

**Alan Boulanger — John Cowley — Marc Monneray. *La Musique antillaise en France. Discographie 1929 — 1959. French-Caribbean Music in France. A discography 1929 — 1959. AFAS — LAMÉCA, Guadeloupe 2008***  
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Recordings have had a great importance on the diffusion of the new musical idioms, which spread from America to Europe (and the rest of the world) in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The most prominent example is certainly jazz. The history of recorded jazz has been documented in minute detail in discographies since the 1930s. The amount of attention paid to jazz recordings has left in shadow many other forms of vernacular music which had a similar evolution. To give an example, Argentinean tango, Cuban rumba and Hawaiian popular music also came to Europe in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century through recordings and visiting musicians. In their wake followed local European bands which attempted to emulate the style and in turn made new recordings. But the discographical documentation of these idioms lags far behind jazz.

Alan Boulanger, John Cowley and Marc Monneray have now compiled a discography of a relatively unknown idiom whose history parallels that of jazz, but which was mainly limited to the Francophone world. Hearing for the first time the recordings made by French-Caribbean bands in the 1920s and 1930s gives a strange feeling. The instrumentation and sound resemble old New Orleans jazz, but rhythmically the compositions are waltzes or beguines. Was French Caribbean music influenced by jazz? Was jazz influenced by French-Caribbean music? Were they independent, parallel developments? We do not really know.

The first Creole musicians from Martinique seem to have appeared in Europe in 1902 after the eruption of the volcano which destroyed the entire city of St. Pierre, but the exodus of musicians really began in the 1920s, when the Antillean community in Paris was expanding. At first they seem to have played at dances and cafes for their compatriots, but gradually the music also attracted the attention of night-clubbers and the emerging community of jazz fans. The regular recording of Antillean music began in 1929, when clarinetist Alexandre Stellio and L'Orchestre Antillais made their first recordings for Odeon. In 1931, the band also performed at the Guadeloupien pavilion and the Paris Colonial Exposition, which gave the music wider exposure.

In the following years, Antillean musicians also became involved in the wider jazz and dance music scene in Paris. For instance, Guadeloupien saxophonist, Robert Mavounzy, played with Django Reinhardt, and trumpeter, Abel Beauregard, from the same island, played in Rico's Creole Band, a rumba band led by Filiberto Rico from Cuba. Such recordings are also documented here.

Paris was the main recording center for Antillean music. The discography ends in 1959, thus covering the entire 78 rpm era and the first microgroove releases. The authors note that on the basis of information available, it was not always possible to separate shellac and microgroove releases from each other, as the same recordings could be released in both formats. Local labels emerged in Guadeloupe and Martinique in the 1950s, and in the following decades, Antillean companies such as Disques Debs became a major force in the development of Franco-Caribbean music. Hopefully, their activities will also be documented later on.

*La Musique antillaise en France* comes with an historical introduction in English and French, biographical notes on the principal artists, a list of Paris clubs active in presenting Antillean music, a bibliography and artist and title indexes. It is presented with the care and amount of detail which we have come to expect from these authors. The book is invaluable to all collectors and researchers of Antillean music, but it can be recommended to anyone with a broader interest in the history of jazz or 20<sup>th</sup> century popular music in general.

My only complaint is that the book is not for sale. I am informed by the publisher that it is available — free of charge — to members of AFAS, Association française des détenteurs de documents sonores et audiovisuels. Interested persons can find AFAS at <http://afas.imageson.org/>. The book is well worth the membership fee.

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