

BOOK REVIEWS

Lorna McDaniel. *The Big Drum Ritual of Carriacou: Praisesongs in Rememory of Flight*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998. pp. xiv + 198. Index, bibliography, photographs, musical transcriptions.

Sydney Hutchinson

Lorna McDaniel's object of study is the music and dance of the Big Drum ritual found in Carriacou, Grenada; however, this book also treats Afro-Caribbean religion in a more general way than its title might imply. The author lived on the island and conducted research there over a lengthy period, but this work is a comparative one that is based primarily on archival research rather than fieldwork. Her unique approach relates historical record and traditional stories to song texts, relying on linguistic and literary analyses. Musical structure, cultural processes, and aesthetic principles are also examined.

The Big Drum Ritual is loosely structured around a traditional theme, the tale of the "Flying Africans," which is told throughout the Caribbean as well as in contemporary novels. Chapter One examines the oldest Big Drum songs, in which the principal theme was that of escape or literal flight. These songs combine languages of three types—Patois (a creole), colonial, and African—and are primarily religious in use. McDaniel carefully analyzes many of these texts and the etymologies of the surviving African words in order to reconstruct the history and social life of the nine Nations, or African sociocultural groups, represented in the repertoire. She suggests that the dance event was the medium for creating a new language and organizing a pluralistic society, while resisting complete integration.

Chapter two focuses on the more recent Creole songs, which do not manifest specific national characteristics, and relates these to Creole society. McDaniel suggests a new process of acculturation called the "reversal," in which social roles are exchanged while retaining essentially the same logic. She describes the aesthetic principles and symbolism of the dances and suggests that the Big Drum songs and dances express the social structure of the past. Today, there are specific rhythms associated with each of the nine Nations and individuals may reclaim their African identity through affinity with one of these rhythms. In this way, music helps to create a new social structure.

In the third chapter, the Big Drum is compared with other danced religions of the Caribbean as a means of "spiritual flight." While most of these are rooted in Yoruba culture, the Big Drum is not and therefore lacks the feature of spirit manifestation that is caused by drum music in many other Afro-Caribbean rituals. McDaniel notes that the changes induced by processes of acculturation have generated a continuum of religious practices from African to Christian that is

more complex than the syncretic explanations usually offered by anthropologists would suggest. She also invokes Esu Elegbara and the literary theory of Henry Louis Gates to help explain "double-mouthed" Creole languages and cultures.

The compositional techniques of the Big Drum are the subject of the fourth chapter. The texture and style of Big Drum songs are quite different from that of other Caribbean repertoires; the author suggests this is due to their greater age and to the desire and conscious effort of Carriacouans to retain the African elements of their music. It is revealed that the act of composition is based on song leading and extemporized text alterations, rather than on the creation of new melodies. The development of the song type "Hallecord" is reconstructed by comparison of melodic elements and song texts are classified by theme. Finally, McDaniel proposes that Calypso is the contemporary heir to the Big Drum songs, which are no longer being composed, by reason of their similar themes and structures.

McDaniel introduces so many different topics and ideas in this comparatively short work that it can sometimes be difficult to follow her train of thought. Printing 129 song texts did help the author to accomplish her stated goal of "preserving and disseminating an example of early African ritual in the Americas" (167). However, the huge numbers of songs that are interspersed throughout the book interrupt its flow and prevent the author from analyzing any of them in detail. The work's historical depth is admirable, but it could have been strengthened if the tantalizing glimpse of present-day Carriacou and its inhabitants we receive from McDaniel's beautiful acknowledgements had been carried through the rest of the work. I, for one, would like to have learned more about the Big Drum in contemporary Carriacou and her collaborators' relationships to the ritual and its music.

Alan Dundes, ed. *International Folkloristics*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. pp. xiii + 255 Preface, acknowledgements, suggestions for further reading, index.

Kurt Hartwig

There are a variety of ways of telling history. Two obvious alternatives are the "deep cut," an in-depth look at representative moments, and the "shallow cut," which exchanges detail for breadth. Alan Dundes chooses the latter approach in his latest anthology, *International Folkloristics*. Dundes surveys 20 articles from "the founders of folklore." His purpose with this collection is threefold: to facilitate teaching, to present the historical development of theory, and most of all, "to confirm the existence of international folkloristics as an independent, worldwide, world-class academic discipline" (vii).

Regardless of this foremost goal, this text is primarily a teaching tool. The articles, presented largely in order of original publication date, span from Jacob Grimm (1815) to Kenneth Goldstein (1971). The appellation "founders of folklore," then, is accurate in the sense of an ongoing re-invention or evaluative