Rebecca Dirksen, *After the Dance, the Drums Are Heavy: Carnival, Politics, and Musical Engagement in Haiti*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. xl + 441 pp. (Paper US\$35.00)

A Haitian drum, when created in time-honored fashion, calls for a sturdy musician. To put it differently, drumming is not for the frail. Even the sturdiest, however, might find it challenging to parade over rugged roads with drums slung across their bodies. Master Drummer Frisner Augustin (1948–2012), who created a Mardi Gras band in his youth, boasted about striding up and down the steep avenues of Port-au-Prince with his drum—and without sleep—for the three big days before Ash Wednesday. What made this possible? Rebecca Dirksen's novel accounting of Carnival in Haiti addresses that question.¹

Dirksen's organization of her book is refreshing. Book-length music ethnographies too often introduce their subject with dry, compartmentalized literature reviews drawing on academic themes and issues. This author, having listened carefully to her subjects, lets *them* define the themes and issues in Haitian Creole. Following the spirit of Spiralism, a homegrown aesthetic first articulated in Haiti during the Duvalier years (1957–86), she reopens Gage Averill's 1994 inquiry published in *Ethnomusicology* ("Anraje to Angaje: Carnival Politics and Music in Haiti") to present the entwined qualities *anraje* (enraged) and *angaje* (politically engaged) and their performances in the street theaters of *manifestasyon* (demonstrations) and *defile* (parades). Arguments spiral outward without linearity "as carnival is something that by necessity goes on" (p. 11). Other local notions that draw from everyday Haitian discourse and drive the double helix of *anraje-angaje/manifestasyon-defile* include *vagabondaj* (vagabonding) and its associated *pwen* (critiques, often coded), *betiz* (vulgarity), and *polemik* (polemic). *Vagabondaj*, an unruly defiance with the potential for creative change, constitutes one path of inquiry in the book and complements the other path: sounding, a "sonified mobility" (p. xxxiv) related to musicking and listening and the contrapuntal elements that compose those experiences.

Dirksen lays out this conceptual framework in the first chapter. Succeeding chapters read the kaleidoscope of Carnivals that transpired during the tumultuous years following the departure of President René Préval from office in 2011 through the presidency of Jovenel Moïse, a protégé of Préval's successor. Although Préval stepped down peacefully, the rise of his successor (not a protégé), popular music star Michel Joseph Martelly (a.k.a. Sweet Micky),

1 Disclaimer: I was a reviewer for Oxford and wrote a blurb for the back of the book.

introduced seemingly unprecedented yet simultaneously recycled twists to the drama of Haitian politics. A blow-by-blow listing would seem to violate the spirit of the book. Let us say that chapters coil through the presidency of the Carnival-musician-turned-president Martelly; the campaigning and street demonstrations that framed his presidency and could often be mistaken for Carnival parades; the attempt of hip-hop artist Wyclef Jean to run in the 2010 election, which failed but produced pointed Carnavalesque commentary in recycled songs; examination of the roots of *pwen*, *betiz*, and *polemik* in the work of Haiti's *twoubadou* (troubadours, like Coupé Cloué) and Vodou's quintessential vagabond, the spirit Gede; the manipulation of those tools in sometimes scathing, sometimes sexually suggestive verbal warfare that underscores the double- and triple-entendre potential of Haitian Creole; retrospective glances, notably the look-backs at prominent bands Boukman Eksperyans and RAM; and close analyses of YouTube Carnival videos (links shared), some by opponents of the Carnival president. The list could go on but would exceed the limits of this review. Needless to say, the content of the chapters drives readers forward—as skillfully as a Haitian Carnival band.

Dirksen derived her data from her experiences while living in Port-au-Prince during much of the period related here, from audio and video recordings, from some 60 interviews with musicians and music lovers, and from informal conversations. A delightful sample of the last (pp. 211–26) captures neighbors discussing a particularly provocative musical attack by Sweet Micky on a female journalist and critic. Dirksen correctly cites it for “the excellent study it offers in everyday Haitian poetics and political interpretation” (p. 212). Conversations and interview excerpts appear throughout the book in English and Haitian Creole, where the latter is spoken. Finally, the book includes a companion website. Fourteen professionally produced videos, some capturing music and others interviews, render this a quite friendly companion.

As of this writing, the streets of Port-au-Prince are in violent conflict over the future of Martelly's successor, Moïse, and the future of all Haitians. The severity of the situation underscores the reflections with which Dirksen closes her book, particularly her epilogue on the Haitian proverb, “After the dance, the drums are heavy.” Like the drum, Haiti's unfinished revolution is not for the frail, and any student or teacher of the Caribbean who yearns to understand that will do well to explore this book.

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