

THE EXODUS

One of the most encouraging stories to come from the horrors of the African slave trade is the evolution, in Central America, of a remarkable people called the Garifuna. Also known as Black Caribs or Garinagu, they are a black ethnic group found in Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala and Belize.*

They originated in the late 17th century on the island of St. Vincent ("Yerumein" in the Garifuna language) through an admixture of Arawak and Carib Indian and escaped Africans. The Africans joined with the Indians on the island to maintain a strong resistance against the French and, later, British colonizers. They successfully resisted slavery for many years, and St. Vincent became known in the Caribbean as a sanctuary from slavery. Blacks from throughout the area came there and, through intermarriage, it was not long before the Indian population decreased and the Garifuna culture began.

The struggle between the French and British for control of St. Vincent continued, with the Garifuna, for the most part, siding with the French. The French loss of the war of 1796 to the British marked the turning point of Garifuna life and history. The British shipped several thousand Garinagu to the island of Roatan off the Honduran coast. From there, they spread to the mainland, settling along the coastal regions of the four Central American countries.

The arrival of the first Garifuna in Belize in November 1823 has been designated a national holiday in that country. Garifuna Settlement Day, Nov. 19, is marked with festivities native to this particular group, and wherever they are, Belizean Garifuna traditionally celebrate this day.

Throughout Garifuna history, constant migration has been a way of life. They are still on the move and have joined the increasing number of immigrants to the United States.

Garifuna migration to the United States began during World War II when the U.S. was recruiting male laborers from Central America to harvest seasonal crops. While most returned home at the expiration of the contract, some stayed on. The latter group was gradually joined by relatives and friends. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, a base for Garifuna migration to the U.S. had been firmly established and the num-

ber of migrants escalated. Although children initially were left behind with relatives, today entire families are coming to the States.

Most of the Garifuna are concentrated in Los Angeles, New York and Chicago. As they have done in previous migrations, the Garifuna have brought their language and culture with them. Though opinions vary as to whether these will survive the latest phase of Garifuna history, Garinagu from various regions of Central America, including St. Vincent, have organized themselves to encourage the preservation of their heritage.

The Garifuna language is an unusual and unique tongue. The structure of the language is Arawakan, with elements of Carib, African dialects, Spanish, French and English. It continues to be spoken today with slight regional differences. For example, there is a greater English influence in the dialect spoken by Garifuna in Belize, while those in other parts of the region are more affected by Spanish.

Another unique feature of the language is the separate male and female manner of speech. This is said to have been the result of a predominance of female Arawak captives during the initial formation of the Garifuna culture in St. Vincent. These women continued to speak their native tongue and even today Garifuna women express themselves in a distinctly female style.

One of the strongest elements of the Garifuna cultural tradition is music. It is traditionally a blend of African polyrhythmic drumming accompanied by lead and background vocals and percussive instruments like claves (clap sticks), conch shells and shakers (rattlers).

The drums are typically wood hollowed into symmetrical cylinders with prepared animal skin stretched across one end. Three drums are usually used, the first drum ("lanigui"), the second drum ("lafuru") and the bass drum ("luruwa").

Traditionally, the singing is done by the women, while the drums are played by the men. The percussive instruments are played by both sexes. The singing is done point-counterpoint, with one singer calling and the other singers responding.

The songs are handed down orally from generation to generation and from one community to another. Most of the song

lyrics relate personal life experiences, usually unpleasant, and in many cases contain subtle innuendos ("bachuti" or "abachuhani").

Many dances and musical styles are performed by the Garinagu, and usually the same terms are used to refer to both the musical style and dance. The most popular music and dance is the "punta." In the punta, the men and women both dance. One couple at a time dances in front of the drummers, moving their hips to the rhythm of the drums. A slower version of the punta also exists and is called the "paranda."

One of the most colorful genres of Garifuna entertainment is the "wanaragua." Known as the junkanoo throughout the Caribbean, it is performed in varied styles and degrees on several of the islands. Among the Garifuna, wanaragua is a male performance. It is usually performed during the Christmas season. On this occasion, masked men dress in brightly colored clothes and streamers, carrying fake swords and wearing tall, feathered hats. They are accompanied by an entourage of drummers and singers as they move from house to house. The group is led by a chief, and each dancer takes his cue from him.

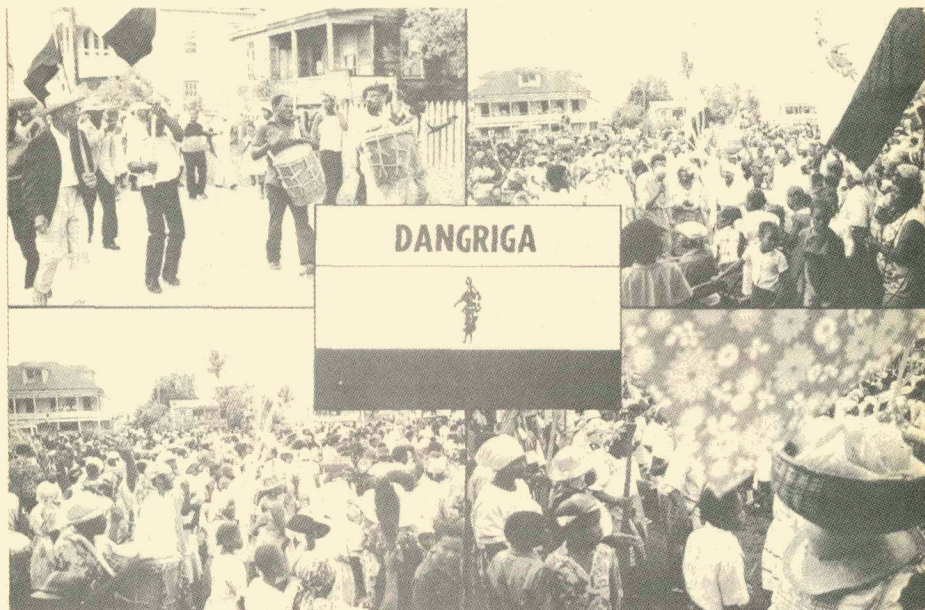
Music and dancing play a large part in many Garifuna rituals, as they are a religious people. While they continue to practice their traditional rites, they are also active members and leaders of different churches, particularly the Catholic Church. In fact, the first Belizean Catholic bishop is a Garifuna.

The infiltration of Western-oriented education and culture has generally influenced the current practice of the rituals. "Dugu," the most sacred Garifuna ritual, now incorporates the use of holy/sacred objects from the Catholic faith. However, there continues to be strong belief among Garinagu in the power of the dead. This dates back to the days when the dead were buried in graves in the middle of their homes. It was then believed that the spirit of the deceased would continue to live and protect the household from evil spirits.

Today, though this practice is extinct, there is still a predominant belief in the powers of the ancestral spirits known as "gubida." The gubida appears in dreams to members of its immediate family and may ask for the performance of any of the Garifuna rituals.

*The word "Garinagu" is usually used to refer to the people; "Garifuna" can refer to the culture, language or the people.

OF THE GARIFUNA



Garifuna Settlement Day, held annually in Dangriga, Nov. 19, celebrates the landing of the Garinagu people in southern Belize in 1832.

Among these rituals are:

- "chugu," the offering of prepared foods by immediate family members;
- "mali," the offering of prepared foods accompanied by brief periods of drumming and dancing;

- "lemesi," the offering of mass; and
- "agouni," the offering of symbolic bath.

The *dugu* ritual is the epitome of Garifuna religion and tradition. It is a healing rite, particularly for ailments believed to be inflicted by the ancestral spirits. Its ceremony is presided over by a spiritual leader called the "buyei." He or she acts as an intermediary between the living and the gubida. Drummers with three large drums, a group of women singers ("gayusa") and a pair of maracas played by the buyei or a designate provide the music for the ritual,

which lasts between one and three days.

The secular version of the sacred dancing of *dugu* is called "hunguhungu." Here the drums play a simple three-beat rhythm and everyone sings in unison as they dance around in a circle.

The communities established by the Garifuna are almost in every case along the coast, so fish plays a major role in the daily diet. Chickens and pigs are raised but are used only in the absence of fish and on special occasions.

Subsistence farming is also pursued, usually outside the residential areas. Like in many African areas, cassava (manioc) is one of the most used food sources, taking up a significant part of the cultivated land. Plantains, sweet potatoes, yams, cocoa and other roots are also grown, often to be

used as main dishes as well as to make pastries and porridges. Porridge is an essential part of the diet because it is fed to the sick and elderly and also provides a food supplement for infants.

Fruit provides the nutritional requirements normally found in vegetables, with the coconut the most utilized. A multi-purpose, essential item, coconut milk is used in almost every form of cooking and in making oil.

The Garinagu believe in the medicinal value of herbs, which are grown and prepared into liquid medications or ointments or used as spices. Beverages are made out of coconut water, cassava and other fruits, sometimes left to ferment if potency is required.

Continued on page 47

RAS ROJAH

Continued from page 45

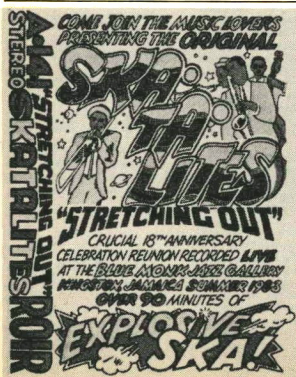
life. Wouldn't it be nice on the now-planned next Syndicate Ip if they would let us hear some extended scatting by an unknown master of the form — Melchisedek himself, Chinnna Smith?

News from Kingston is that Danny Sims, Bob Marley's first "discoverer," is now running Tuff Gong, and rumors abound that his lawsuit with Rita and Chris has been settled out of court.

Next issue will be our fourth annual Bob Marley memorial magazine — our biggest yet — with fascinating, previously unpublished interviews from various parts of the planet. May 11 is the fifth anniversary of Bob's passing, and I shall be lecturing on the history of reggae as seen through the life of its greatest proponent in Texas between May 8 and May 12, at Liberty Lunch in Austin, and in Houston, Dallas and San Antonio. Come on out and join us in honoring the memory of the Reggae King, and see some unusual sides of him, too. I'm especially looking forward to meeting listeners of *Reggae Beat International* in Houston.

Joe Gibbs, reduced to bankruptcy by Charlie Pride for copyright infringement a few years back, is now running a restaurant and grocery store out of his former record plant (immortalized in the film *Rockers*) and engineer Errol T is working the register . . . Alton Ellis is not in prison nor has he been busted for anything at all, if you've heard the recurring (false) rumors.

The I Threes continue to release tantalizing previews of their long-awaited solo Ip, the latest being a cover of Nigerian Sonny Okosun's "Neighbor," a difficult to find, but must-have 7" . . . I simply cannot stop playing Shinehead's "Good Love Tonight," his cover of the two-time hit by soul singer Freddie Jackson. One of the most eerie and unique vocals I've heard in years and well worth seeking out . . . Till next time, Jah Love everyone! ★



LTD

Continued from page 37

In reissueville, the headline stories are **Sam Cooke and Ann Peebles**. Sam is honored by a two-record collection of his own compositions called *A Man and His Music* (RCA). It ranges from the gospel of "Touch the Hem of His Garment" to the secular gospel of "A Change Is Gonna Come," featured here in the uncensored version with its oblique commentary on the civil rights struggles then taking place. Ann Peebles didn't have Sam's otherworldly voice, nor his knack for lyric and melodic hooks. She did have a lot of heart and one of the finest soul bands of the '70s, the Hi rhythm section, organized by Willie Mitchell in Memphis, most noted for their work with Al Green. Hi Records has licensed a "best of" to the English Demon label called *I'm Gonna Tear Your Playhouse Down*, including her biggest hit, "I Can't Stand the Rain." It shows her at her best, the female equivalent of Al Green.

Finally, the hippest contemporary blues label, **Alligator**, has a sampler, *Genuine Houserockin' Music*, which shows off the company's patented combination of roots blues and modernity on a collection without a weak cut.

SKATALITES/ZAZOU BIKAYE

Continued from page 43

stretches over 18 minutes! What starts out as a catchy, extremely danceable tune ends up trying the patience of the revelers. The Ip completes its high-tech high junks with "M'Pasi Ya M'Pamba," a funky bit of hip-hop stylee, with some Arabic-sounding synth thrown in.

Not a fully satisfying effort, Zazou Bikaye still succeeds in part of their experimentations. Tradition need not be sacrificed in the quest for newness, and this pan-African hybrid does show reverence for the roots. Where will the open-mindedness of this combo take the music next? The follow-up to this Ip could be even more successful in its attempts to fuse the electronic age with the traditional sources.

The Skatalites blood-pumping acoustic sound and Zazou Bikaye's avant-disco dance mix both possess a main ingredient for good African-influenced music — a relentless, primal, mofoin' groove. The solid unfettered foundation of the seasoned pros and their bag of chops contrasted with the whiz-kid experimentation show the music thrives in both cases. The crying of Bony Bikaye's voice on "Soki Akei" is just as soulful as the wailing of Roland Alphonso's saxophone. While the sweet mud bath of the Skatalites invigorates our senses, the orbital sensations of Zazou Bikaye keep us yearning for more microchip explorations of the fertility of the Mother Continent's music.

— Tom Cheyney

THE LTD TOP 10

1. Cost of Living — Half Pint (Taxi 7")
2. "A Change is Gonna Come" — Sam Cooke (RCA)
3. "Ou Pa Ka Sav" — J.P. Marthey & Patrick Saint-Elol (GD)
4. Art of Drums — Macattack (BAAD 12")
5. Minibus — General Trees (Black Scorpio 12")
6. "Etranger-Amoureux" — Diblo Dibala (Distribution Kadance)
7. "Selling Out" — Slim Gaillard (Absolute Beginners Ip, EMI America)
8. Hold It (Now Hit It) — Beastie Boys (Def Jam 12")
9. "Dr. Love Power" — Ann Peebles (Hi)
10. "London Girl" — The Pogues (Stiff ep)

GARIFUNA

Continued from page 25

While this agricultural life was once the basis of Garifuna economic and nutritional survival, this is not the case today. Their economy and subsistence have shifted to wage labor. As a result, young adults leave home in search of jobs and those left at home often survive on remittances received from relatives who are away. The Garifuna have long been known for their key role in the field of teaching in Belize, and now their career scope has broadened to other areas of civil service.

The strength of the Garifuna cultural heritage is a large part of the reason for their survival. With a renewed interest in rediscovering their own roots and culture and a dedication to their perpetuation, this 100,000-strong people continues to prosper and make progress in the modern age. Their culture's unique combination of African, Indian and European influences, transmitted orally from generation to generation, thrives even as the Garifuna migrate away from their home region. The Garifuna do not treat lightly their heritage, saying: "Furendeiba baleerun luma babeuredeun Garifuna. Liguiyaba lidemedeme banchugu," or "Learn to read and write your Garifuna language. It will enhance your intelligence."

This article was prepared in collaboration with the participants in a radio program on Garifuna history and culture on KCRW-FM's African Beat, Nov. 9, 1985, in connection with the 1985 Garifuna Settlement Day celebration in Los Angeles.