

haiti confidential

COOK vector

STEREO

*The inscrutable music of Haiti . . .
definite, authentic, for the initiate.*

From after hours jazz to ritual drum rhythms



Lavinia Williams' Haitian Voodoo Dancers and Musicians
Ensemble Aux Calebasses ("Finest Meringue Band in Haiti")
TIFloo (little flute)
Panama m' tombe
Vaccines of La Perchoire (giant bamboo flutes)
and others

HAITI

Nodding your head won't break your neck*

On the periphery of the Caribbean volcanic circle, fifty miles southeast of Cuba, between Jamaica and Puerto Rico lies the Republic of Haiti, dreaming of its proud history while it struggles to find the next meal. This nation of ex-slaves whose forefathers defeated Napoleon's armies is a land of violent contrasts, strong emotions and some of the sweetest melody and infectious rhythm to be heard in the Carib world. Everybody in Haiti dances. A few of them frequenting the sophisticated city hotels and night clubs swing their hips to the seductive Haitian meringue. All of them respond to the pulse rousing *tambour* or voodoo drum with some form of graceful country dance.

Donkey works, horse gets paid*

One Haitian who was too young to do much dancing found another way to join in the fun. Ten-year-old Aluption Cadet whittled himself a workable five-holed flute out of a thin bamboo tube and began to teach himself how to play. Now, seven years later, he is known across Port-au-Prince as *Tifloo* (petite flûte), and his flute is his future. We first heard him in the outdoor *Theatre de Verdure* where the National Troupe Folklorique was dancing under the firm guidance of Lavinia Williams. The dancing was full of carefree charm, but *Tifloo's* tone ravished our ears from the first notes. He plays mostly with the accompaniment of a trio of voodoo drums, played with fingers, palms, thin sticks and a small mallet, with occasional vocals by the virile baritone of Roger Morisseau. The beautiful *La Covée* is a dance that deals with harvesting and love, and the dancers can be heard stamping furiously just after the music speeds up for its swirling finale. In the *Contra Danse*, *Tifloo* becomes the Creole counterpart of an American country fiddler at a square dance, while Morisseau takes over the role of caller.

Panama m' Tombe--the fallen hat

One day in 1897 President Hyppolite of Haiti lost his hat while on the way to quell an insurrection. As it happened, Hyppolite suffered a fainting spell, and died a few days later. The song *Panama m' Tombé* was composed gleefully and almost instantaneously, giving both song and title lasting significance. To this day it is a rare Haitian who will pause to pick up his hat if he should happen to drop it.

The true Haitian *meringue* (pronounced in Haiti as in pie) is a style that has a comparatively easy-going rhythm and unbounded melodiousness. Like calypso, the meringue is usually made up about something that actually happened. We recorded in the big thatched-roof night club called *Aux Calabasses* (after the 2,400 calabashes dangling from the ceiling) in the outlying Carrefour district. In the meringue *Paulette*, baritone Morisseau takes a double role, once as a natural baritone, then as a very unnatural, double-voiced phenomenon, honking weirdly in high harmony with himself. An astonished and apropos American throat surgeon wandered in while we were recording, soon was probing and kneading the amenable Roger's larynx. Roger said he learned the trick many years ago. Having spent a whole night awake, trying to imitate the sound of a locomotive whistle, in the morning he fell asleep and dreamed that he could do it. He has never forgotten how. It may be suggestive of the Haitian essence that no engines could be heard operating in minor thirds.

Vaccine is the Creole name for the strange, jungly music recorded at *Le Perchoire*, 3,000 feet above Port-au-Prince, where five blowers puff out one note each on big bamboo tubes while tapping them with sticks to create the clicking rhythm. A drum helps to fill out the pattern. This particular form belongs to a voodoo dance and contains a favorite Caribbean rhythmic trick of opposing three beats to two—simultaneously.

As Haiti struggles up along the difficult road of independence into modern times, one sign of *her* times is the younger generation. The alphabet song is sung by 45 boys of the second grade as they learn how to form letters into syllables. Lyrics: "F avec A fait FA; F avec E fait FE; F avec I fait FI, avec O fait FO, avec U fait FU; FA, FE, FI, FO, FU. CH avec A fait CHA . . . etc."



Vaccines of La Perchoire

Side A: Lavinia Williams Haitian Voodoo Dancers and Musicians

A youiyo—an incantation with Morisseau and three drums lead by Jean Remy
La Covée
Juba
Congo
Contra Danse
Danse Tresse-Ruban

Side B: Sound Picture of Haiti

*A Tioupoutiou**—*Meringue Ensemble Aux Calabasses de Nemours* Jean-Baptiste
Panama m' Tombe—*Trio Au Chanteclair*: Claudis Alexis, drum; Augustin St. Hubert, guitar; Fredric Francois, maracas—congo
Paulette—Roger Morisseau and combo: Jean Remy, drums; Milord Moujois, trumpet; Ludovic Glaudin, guitar—meringue
Voodoo Danse—*Vaccines of La Perchoire*
Alphabet song—45 schoolboys

Recorded by Carter Harman with Cook widerange stereophonic equipment.

*For more fine Haitian meringues, hear MERINGUE!—Cook 1186, 12" LP.

C. H.

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Stamford, Connecticut

*Haitian proverb