NOTES\_COMPARSA\_SCAN

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THE COMPARSA

The comparsa is a processional dance, a march. It is of African origin: it was performed at the profane festivals of slaves and at those permitted by their masters, for carnivals (the day of the Kings and the processions of Corpus). Only the music and a few dance steps remind us of this origin.

During the frenetic parade, whites, blacks and mixed-race people merge. The entire population of Santiago is in the streets for the duration of the carnival and follows the comparsas dancing.

At the head of each comparsa march the musicians followed by the costumed participants who lead behind them the crowd irresistibly won over by the rhythm of the dance.

The phenomenon of integration produced by the comparsa is not only racial, but social, since absolutely everyone participates in it, regardless of social and economic level.

All the musicians use Creole drums reminiscent of those of Bantu origin (ngoma), and others of Dahomean origin (tam-tam) by adapting the bass drum of military music to a drum of very little depth garnished with two large skins, which are called "galleta". In addition, they use atcherés and the traditional carnival rattles. They also use bells and bells, and especially now rims of car and truck wheels, on which they strike with iron rods.

To pierce the sonorous power of all these percussions, the main theme of the songs is entrusted to a trumpet or a cornet with valves, and most often to the Chinese horn which allows very high sounds to be heard from a great distance. All the participants in the comparsa can thus respond in chorus. In addition, each person has a whistle, a rattle or some other object that has become a percussion instrument to support the rhythm of the music that drives them.

The music of the comparsa is almost always improvised, based on a simple theme imposed by the cornet and to which the choir responds.

The text is almost always an incongruous refrain, more rhythmic than poetic. These texts were previously used as an indirect attack on those in power or as a social critique. Today, many of these refrains reflect the people's satisfaction with the Revolution.

The general rhythm of the comparsa almost always varies, resulting in various choreographic figures on the part of the dancers. Each time the solo instrument attacks the theme, it performs a series of variations and improvisations, but the choir takes up the chorus without any variation and on an even rhythm.

Many of the comparsas on this recording have taken up themes from trendy songs, such as: "La vie en rose" or themes from paso-dobles bullfighters.