

VOLUME THREE

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FS 3846

MUSIC OF THE BAHAMAS

RECORDED AND EDITED BY SAMUEL B. CHARTERS

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC FROM THE BAHAMAS ISLANDS



MUSIC OF THE BAHAMAS

I DRINK ALL THE RUM AND NEVER GET DRUNK
BAD WOMAN
TAKE THE NAME OF JESUS WITH YOU
'TIS SO SWEET TO TRUST IN JESUS
LIZA SIMEON
UNDER THE PRECIOUS BLOOD
MAMA, BAKE A JOHNNY CAKE, CHRISTMAS COMING
GAL, YOU WANT TO GO BACK TO SCAMBO

EVERYTHING THE MONKEY DO
IN THE SWEET BYE AND BYE
IF I WANT HIM TO RECEIVE ME
KINDLY LIGHT
OH, JESUS, I WAS PROMISED
ORANGE BLOSSOMS SMELL SO SWEET
MY BONNIE LIES OVER THE OCEAN
WHEN A MAN MARRIES HIS TROUBLES JUST BEGIN

Descriptive Notes are inside pocket

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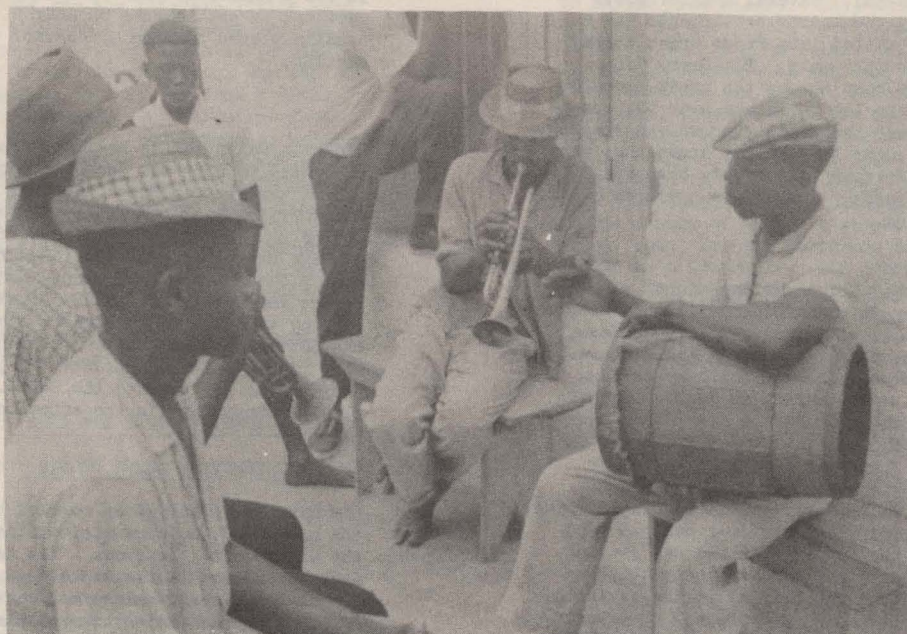


Photo by S. B. Charters

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC of the BAHAMAS

SIDE ONE

DANCES AND HYMNS

- Band 1. I DRINK ALL THE RUM AND NEVER GET DRUNK
BAD WOMAN
Joseph Green, fife.
- Band 2. TAKE THE NAME OF JESUS WITH YOU
- Band 3. 'TIS SO SWEET TO TRUST IN JESUS
Prince Forbes, guitar.
- Band 4. LIZA SIMEON
Prince Forbes and Willie Green, guitars.
- Band 5. UNDER THE PRECIOUS BLOOD
Charles Bastain, harmonica.
- Band 6. MAMA, BAKE A JOHNNY CAKE, CHRISTMAS COMING
- Band 7. GAL, YOU WANT TO GO BACK TO SCAMBO
- Band 8. EVERYTHING THE MONKEY DO

SIDE TWO

THE BRASS BANDS

- Band 1. IN THE SWEET BYE AND BYE
The Daniel Saunders Brass Band
- Band 2. IF I WANT HIM TO RECEIVE ME
- Band 3. KINDLY LIGHT
- Band 4. OH, JESUS, I WAS PROMISED
St. Bartholemew's Friendly Society
Brass Band
- Band 5. ORANGE BLOSSOMS SMELL SO SWEET - POLKA
- Band 6. MY BONNIE LIES OVER THE OCEAN
- Band 7. WHEN A MAN MARRIES HIS TROUBLES JUST
BEGIN - QUADRILLE
The Daniel Saunders Brass Band with
mandolin

There are two major holidays for the natives of the Bahamas Islands, Christmas and August Monday. The first Monday of August is celebrated every year as "The Commemoration of the Abolition of Slavery" in the British Empire, and the celebration is noisily colorful. Many Nassau people throng to the great celebrations at Fox Hill, south of the city, but many others spend the weekend at one of the Out Islands, and the larger settlements on the Out Islands ring with music and laughter through the three day week-end. Several smaller boats brought parties to the Andros settlements and a native tour party sailed into Fresh Creek Friday night on a small supply ship. The ferry men, sculling the heavy boat across the creek from the native settlement to the buildings near the construction camp where the holiday crowd was staying, shook their heads wearily. Friday night they were up until 1 a.m., ferrying the crowds back and forth across the creek. They began again at 6 a.m. on Saturday morning.

The first dance was held on Friday night, with a local band playing at one of the pavilions. It was a small native band, with drum, guitar, and saw, and the music they played was rough and exuberant. Most of the Nassau people were too busy talking with old friends, or drinking, to do much dancing, but the pavilion was crowded. A sloop from the south of Andros had come into Fresh Creek and one of the men in the crew was a well known guitar player. He joined the band at the dance and played with them until early in the morning. There was music everywhere. A commercial calypso band had come over in the supply boat and was playing for dancing in a building in the construction camp, the native band was playing in the pavilion, and three or four men had guitars, and they were playing in the small barrooms. The tradition of instrumental music in the islands seemed as strong as the tradition of vocal music, and the sound of dance music rang out across the shallow anchorage inside the mouth of the creek.

Early in the morning of August Monday a small sloop came slowly into the anchorage, the deck crowded with men from the settlement at Cargill Creek, south of Fresh Creek. They pulled the dinghy up to the side, usually dighys are pulled behind the native sloops, bailed it out, then one of the men carefully put a large bass drum into it. The bass drum was sculled over to the shore; then the rest of the men climbed into the dinghy, carrying a snare drum and three trumpet cases. It was a brass band from the Cargill Creek Settlement. They had been hired to play for a dance at the other pavilion in the settlement.

There were three brass bands on Andros, one at Staniard Creek, one at Cargill Creek, and the third at Mangrove Cay. The Staniard Creek band sometimes had a saxophone, and there had been a melophone at Mangrove Cay for a number of years, but the trumpet and drum instrumentation was the usual arrangement. I had heard about the bands from the singers I had been recording, but this was the first one that had come to Fresh Creek. They were all fishermen and farmers who played when there was a job, and not much in between. I could hear them warming up in the small building next to the pavilion and they sounded just like they should have sounded, like fishermen and farmers who didn't play much, but they had a strong singing style in their playing, and they sounded as though they played for the love of it.

The leader of the band, Kingston Brown, was a very reserved man, wearing freshly pressed white flannel trousers, a light coat, and a new straw hat. As I was talking with him I kept wondering how he had sailed most of the night in a small sloop with seven other men and kept his white trousers out of the way in the small cabin. They had brought

along three trumpets, but the third instrument belonged to a musician named David Mackey, who usually played with the band. David was the local constable at Behring Point, and he had to stay and make sure there celebration didn't get too excited. The others in the band had brought his instrument in case one of their trumpets developed valve trouble. The bass drum was lettered "St. Bartholemew's Friendly Society", and the musicians said that they were the Society's official band. It was a fraternal order that had occasional meetings in settlements on Andros, and the band usually played for the procession that opened the meeting.

Kingston was a little hesitant about recording, but he wanted to hear how the band sounded, and the others were very pleased with the idea. Kingston was worried about their playing for eight hours, and he thought they should rest, but his curiosity got the better of him. Two boys from the settlement picked up the instruments and we started across the settlement to the house. As we picked our way across a rough stretch of coral most of the settlement came out of their houses to watch. They played a few hymns; then Kingston decided they had to get back to the dance. They began playing about four in the afternoon.

The settlement stayed up most of the night and the sounds of music carried out to the beaches at the entrance to the creek. The band from Cargill Creek sounded a little winded but they had added enough volunteer drummers and rattle players to make up for the fading trumpet players. Kingston started singing everything he could remember the words to; then he started making up words. At both sides of the creek people were shouting to the ferry men to hurry across with a boat. One of the ferry men had gotten as drunk as his passengers, and he was sitting in the back of his boat letting volunteers scull it across for him. One of the guitar players was sitting on a wall along the water, playing for several people sitting around him in the darkness. The dancing had gotten more and more unrestrained, and the dancers were shouting and laughing as they moved across the dance floors. The holiday dresses and the summer suits were soaked with perspiration.

"What do you mean you aren't going to take me across?"

"I know your face. I've taken you across several times tonight."

"But I must sleep over there."

The ferry man looked at her.

"I should leave you here."

He wearily untied the boat and began sculling her across the quiet stream. The last sounds of August Monday were the creak of his oar and the sound of her voice singing softly in the darkness.

The band from Cargill Creek was the last to stop playing. At 2 a.m. the sound of music faded away, then the sounds of singing and laughing slowly died. I walked around the settlement and found the ferry man trying to tie his boat up to the dock. A woman was arguing with him.

SIDE I, Band 1: I DRINK ALL THE RUM AND NEVER
GET DRUNK

BAD WOMAN

Joseph Green, fife. Recorded at Lisbon Creek, Andros, Bahamas Islands, August 18, 1958.

Although the flute and the fife are little used in the Bahamas today both instruments were at one time very popular in the isolated settlements. The performer, Joseph Green, who was heard as a singer on Vol. II, is from a small settlement called Grant's, several miles from Lisbon Creek. The Grant's settlement is built on a low ridge about half a mile from the sea, and is isolated, to an extent, from even the Mangrove Cay settlements. In the Grant's settlement the quadrille and the schottische are still danced, and the flute often is used to accompany these older dances. The instrument Green was using was a new metal fife, with a mouthpiece like a modern piccolo. It had no keys. Both of his short pieces are still used for dancing in the settlement, and seem to be of English origin.

SIDE I, Band 2: TAKE THE NAME OF JESUS WITH YOU

SIDE I, Band 3: 'TIS SO SWEET TO TRUST IN JESUS

Prince Forbes, guitar. Recorded at Lisbon Creek, Andros, Bahamas Islands, August 18, 1958.

Forbes is a man in his thirties from the Bastian Point Settlement, between Grants and Lisbon Creek. He is the best guitar player on the southern part of the island, but it is interesting to compare his playing with that of Joseph Spence, the guitarist on Volume I. Forbes is playing in the same style, with the guitar tuned to the older English D tuning, but his playing has none of the excitement of Spence's. Forbes often plays for church groups, and on a Sunday morning he usually sits on the beach at Bastian Point playing humms for the people of the settlement. His playing with a dance orchestra can be heard on the last bands of this side.

SIDE I, Band 4: LIZA SIMEON

Prince Forbes and Willie Green, guitars. Recorded at Lisbon Creek, Andros, Bahamas Islands, August 18, 1958.

LIZA SIMEON is a popular quadrille melody, and is played for a line dance that is similar to the English quadrille and was certainly derived from it. Forbes plays the melody and the second guitarist, Willie Green, a son of the fife player, Joseph Green, plays the chords.

SIDE I, Band 5: UNDER THE PRECIOUS BLOOD

Charles Bastian, harmonica. Recorded at Lisbon Creek, Andros, Bahamas Islands, August 19, 1958.

Many of the men in the fishing boats learn to play the harmonica while they are out at sea. Bastian is the captain of a thirty foot sloop, the Charity, and his crew includes the singer, Frederick McQueen, who was heard on Volume II. He is deeply religious, as are most of the Andros people, and he plays only hymns and spirituals. UNDER THE PRECIOUS BLOOD, as well as the hymns played by the guitar player, Prince Forbes, is taken from a hymn book in the settlement church.

SIDE I, Band 6: MAMA, BAKE A JOHNNY CAKE, CHRISTMAS
COMING

SIDE I, Band 7: GAL, YOU WANT TO GO BACK TO SCAMBO

SIDE I, Band 8: EVERYTHING THE MONKEY DO

Fresh Creek Dance Band. H. Brown, maracas and vocal lead; Prince Forbes, guitar; Alfred Gay, drum; James Clair, saw; local children, sticks. Recorded at Fresh Creek Settlement, Andros, Bahamas Islands, August 2, 1958.

This is not an organized dance orchestra in any sense of the word. The guitar player was sailing to Nassau from Mangrove Cay, and the tide had drifted his sloop into Fresh Creek that afternoon. H. Brown, who sang on Volume II, is from Staniard Creek, the drummer, Alfred Gay, is from Behring Point, and the saw player, James Clair, is from Love Hill. A dance pavilion proprietor in Fresh Creek needed some entertainment for the August Monday celebrations and he asked H. Brown to bring some others in to play. MAMA, BAKE A JOHNNY CAKE, is a traditional Bahaman Christmas song and refers to the custom of baking a simple dough cake, the johnny cake, for the Christmas holidays. It is danced as a Quadrille. The other two songs are popular throughout the islands and are recent imports from islands to the south. The term "scambo" means any far place.

SIDE II, Band 1: IN THE SWEET BYE AND BYE

The Daniel Saunders Brass Band. Daniel Saunders, first trumpet; Erskine Green, second trumpet; Theopolus Williams, drum. Recorded at Pindars Settlement, Mangrove Cay, Andros, August 18, 1958.

The brass band tradition is still strong in the Bahamas and there are three small bands on Andros. The bands play for processions or dances, and often sail hundreds of miles to play for a special occasion. The poverty of the settlement and the small numbers of people have limited the number of instruments available, but the bands play often and there is a lively rivalry between the musicians. They are often hired to play for funeral processions, and BYE AND BYE is an example of the hymn music played for these solemn occasions. The processions are led by the priests and catechists, and the band marches in front of the coffin. The procession is very similar to the old fashioned funerals, with brass bands, which may still be found in many parts of England. The music, simple harmonizations of the better known hymns, is also clearly English.

SIDE II, Band 2: IF I WANT HIM TO RECEIVE ME

SIDE II, Band 3: KINDLY LIGHT

SIDE II, Band 4: OH, JESUS, I WAS PROMISED

St. Bartholemew's Friendly Society Brass Band. Kingston Brown, first trumpet; Nathaniel Mackey, second trumpet; Willis Thompson, snare drum; Arthur Brown, bass drum. Recorded at Fresh Creek Settlement, Andros, Bahamas Islands, August 4, 1958.

The St. Bartholemew's Friendly Society Band sailed from Cargill Creek to Fresh Creek to play for an August Monday dance in one of the Fresh Creek dancing pavilions. The dance orchestra heard on the other side of the record played at the other pavilion. The Brass Band recorded before the dance and played a number of the hymns that are used for processions and religious gatherings. As in the first example by the Daniel Saunder's band the style is closely related to the simple harmonizations of the church hymnals. It is similar to the music played by small brass bands of the Salvation Army in England and in the United States.

The instrumentation is a standard one for groups of this kind. The local drums are made of goat hide stretched across the top of a nail barrel. The bottom is removed from the barrel, and when the drummer arrives at a dance he has to build a small fire and hold the open end of the barrel over the flames. The heat tightens the skin until the drum is in tune to play. The saw is used as an instrument similar to the scraping instruments that are used by almost every Afro-American cultural group. The player holds it with the handle against his left shoulder and the back of the blade resting in his left hand. He scrapes the teeth with a table knife held in the right hand. The maracas are a recent innovation, and are still not commonly found. Local musicians often join in with other instruments and during the three nights the group played there was considerable variation in instrumentation; though the musicians felt that the combination of drum, guitar, and saw was most typically Bahaman.

SIDE II, Band 5: ORANGE BLOSSOMS SMELL SO SWEET
- POLKA

SIDE II, Band 6: MY BONNIE LIES OVER THE OCEAN

SIDE II, Band 7: WHEN A MAN MARRIES HIS
TROUBLES JUST BEGIN - QUADRILLE

The Daniel Saunders Brass Band with mandolin. Daniel Saunders, first trumpet; Erskine Green, second trumpet; Edgar Green, drum; Harold Finley, mandolin. Recorded at Pindars Settlement, Mangrove Cay, Andros, August 18, 1958.

As the band was finishing its performance of SWEET BYE AND BYE the mandolin player, Harold Finley, came racing along the beach on a bicycle, his mandolin hanging from a string around his neck. As soon as the crowd saw him coming they began to jump with excitement. The music that the band played for dancing was very different from the music of the processions. It was noisy, roaring music, with the two trumpet players trying to outdo each other and the women leaping and dancing around them. Finley was playing a mandolin strung with plastic ukelele strings; so the instrument was very soft in tone, but his fine rhythm, and the exuberant drumming of Edgar Green, completely changed the sound of the band. It was almost a small jazz band, with attempts at creative solos by both of the trumpet players. Finley had a good voice, but the words to the older dances have been forgotten; so he sang along in the same kind of "scatting" style that became popular in American jazz singing in the 1920's. The three dances, the polka, the waltz, and the quadrille are still the most popular dances of the older settlements on Andros.

A NOTE

This is the last of a series of three records devoted to the music of the Bahamas. The others in the series are -

FS 3844 MUSIC OF THE BAHAMAS, Volume I,
BAHAMAN FOLK GUITAR

FS 3845 MUSIC OF THE BAHAMAS, Volume II,
SACRED MUSIC, LAUNCHING SONGS AND BALLADS

FS 3846 MUSIC OF THE BAHAMAS, Volume III,
INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

The material was collected during an extended field trip to Andros Island in 1958. The trip was done without sponsorship or assistance, but despite many difficulties the over all aim, which was to document every type of native traditional music on Andros, was finally achieved. Some remnants of English ballad material were collected, but in every case it was determined that the source was one of the many school song books which were in use in the islands in the years between 1870 and 1900, rather than an earlier aural tradition. Rather than including these remnants it was felt to be more valid to include as many of the magnificent native ballads as possible, and three of the long Andros ballads were included on Volume II. The native guitar style is very popular, and a number of musicians have brought the style to a high technical development. Because of the importance of the guitar music the entire Volume I was devoted to the playing of the best island guitarist.

Because of the isolation and backwardness of Andros the music of this island seems to reflect the older music of the Bahamas, and is perhaps the heart of the Bahaman musical style. There are two important Bahaman musical styles not popular on Andros and not included in the series of recordings. One is the newer "gospel" singing of the larger churches in Nassau, and the other is the highly developed drumming of the dance groups in Nassau. The predominant religious group on Andros is the older Episcopal Church, which does not encourage "gospel" singing in the services. The style has developed in the newer Baptist churches which are becoming popular in Nassau. The drum style is largely limited to Nassau because of the hybrid nature of the city. It is closely related to the drumming of the larger West Indian island groups to the south, and the more isolated islands, like Andros, have not developed the style. An excellent documentation of both these styles can be found on Folkways record FE 4440, RELIGIOUS SONGS & DRUMS IN THE BAHAMAS, recorded in Nassau by Marshall Stearns.

Many of the Andros people were very helpful during the weeks of recording, and grateful acknowledgement is made to Commissioner James Thompson, Fresh Creek; David Mackey, Behring Point; Prince Albert Jolly, Mangrove Cay; and Leroy Bannister, Lisbon Creek; for their kindness. The recording was done by S. B. Charters, with assistance from A. R. Danberg.