Timothy Dodge, *Rhythm and Blues Goes Calypso*. Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2019. ix + 245 pp. (Cloth US\$95.00)

The main task Timothy Dodge sets for this book is to investigate the influence of calypso music on rhythm and blues in the United States between 1945 and 1965—from the Andrew Sisters' postwar cover of "Rum and Coca Cola" to the last echoes of the calypso fad sparked by Harry Belafonte. The book takes its character from Dodge's vocation as record collector, with abundant citations of songs and anecdotes about the artists. It reads a bit like an annotated discography transformed into a narrative through added historical and social context.

The first three chapters are a prelude to the main event. Chapter 1, "What is Calypso?" discusses the origins of calypso in Trinidad and gives an overview of the genre organized by some of the issues that calypsonians sing about: Afro-Caribbean religion and culture, relations between men and women, race and ethnicity, and politics. Chapter 2, "Calypso Comes to the United States," discusses the work of West Indian musicians who recorded and performed internationally in the early 1900s, including band leaders Lionel Belasco, Gerald Clark, and Sam Manning, and the first "tent calypsonian" (topical singer) to perform extensively in New York City, Wilmouth Houdini. Chapter 3, "The Arrival of Rhythm and Blues," traces developments in blues, gospel music, and jazz from the 1920s through the 1940s.

Most of the information about calypso influence in rhythm and blues is located in Chapter 4, "Rhythm and Blues Goes Calypso." It begins with Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Jordan's 1945 song "Stone Cold Dead in de Market." Dodge discusses some of Jordan's further experimentation with calypso, and mentions his relationship to a few West Indian musicians. He goes on to mention numerous R&B recordings over the next ten years that were influenced by calypso. Not until he comes to Harry Belafonte's well-known calypso recordings in the late 1950s, though, does he really identify a trend. Nor does he make the case that there was much to talk about after Belafonte, apart from novelties such as Chubby Checker's "Limbo Rock." As an appendix he provides a complete list of the 170 R&B songs that he has identified as having calypso influence, as well as a discography of Harry Belafonte's calypsos.

To benefit fully from this book I would have needed to do more listening than I had time for. Its main attraction is the discographic detail, and where Dodge makes novel observations about context and trends, they are not always well-informed. In discussing Houdini's song, "Happy Land of Canaan," for example, he describes the rhythmic syllables "biddy bim" as "prefiguring the sounds of the not-yet-invented steelband" (p. 28); in fact those rhythmic syllables are a typical vocal device of the Spiritual Baptists that the song references. His vague-

ness or inaccuracy in defining musical style is also a problem when it comes to his discussion of calypso influences in rhythm and blues. For example, he begins Chapter 3 with the provocative assertion that rhythm and blues was not just a marketing category but “an actual genre” (p. 97), without ever substantiating that argument. And he makes frequent reference to “calypso-like melody” without defining what that means or how it differs from rhythm and blues; this does not convey much more than his own intuition.

In the book’s conclusion Dodge offers a few frames for making sense of the relation between calypso and R&B, including exotica, general interest in Latin American music, integration of West Indian immigrants into U.S. society, independent labels, and the U.S. servicemen stationed in Trinidad during World War II. These are put forth tentatively, without reference to more carefully argued interpretations by other scholars—for example, Charles Gillett’s argument in *The Sound of the City* (1970) that Belafonte’s calypsos represented a “safe” version of Black music for people who felt threatened by Rock and Roll; or Michael Eldridge’s observations about the ambitions of Trinidadian calypsonians to break into the international market (in “There Goes the Transnational Neighborhood: Calypso Buys a Bungalow” [*Callaloo* 2002]). On the other hand, Dodge’s mention of Louis Jordan’s relationships with West Indian artists, as well as his discussion of Houdini’s stay in New York, point to the promise of ethnographic research into the relationship between African Americans and West Indian immigrants. In sum, this book doesn’t rise to the level of a compelling story, but it has some treasures for those who are interested in the relationship between calypso and African American music.

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