

Curwen Best. 2012. *The Popular Music and Entertainment Culture of Barbados: Pathways to Digital Culture*. Maryland: Scarecrow Press. 211 pp. ISBN: 081087749X.

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Spouge, Soca, Tuk, Dancehall, and Calypso! What happens when traditional Caribbean sounds ‘mash up’ with digital technology? The answer is: a digital revolution and global superstars like Rihanna. In Curwen Best’s *The Popular Music and Entertainment Culture of Barbados, Pathways to Digital Culture*, getting back to the plantation roots of Bajan rhythms provides the historical backdrop to a Barbados phenomenon, while at the same time debating how tourism, technology, and transnational influences have transformed popular culture and music in Barbados.

For those familiar with Caribbean music and history, one obvious question is: How did plantation drumming evolve into hi-def recordings of hip hop, dub, and dancehall? The author, professor of popular culture and literary studies at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, offers some interesting comments on multiple paths to a [re]volution of popular music and entertainment in Barbados. However, before entering into further discussion of what the author *does* in this book, readers need to be aware of what the author *does not do*. As Professor Best states in his “Introduction,” *Pathways to Digital Culture* (here shortened to *Pathways*) is not intended to be “an encyclopedia of Barbados’ music and entertainment,” but rather a comprehensive study of popular music culture in Barbados and “its contact with the outside world and, more particularly, with the virtual worlds” (xii). The author’s emphasis on “contact” reverberates throughout each of the four parts of the book, forcing readers to “contemplate the interconnectedness of the various periods, sectors, artists, genres, instruments, and technologies.”

One might also argue that, in making these connections, the professor engages in a remediation process to uncover how colonial and postcolonial influences embedded in Bajan music operate as cultural baggage. In that sense, *Pathways*, offers more than just an analysis of musical culture in Barbados—it affords readers an archaeology of Bajan popular music in the spirit of Jerome Handler and Charlotte Frisbie’s study, “Aspects of Slave Life in Barbados: Music and Its Cultural Contexts,” published much earlier in *Caribbean Studies* 2 (1972). Seguing from this earlier archaeological research, Best opens his first chapter

with a reference to 1788 remarks by William Dickson that through the drumming on earthen jars, slaves communicated in a manner that “circumnavigate[ed] the legal and formal prohibitions that governed their society” (3). Thus, Professor Best’s research skillfully weaves the paradoxes of resistance and subjection as the warp and weft of a musical tapestry begun in the slavery period, but undergoing renovation in the digital era.

The first section of *Pathways* is labeled “Acoustic,” yet despite its focus on the sounds of tuk bands and their African ethnocentric rhythms, structures, and techniques, the chapter offers additional insight into the cultural stigmatization that surrounded tuk music in the pre-emancipation period. Part of this stigmatization stemmed from the nature of the musical instruments: drums, rattles, and stringed instruments made from plantation paraphernalia such as baskets, squash, fishnets, and skins. The other part of the stigma centered on the African origins of the musicians with their differences in musical forms; their use of polyrhythms, call-and-response structures, and masquerade. This latter characteristic, referenced as the “landship,” or use of maritime costumes, is explained by the author as inspired by the slaves’ observations of British sailing crews. The resulting performance had a duality not always recognizable to plantation owners. On the surface, the music and maritime dress was viewed by Euro-Caribbean audiences as lively entertainment. However, for Afro-Caribbean audiences, tuk music had subversive properties that could be used to “both praise and ridicule the slave owners and their associates” (7). For this reviewer, discussion of pre-emancipation tuk music as satire offers a refreshing African cultural model that challenges the typical master-slave tropes muting African voices and locating African rhythms in a substratum of music hierarchies.

After Emancipation, tuk bands continued to evolve as a symbol of Bajan folk culture until the mid-twentieth century when, as Professor Best argues, Barbados began to “re-engineer its economic sectors.” This ‘re-engineering’ extended to musical instruments, so that both tuk music and traditional tuk instruments were viewed as cultural relics. Yet, as part of the folk culture of Barbados, tuk did not die out—rather it evolved and informed latter rhythms. By the latter decades of the twentieth-century, advances in technology created instruments producing synthetic or digital simulations of traditional sounds that formed the underpinning of newer contemporary styles such as spouge, soca, and calypso.

Pathways also offers a valuable and long overdue survey of twentieth-century social, economic, and technological developments that greatly influenced not only Barbados’ music and culture, but that of the entire Caribbean region. As a case study, parts two and three of the book focus on interisland migrations and their influence on calypsonians

in Barbados and Trinidad. Historically, Trinidad, as the origin of steel drums, has reigned king of calypso and become synonymous with Carnival festivities. Yet, due to the proximity of the two islands, calypso inevitably infiltrated Barbados music—with varying degrees of audience acceptance. Since the origins of calypso date back to nineteenth-century carnivals, calypso reflects a form of Afro-Caribbean parody of Eurocentric behaviors. However, less subtle than tuk satire, calypso creates a parody through improvisation and sexual insinuation. Thus, Best points out that “early Bajan calypsonians and their songs were deemed to be immoral, common, and sinful by the establishment and upper classes” (19). Unfortunately, this was further problematized by the fact that, without acclaimed artists such as Trinidad’s Lord Kitchner and Mighty Sparrow, Barbados’ calypso remained judged in terms of Trinidad’s artists. Not until the 1960s, when Jackie Opel fused Jamaican Ska with Trinidadian Calypso to create Spouge, did Barbados demonstrate its ability to create and sustain a viable music art form with a unique Bajan zest.

With the continued growth of tourism in the latter decades of the twentieth-century, the proliferation of hotels, and increased promotion of festivals such as Crop Over, Barbados developed distinctive varieties of calypso, soca, dub, dancehall, spouge, ringbang, and gospel. As might be expected, the change has not been without controversy. Post twentieth-century, increased digital technologies and media coverage afford musicians freedom from national and geographical boundaries. In Barbados, this seems to play out in cultural politics—an area in which Professor Best appears knowledgeable. For instance, chapter eight, “The Culture Industry”, provides detailed interpretations of how the nuances of power and political party strategies in Barbados have collided with the culture industry to create a commercialization of island culture. For anyone who has lived in the Caribbean, this commodification of culture comes as no surprise. As the distinguished professor notes, Barbados has “become an exploitable space” where artists, musicians, and cultural workers can begin to “reposition themselves in order to reap substantial gains” (149).

The final section of *Pathways* delves into the consequences of this “repositioning” of Bajan artists—and in a greater sense, the repositioning of all contemporary Caribbean artists. For example, the author observes a number of conundrums: the duality of artists in cyberspace, the paradox of self-representation on the Internet, the relationship between text and image, and the transience of cyberspace. These echo larger issues of postcolonial nations grappling with identity concerns. Along these lines Professor Best argues that the globalization of Caribbean music has created a cultural paradox in which Caribbean artists have become “largely constructions of the new technology” (160). In his

opinion, this has disturbing consequences in terms of maintaining an island or national cultural identity. Outside the Caribbean, the construction of virtual identities breeds a cultural ignorance that generates exotic misrepresentations of Caribbean peoples.

Evocative of eighteenth-century colonial displacement from the center of the British Empire, the author argues that artists like Rihanna represent a twenty-first century displacement of contemporary Caribbean musicians from the center of their island nations. While this has positive effects on island economies, the social effect is less desirable. How this [re]evolution of the popular entertainment industry will play out over the future is uncertain. What does appear certain is that Barbados' artists' "contact with the outside world and, more particularly, with the virtual worlds" will continue to transform the island's music and popular culture in complicated ways.

Pathways, and Professor Best, leave readers to muse on these evolutions, revolutions, and transformations following whichever path the reader chooses. Historians and scholars will certainly appreciate the enormous detail and research found in the historical background. Musicians can appreciate the intimate understanding the author has of both the cultural and technical nuances of Barbados and Caribbean music. Cultural enthusiasts will particularly enjoy the insightful observations of people and artists from a variety of islands involved in the growing Caribbean music industry. And, as the publisher states, the book "will be of interest to anyone ... curious about Caribbean popular culture."

Al Campbell, ed. 2013. *Cuban Economist on the Cuban Economy*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida. 338 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8130-4423.

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Desde sus inicios la Revolución Cubana suscitó el interés de la intelectualidad del país por ser una experiencia altamente atractiva en lo social, económico, político e ideológico. Por primera vez se construía el socialismo en el hemisferio occidental y a 90 millas de la potencia hegemónica mundial. Esta revolución resultó un gran taller de creación de pensamiento de donde surgía todo un proyecto económico