

Introduction: Caribbean Music

The Caribbean is a broad term given to the region of the Americas that consists of a number of islands on the Caribbean Sea. Some of its largest islands are Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Puerto Rico. Prior to the arrival of Christopher Columbus at the end of the fifteenth century, these islands were occupied by the native Arawak Indian and other indigenous groups of people. With the colonisation of many of these islands by England, France, Spain and the Netherlands, the indigenous populations were virtually wiped out by disease brought by the Europeans. As the sugar plantation economy grew, African slaves from the western coast of Africa were imported to serve as labourers to work on these plantations. Following the Emancipation Act of 1834, Central African, East Indian, and Chinese indentured labourers were brought in to replace the workforce. Today, the population of many Caribbean islands is a mix of African, Indian, Afro-European and Afro-Asian descent. The diversity of languages spoken in the Caribbean reflects the region's complex and colourful colonial history: in Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica and Barbados, English is the main language; in Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, Spanish is spoken, whilst Haiti, Martinique and Guadeloupe are French-speaking as they were colonised by France. However, in many islands, localised forms of language and speech, known as Creole, also exist. These linguistic blends can often be heard in the lyrics of reggae and calypso.

With such an eclectic mix of peoples and languages, the musical cultures of the Caribbean are a melting pot of old cultures from Europe, Africa and many other sub-cultures. Today, some of the musical styles and genres of the Caribbean are hugely popular in many parts of the world. The music of the steel band, calypso and reggae all had their roots in the region, whilst the music of Cuba, Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic has influenced popular Latin dance music such as salsa, rumba, cha-cha-cha and mambo.

Candidates do not need to study music from the whole of the Caribbean, but should be taught about the instruments and musical features of Reggae and Calypso music, which are described in the following sections. The instruments or terms specific to this world focus with which candidates should be familiar are printed in bold. Information has been provided on the history and socio-cultural context of this music for the benefit of teachers; candidates should have a general awareness of the background to each style, but will not be tested in detail on this.

1 Jamaica: Reggae Music

Jamaica's most popular music form is reggae. Its spread was aided by a vibrant recording industry and the **sound system** (the mobile music playing and loudspeaker system mounted on trucks that played music to the public). Reggae music has been a powerful and liberating force for the poor and oppressed in Jamaica. Strongly rooted in the historical conditions of slavery and colonialism, reggae music spoke up against poverty, crime, political violence and police brutality. But more than that, reggae is linked to **Rastafarianism**, a twentieth century religious movement. Originating among the poor urban class in the 1930s, its development was influenced by the teachings of the black nationalist Marcus Garvey (1887–1940), who urged black people to look to Africa as their motherland. The belief in a single God – Jah – is an important aspect of the religion. Haile Selassie (1892–1975), emperor of Ethiopia is acclaimed as the messiah of Rastafarianism; because of this, the colours red, green and gold, which are the colours of the Ethiopian flag are prevalent in Rastafarianism. Central to its tenets are the message of peace, love, and a lifestyle of self-expression, self-reliance and dignity. Cultural symbols such as locks or matted hair, headdress, garbs in the colours mentioned above and ceremonial rituals give Rastafarians their identity.

By the 1970s, the sociocultural influences of Rastafarianism began to be felt among the middle and upper classes, as well as a new generation of nationalistic youths. Reggae stars such as Bob Marley, Burning Spear and Alpha Blondy, whose reggae songs carry messages of human rights and universal love helped introduce the music and the ideals of Rastafarianism to the world. Marley's synthesis of revolutionary ideology and Rastafarian spirituality appealed hugely to the lower class and disenfranchised peoples, especially those in the English-speaking Caribbean.

Other Jamaican reggae artists such as Bunny Wailer, Peter Tosh, Jimmy Cliff and the Third World Band also helped reggae gain worldwide international popularity. The music, message and the unique communicative skills of Bob Marley and many Jamaican Reggae artists captured the imagination and admiration of the world.

Instruments

Traditional instrumentation in reggae consisted of two **guitars** (**acoustic** or **electric**), one for **rhythm** and one for **lead**, **drums**, **congas**, **keyboards**, a lead singer and backing vocalists. Instruments that may be included in reggae music today include **drum kit**, **bongo drums**, **chimes**, **tambourines**, **cowbell** and **shakers**, **electric organ**, **string instruments**, **saxophone**, **trombone**, **trumpet** and **French horns**.

Musical Features

Tempo, rhythm and metre

Reggae music was strongly influenced by many different styles of music including the *Mento*, a style of Jamaican folk music which is a fusion of European and African elements, as well as American jazz and rhythm and blues. The immediate precursors of reggae were *Ska* and *Rocksteady*, Jamaica's dance music genres that emerged in the 1960s. Reggae, which combined the prominent offbeat bass of *Ska* and the slower tempo of *Rocksteady* followed. The genre's strong and critical social commentary, its link with Rastafarianism and the Jamaican lower class made it different from its two earlier precursors.

Reggae music has a 4/4 metre and the tempo is usually slow. One of the most distinctive rhythmic features of reggae music is its emphasis on the **offbeat**, in which the guitar or piano (or both) plays staccato chords on beats 2 and 4. This **rhythmic ostinato** is combined with the bass drum on beat 3 resulting in a unique sense of phrasing with the first beat omitted. This rhythmic style, dominating reggae music in the 1970s, came to be known as '**One Drop**', which is named after Bob Marley's song of that same name.

Variations on the bass drum can be introduced to provide variety, e.g. playing on the first beat, the first and the third beat (or on every beat), introducing two quaver notes in the first or third beat, or adding **syncopated** semiquaver and quaver patterns.

The electric bass guitar typically plays a syncopated rhythm corresponding to the bass drum while other instruments add cross-rhythms or counter melodies. As a result of the combination of different rhythmic patterns played by different instruments, the rhythmic texture of reggae music is one of **polyrhythm**, with sets of patterns of regular beats, offbeats and syncopation.

Melody, lyrics, vocal style and texture

Melodies can be borrowed and adapted from hymns, work songs, spirituals and Jamaican traditional songs. Original reggae songs are also composed by individual creators and performers who infuse their own experiences into their songs, Bob Marley, Bunny Wailer, Peter Tosh being some notable examples. The lyrics often reflect the themes of universal peace, love, Africa as homeland and references to the Rastafarian god '**Jah**'. Lyrics carrying messages of human rights, poverty, crime, political violence and police brutality are also common.

Reggae songs are generally in **verse–chorus** form. Due to the influence of the work song, call-and-response texture can also be found in reggae music. A unique characteristic of reggae singing by the lead vocalist is the use of volume oscillation (tremolo) rather than pitch oscillation (vibrato). This style of singing is referred to as '**toasting**'. Backing vocals usually sing in harmony, either throughout the melody or as counter melody to the main vocal line.

2 Trinidad and Tobago: Calypso Music

The islands of Trinidad and Tobago are known for **steel band** and calypso music. Since the late nineteenth century, **Carnival**, a festive celebration preceding Lent, has been the main context for the development and performance of calypso. Before the 1930s, strolling minstrels sang songs that included a combination of free speech, humour, theatre and sentimental expressions about the labourers' African homeland. Known as *banja*, these were the precursors of Calypso. Until the 1960s, these songs were accompanied by guitar or banjo. As the style evolved and continued to develop, it became known as Calypso.

Calypso songs were topical, commenting on local political issues, daily lives and relations between men and women. It was the cultural expression for the largely illiterate Afro-Trinidadian working class society.

Calypso songs were originally sung in venues called **tents**, constructed from bamboo and thatch. Tents (or halls or arenas) are still the main venue in which calypso singing takes place. During the weeks preceding Carnival, calypsonians (singers of Calypso) will perform each night in four or five tents. The best singers are selected to perform before a panel of judges at a show on the Sunday before Lent. The best calypso of the year will then be crowned the Calypso Monarch, the reward of which would be cash and fame for the winning song and singer.

The first commercial recordings of calypso music were made as early as 1914. Multinational record companies such as Decca also helped spread the interests in calypso with the distribution of **78 rpm records**. Each year, the calypsonians sang new songs to capture the spirit of Carnival celebrations. By the mid-1930s, calypsonians were making visits to New York city where they recorded their latest hits. After World War II, interests in calypso spread throughout New York, Miami, Chicago and California. New calypso songs were composed in the United States, extending the reach of the music. In the 1950s, calypso songs were played over the radio, television and on film. By the 1970s, calypso gained international popularity as sub-genres such as *Soca* developed. The lyrics of these new calypsos moved away from topical local themes to a more dance hall/party ambience.

Instruments

Early calypso instrumentation emphasized West African elements where voice and drums are strongly featured. But the influences of European and British marching bands soon led to the borrowing of acoustic guitar, **penny whistle** and fife, used as lead instruments. By the mid-1950s, steel bands became a popular accompaniment for calypsos at Carnivals. Today, big band instruments including the **saxophone, trumpet, trombone, clarinet, piano, synthesizers, electric guitars, bass guitar**, and so on can also be heard in modern calypso music.

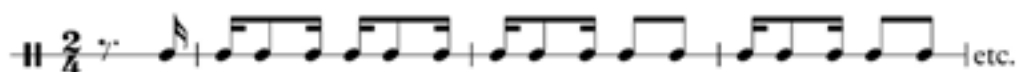
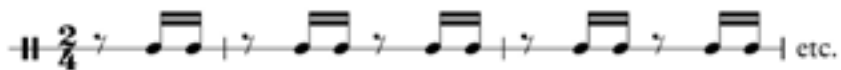
Steel pans were constructed from large, 55-gallon oil drums. In the 1940s when Trinidad's Petroleum industry began to thrive due to increased demand for oil, there was a plentiful supply of oil drums. Using discarded oil drums, the islanders began to make musical instruments out of them. The heads of these oil drums were beaten into a series of convex circles. Different sizes and cuts of the pan created high- and low-pitched pans; tuned dents were carefully hammered into the head of each pan to produce pitched notes. A number of pans producing different pitch range form the steel band, in which the instruments are divided into melody, soprano, tenor, and bass pans. From its inception, the steel band and calypso have been strongly linked. The number of members in a steel band varies from a few players to 20 or more. During the Carnival, pans were strapped over the shoulder or worn hanging from a strap around the neck. A distinctive feature of steel band playing is the use of **rolling/tremolo** to create sustained chords or longer notes.

Traditionally, rattles made of dried-out calabash filled with seeds accompanied steel band and calypso songs. Today, an array of percussion instruments such as the **maracas**, conga, bongos, **cowbells**, guiros, triangles, trap drums and **bass drums** are common.

Musical Features

Tempo, rhythm and metre

Early calypso songs were slower in tempo, but to suit the dancing and the road marches at the Carnival, the music is now mostly faster and in duple metre. **Syncopated** rhythms in the music are a typical characteristic of calypso, for example:



The pattern of two longer and one shorter notes is frequently found in both melody and bass lines:

Melody, harmony, lyrics, vocal style and texture

The earlier, slower calypso songs tended to be in the minor mode, whereas most modern calypsos are in the major mode, with simple harmonies. Melodic lines are often simple and may return during instrumental interludes. Melodic instruments may imitate the vocalist's melodic contour whilst also providing supporting harmony. Calypso songs often begin with an instrumental introduction and instrumental refrains after each verse are also common.

Calypso songs are often in **verse-chorus** form, following the poetic structure of a traditional ballad. Melodic structure varies from song to song, but a typical form is that of A, A, B, C. At times, the same melodic phrases are repeated over and over, very likely to allow for the Calypsonian to focus on the improvisation of the lyrics.

In terms of vocal texture, contrast between solo and chorus singing is common. The chorus sings a short refrain, often in harmony, and the solo singer improvises, making up new verses on the spot. At times, the words do not fit neatly with the music, resulting in the singer rushing the words in speech rhythm in order to fit the lines into the time.

Calypsonians are singer-poets; many adopt catchy stage names – Attila the Hun, Lord Invader, Roaring Lion, Lord Kitchener, Mighty Sparrow, for example. The lyrics often use satire to comment on political exploitation and economic injustice, although there are also songs sung for entertainment.