé Dèyè" ("watch her rear end"). "Aki Yaka," their third release, sold 60,000 copies and received a gold record. The crucial difference of this new style was the presence of a horn section, arranged to play riffs instead of the mini-

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jazz/beguine/cadence melodic horn solos that dominated the music of the past 10 years. Exile One toured extensively from 1975 to 1977 and cadence-lypso became extremely popular in the French Antilles and Europe as well as Haiti. New groups such as Gramacks, Perfecta and Les Aiglons began playing the new style.

By 1978, the then 10-year-old mini-jazz bands had pretty well run their course, toying with reggae, rock, funk and synthesizers, but without establishing any new direction. The stage was once again set for the next big change, and once again, it involved horns. Exile One's sound gave the Haitian bands new life by inspiring them to reintroduce the horn section they abandoned in the '60s. This, however, is still a matter of some dispute among musicians.

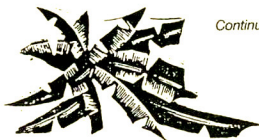
We asked Adrien Jeannette, keyboardist of Bossa Combo, to tell us when the band changed from having a single horn to the full five-horn section of today. He recalled: "In 1977-78. It was because of the competition from the music of Haiti with the music of the Antilles. Martinique and Guadeloupe were playing our music, but they were adding a trombone, one or two trumpets, and an alto or tenor sax. The competition was such that we felt we had to do something, because they were taking away the power that we had. So we added five horns and went back up again."

The Antillean bands were Exile One and Gramacks, he said. "We had Frères Dejean, but nobody paid attention to them. They were doing it for a long time, but nobody noticed until Exile One came through. DP Express was the first in Haiti to follow Exile One. We played with DP Express in Haiti, and we were really shocked—it was a good lash—so we went back and put our horns together."

Loubert Chancy, saxophone player who joined Shileu Shileu in 1970 and continued to play with them (as Skah Shah) until 1987, told us that his band added a big horn section in 1978 because "everybody started playing like the Martiniquais, the Guadeloupian. . . Exile One was one of them. Everyone became interested in horns again. DP Express, Scorpio, the response was very positive. We said OK, we have to do that. We just go by what they want."

But then we asked Kapi of Tabou Combo if the music from the French Antilles, specifically Exile One, had any impact on Haitian music at that time. He insisted: "None at all. Exile One at that time was having great success in Martinique, and at that time they went to Haiti, but as far as impact is concerned—no, I don't think so. At that time they had a hit, and everybody went crazy over the song, and they were traveling, to Haiti and New York, but as far as impact was concerned—no, none at all. . . It wasn't because of Exile One. When we introduced the horns, it was time for a change, because accordion was old-fashioned, and two guitars and a bass—we were trying to improve the music, but we were not influenced by Exile One. We were trying to put a new meaning to the music." But Kapi, we asked, what year did you put the horns in? "Nineteen seventy-seven," he replied.

Whether the musicians agree or not on the influence of Exile One on Haitian music, one thing is clear. The horns were back and Haitian music was again revitalized.



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Skah Shah:
Sweet
melodies
for cheek-
to-cheek
dancing.

The exodus of Haitians to New York continued throughout the '70s, making Brooklyn the second-largest Haitian city in the world after Port-au-Prince. The Haitian community in New York today is lively and self-contained. In certain sections of Brooklyn, Haitian businesses, groceries, bakeries, restaurants and record shops line the streets, and Creole is the most frequently heard language. There are several newspapers and magazines printed in French: *Haiti Observateur*, *Haiti Demain*, *Haiti Culture* and *Nouveauté*. Many radio programs keep the lines of communication open: Moments Creoles, WLIR, Sun., 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.; Eddy Zamor's Eddy Publicité, Sat., 8 to 10 p.m. and Echo de la Metropole, Fri. 6 to 7:30 p.m., 105.9 FM; Ekspresyon Kreyol, Sat. 10 a.m. to 12 noon 89.5 FM; Haiti en Ondes, Sun. 9 to 10 p.m., WEVD, 98 FM; and continuous daily broadcasting on WBSB, 92 FM, Voix des Antilles.

The center of the music shifted to Brooklyn as well. Currently, eight of the leading bands are located in Brooklyn and actively working: Tabou, System, Skah Shah, Mini Allstars, Macho Band, Djet-X, Ambassadeurs and Accolade, with the emphasis on performing "nan bal" (at a dance) rather than recording. On any given weekend, at least two or three Haitian bands will be playing to thousands in Brooklyn or Queens dance halls such as the Empire, Tilden, Starlight and Biltmore ballrooms, Ceneval Manor or Chateau Royale. There are at least six record shops: JD, Ma Maison, Marc, Saint-Aude, Mini Records and Geronimo; even the African Record Center seems to be specializing in Haitian music these days. The Haitian-based bands — Bossa Combo, Scorpio, DP Express, Coupe Cloue and Frères Dejean — travel frequently to the United States to release records and perform. A few more bands are scattered among Montreal (Dixie Band), Boston (Volo Volo) and Miami (Magnum Band and Top Vice).

For all the strength of the Haitian presence, it seems that the Haitian recording industry is in somewhat of a decline. Highly popular bands that routinely draw a thousand people to a weekend dance express problems with their recording arrangements. Amazingly, there is no royalty system in place for record sales; the band is usually just paid a lump sum for the record.

Veteran trumpet player Anderson Cameau told us his view of the Haitian music industry: "We don't have producers. Those people, they see the music just like a grocery store. . . . Let's say we got a band, and we go to a producer and he tell us he's gonna give us \$5,000, and after that he pay for the recording, pressing, album cover, and put that album out. And after that, he doesn't owe you no money. Even if you sell 20,000 or 1 million, he doesn't care about you. Not even a gift, not even a pair of shoes."

"Long time ago, Nemours Jean-Baptiste, Coupe Cloue, they suck their blood, man. They would buy their albums from them for \$800, and

they have 14, 15 musicians, and they make a lot of money, almost \$20,000 over that \$800."

But according to producer Marc Duverger of Marc Records: "Today, even if you sell three or four thousand records, you need at least \$10,000, \$15,000 — the recording alone sometimes will take \$10,000, whether the record sells or not. Haitian business is in big crisis now, cause nobody's making money, nobody wants to put a record out. That's why a lot of bands now go on their own to try to do their records. A lot of people think it's the music from the Antilles, Martinique, Guadeloupe, that's making the Haitians go down, but that is not so. Haitian music start to come down before those bands. They stopped buying the Haitian music after (Francois) Mitterand came in with the socialism [in France]. The minute Mitterand got in power, the franc came down. . . ."

To counter these problems, Tabou Combo, System Band and Skah Shah have all started their own labels, allowing them to control the production and distribution, and to share in the profits. Tabou Combo's Chancy label is the best established, having released nine Tabou Combo lps, five for Coupe Cloue, and one for Ti Manno and Gemini All Stars, among others.

Most of the bands we spoke to expressed their desire to reach a larger audience. Kapi, speaking for Tabou Combo: "I'm a compas player, so I'd love it to be big. And that's what we're heading for: We want compas to be international. We want compas to be as known as reggae or calypso."

We asked Skah Shah's Loubert Chancy if his band wants to cross over to the American audience. "We would love to. But not by playing American music, but by playing our own music and have them understand our music. I think the handicap now is promotion. Because I believe that anybody who has the chance to listen to Skah Shah would really enjoy it. When we play at SOB's, they [the mostly American audience] have a very good time, they enjoy every bit of it. . . . The groove is universal."



When Baby Doc was forced to abdicate in 1986, the heady possibility of freedom after 29 years of oppression hit the Haitian people like a bomb, and music soon appeared to mark the historic events. "Dechoukaj" means "uproot" in Creole, and refers to the often-violent effort to get rid of the Tontons Macoutes and all vestiges of the Duvalier regime.

Since 1986, some of the albums that have appeared are Fedia Laguerre's *Dechoukaj*, Toto Necessite's *Haiti Libere*, Les Freres Parent's *Operation Dechoukaj*, and *La Grand Puissance: Operation Dechoukaj* by Joubien.

The long-established fear of speaking out against the government is still present.

The long-established fear of speaking out against the government is still present, however. Most of the dechoukaj songs talk around the topic, never advocating it. The latest releases by System Band, Accolade and Bossa Combo, as well as Skah Shah's 1988 release, *Van Libete* (Wind of Freedom), are still very conservative, calling for unity but not much more.

One exception is Formula One's "Haiti": "Duvalier tombé/Ton Ton Macoute pa à la mode encore." (Duvalier has fallen/the secret police are not in style now). Vocalist Yvon Estinvil was reluctant to sing even those seemingly innocuous lines at first, even though located safely in Los Angeles, some 6,000 miles from the scene of the crimes. Certainly the lines of the chorus, "mète baton pou yo" (Put a stick to them), would have been enough to land the group in jail, or worse, during the Duvalier regime!

We asked Kapi of Tabou Combo if the band had ever addressed the political situation in Haiti: "We did, even when Duvalier was there. Not directly, but we tried to put the message across without going straight to the point. We circled around the bushes, but they got the message anyway. We were talking about 'even though you have millions in Swiss banks, these are material things and when you die you can't take them with you,' and about sharing what you have with the poor people, sharing with the people who have nowhere to sleep" ("Partager").

For many years, Bossa Combo was identified with the Duvalier regime and was said to be Baby Doc's favorite band. The insidiousness of this situation is illustrative of how the unchecked political power of the Duvaliers affected every aspect of Haitian life. Adrien Jeannette recalls: "We were a neighborhood group in 1968, and there was one person in

Kapi: "We want compas to be international. We want compas to be as known as reggae or calypso."

the neighborhood that Jean-Claude (Duvalier) looked up to as a father figure and counselor, LeMaire Prospere. In the neighborhood, there were a lot of people who had connections with the government. We approached him about putting our band together. He had two cars. He sold one and used the money to buy us our equipment.

"The rapport we had with LeMaire put us in connection with other people in the government because he went around and kept saying 'I

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Coupe Cloue:

The Soul of Haitian Music

In the early '50s, an itinerant Haitian guitarist named Gesner Henry was plying his trade from door to door, "enjoying life," as he says, playing his guitar and singing for spare change or a free meal. From these humble beginnings rose one of the most enduring and beloved figures in contemporary Haitian music, Coupe Cloue.

Born in Leogane, west of Port-au-Prince, in 1925, Henry had a talent for music and soccer. He actually gained fame first on the soccer field and picked up the nickname Coupe Cloue (pronounced KOO-pay KLOO-ay, it means roughly, "cut and kick") that would follow him throughout his musical career. By the mid-'50s, he had gained enough renown to become the opening act

for Jazz de Jeunes at the Theatre de Verdure in Port-au-Prince. Drawing largely on the merengue of the Dominican Republic for inspiration and arrangements, he soon became known for his lyrics, which ranged from sexual double entendres to universally recognized depictions of Haitian life and social situations.

He began with his first group, Trio Crystal, later named Trio Select, and then continued with Ensemble Select. In 1976, he began adding more members until the band numbered 12. However, he never lost his homey, popular touch.

Of all Haitian music, his is closest to that of Africa — the use of percussion and acoustic guitar patterns closely resemble the Ghanaian palm-wine highlife of Ko Nimo and even early Dibango. Amazingly, he claims never to have heard African music when growing up. It is understandable, given Haiti's historical isolation,



but the parallels are uncanny. Coupe finally visited Africa in 1975, performing in the Ivory Coast, where his physical similarities to Dibango gained him much attention and his music, even more. It was in Africa where he was given the title of "Le Roi" (the King). In January 1987, he was scheduled to return to Africa for a concert in Gabon.

Coupe Cloue calls his music "compas mamba" (peanut compas), and he has at least 15 al-

bums to his credit. He has introduced a synthesizer into his band, but as if to balance this technological innovation, he has also added a traditional bamboo stick (ti-bwa) for percussion. His recent lp *Madam Marcel* even contains some musical references to the zouk phenomenon, which he feels is only a passing fad. Coupe Cloue remains and endures, as a symbol of "bootstrap" Haitian music, adapting to modern trends but keeping true to himself and the soul of Haiti.

Ti Manno:

The Dawn of Haitian Protest Music

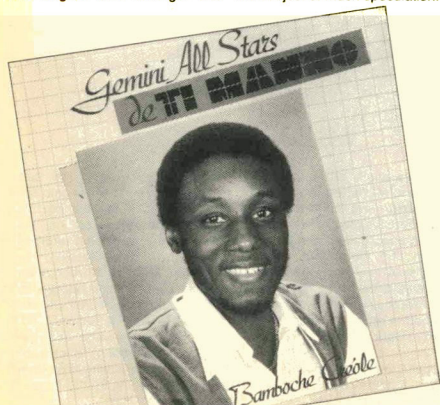
Ti Manno (Antoine Rossini Jean-Baptiste), said to be the Bob Marley of Haitian music, began his career in St. Marc, north of Port-au-Prince, then joined Shoupa-Shoupa in New York in 1971, and went to Boston in the mid-'70s with Volo Volo and Astros. In 1979, he joined DP Express in Haiti, and their 1980 lp contained his first protest song, "Corrigé," speaking out against sexual harassment of women by the Tontons Macoutes and other "gran neg" (big shots).

Leaving DP Express to form his own band, Gemini All Stars, he found his forte. Songs exposing the hypocrisy of the upper class ("Min Culture Pa Nou"), advocating the Creole language over French ("Operation Min Centre"), and stressing education and African origins were stronger and

more pointed than any other band had done up to that time.

In "Neg Kont Neg" ("Black Against Black"), he called for black unity: "Africa, pa gain l'union piti ou yo / Nou kite moun' ap joué nan cerveau nou / Pou youn' pa vè oué lot'." ("Africa, there is no unity among your children / We are letting the white men play with our minds / To make us hate each other").

Ti Manno's fearless comments on the ills of Haitian society landed him at least one stint in jail. He was pulled off stage during a performance and badly beaten by the Macoutes; he was also sent into exile to the French Antilles for a time. But his popularity was so great that the government was afraid to do anything too drastic to silence him. It is said that his music may have planted the seed of revolution that led to Duvalier's ouster. He died, still in his 30s, on May 13, 1985, of meningitis, although the cause of death is still the subject of much speculation.



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Djé-X featured one of the best saxophonists of the mini-jazz era, Gerard Daniel (at far right).

have a band.' So the word got around to Jean-Claude. When asked about it, he said the guys need more equipment. So Jean-Claude, being a young kid at the time, gave the band equipment. He sent us a piano, sax, bass, amp and speakers. After we became well-known, Jean-Claude would call us for his parties, all because of LeMaire. Everybody thought the band was Jean-Claude's but that was never the case. When we grew up and learned more about what was going on, people would say: You guys are Jean-Claude's band, but we really couldn't go back and denounce the lie."



From 1978 to 1986, compas grew stronger as bands became more professional and the musicianship improved. The songs, however, became increasingly complex, as the simple song structure of the mini-jazz gave way to complicated multipart "symphonies" with, as one observer notes, "an introduction to the introduction, then an introduction, then several rhythm changes, before getting to the groove, or 'manman compas.'"

But by 1985, another musical revolution was brewing in the French Antilles. The tidal wave of zouk, with Kassav' riding the crest, washed over Haiti, causing many of the groups to rethink their music to keep up with the interest in the dynamic new sound. None of the musicians we spoke to, however, would admit that they were going to capitulate to the challenge and actually play zouk music. The overriding opinion seemed to be that Kassav' has the edge because of their state-of-the-art technology and electronics, not because of any musical superiority. The Haitian bands are realizing that a new standard has been set and they can no longer allow their records to be released with out-of-tune horns, hoarse monotonous vocals or rambling, disorganized songs.

We asked Ti-Fre and Jean Michel St. Victor ("Zouzou"), guitarist and vocalist of Skah Shah, if their band was going to jump on the zouk wagon. Ti-Fre responded: "We got our own zouk. If we go back to Haiti and look at the traditional rhythms, we got congo, petro, ibo...." Zouzou added: "Haitian folklore is really rich, with more than 20 rhythms...." Ti-Fre: "I think the Haitian bands were too full, too sincere about the compas. Over those 20 years they should have played ibo, rabordage...."



Kapi & Gary
present "Le Zouk":
High-tech music
reaching back to
the founding
folkloric
rhythms (1986).



System Band:
A serious
challenge to
Skah Shah
and Tabou
Combo.

*It seems that in Haiti,
history is not linear,
but circular.*

We posed the same question to three more Haitian musicians. Trum-peter Anderson Cameau was asked if he thinks that zouk will change the direction of Haitian music. He predicted: "I guess it's going to change. Compas needs some changes in the rhythmic. Especially with the guitars, the way we play, I feel that it has too much noise, you cannot understand those two guitars. This is my opinion. The compas is too complicated."

Guitarist Ronald Smith of System Band: "We don't plan to play exactly the zouk, but yeah, we plan to add much more electronics and make the music more commercial. One idea music, because that's the way they compose. They start out with a groove, and they continue that groove, where Haitian music, we have a beginning, the singer sings, and then it goes into the solo, the singer sings again. So we're trying to change that, we're trying to see if we can go, and the people start dancing, the groove starts right there. We have to make the music less complicated, lighter. We're trying to use basslines too, instead of like regular compas, to give it more popular music sound, so people get into it easier and notice what's going on."

According to Kapi, Tabou Combo is going to begin using "the latest technology for recording, so definitely the sound is going to improve, and the music will sound better also. Once we do it, all the other bands will follow."

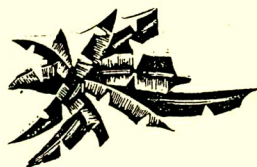
Despite these protestations, several records have come out that sound suspiciously just like zouk. One of the first on the scene was *Le Zouk* by Kapi and Gary Resil, although Kapi maintains that it was not his project, he was just helping out. Nestor Azerot's ep, *Zouk Celebration*, was released in 1986. Claude Marcelin's *Lakol* and Anderson Cameau's *Kalalou* were recorded in Paris, where most of the zouk sound was forged. Mini Allstars, producer Fred Paul's studio band, made *Raraman*, a record that has many parallels with zouk, but draws on the "rara" rhythms of Haitian carnival as well.

By the end of 1987, System Band had put out an lp with one pseudo-zouk track on it, "Sa Pi Red." Its experimental nature is apparent: All the pieces are there, but nothing hangs together. Skah Shah's new album, *Van Libète*, stayed closer to compas than their comments during our interview led us to expect. The long-awaited Tabou Combo record came out early in 1988, and as promised, has a nice, clean high-tech sound. It also has many, many similarities to zouk: keyboards, tight horn arrange-

ments, melodic bassline, dominating kick drum, female background vocals and simplified song structures, with the conga and cowbell (staples in compas) mixed way down.

And so, another cycle in the history of Haitian music is complete: compas direct to mini-jazz, mini-jazz to compas, compas to — not zouk, but high-tech music that reaches back to the founding rhythms of Haitian folklore, the heartbeat of the Haitian people. It seems that in Haiti, history is not linear, but circular.

But what of the future? Can we expect another major change in 1995? Kapi of Tabou Combo: "There is a new generation of musicians. They don't play compas, by the way. They go back to the roots — lbo, petro, congo, the authentic rhythms, but nicely done, with electronics, synthesizer, nice guitar licks. There are groups called Kata, Cajou, a lot of young musicians.... Compas is going to fade, believe me, sooner or later. By the year 2000, there will be no more Haitian bands playing compas. Thirteen years from today. You heard of Moun Fou band? Check them out. They're going to be the next Haitian stars, if they stick together. They're here in New York. They just happen to be Haitian, but they're not playing Haitian music." Do you think they may push you out, just like you did to Sicot and Nemour? we asked. Do you see history repeating itself? "Oh yes, oh yes...."



(NEXT: PART THREE: THE HAITI-ANTILLES CONNECTION
—From cadence to zouk and back again)

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