



THE JAMAICAN ENSEMBLE

Kosi Keith Eric – singer, percussionist, group leader

Malisha Odlum –singer, percussionist, dancer

Baba Ray Bean – percussionist

PREPARATION FOR THEIR APPEARANCE AT YOUR SCHOOL

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

The ***Jamaican Ensemble*** is dedicated to preserving and presenting the traditional music and dance of Jamaica to young audiences in an entertaining and enjoyable way. They tell the history and show how old music and dance is constantly used to create new music and dance forms. The audience is exposed to the Jamaican language and many traditional instruments. They are also encouraged to participate.

Jamaica is a small island state in the Caribbean Sea. Its history tells of invaders and conquerors, the influx of slavery, and of triumphant runaways who kept their freedom for generations. The different styles of Jamaican music include influences from across the globe, but the primary influences are a mixture of European and African music. European scales and harmonies mixed with African drumming, rhythmic intensity, and the interesting use of offbeat stresses, make up Jamaican music today. Much of the music is based on matching the lyrics to the songs. In other words the words come from a long tradition of poetry, story telling, and riddling, and the music was improvised around them. The lyrics of different styles have different characteristics and metrical patterns, so each type of music must change to fit different words. Jamaican poetry is a melting pot of ethnic and international styles like the music that sometimes accompanies it.

MUSIC

There are three main types of music that will be featured in the performance. **Calypso** music is perhaps the most familiar. It originated on the northern coast of Jamaica and on the island of Trinidad. Calypso is traditionally a slow ballad sung on a humorous topic.

The second, **soca** or **southern calypso**, appears in southern towns of Jamaica where Latin American influences are stronger. Soca has a faster beat and more rhythmic intensity that creates dance music based on the melodies of calypso ballads.

Lastly, **Reggae music** originated when the rhythms of calypso and other Caribbean music met the electric guitar of American popular music. It is associated with Kingston, the capital of Jamaica, and is often called the Jamaican national music. Reggae lyrics



generally concern social unrest and the unhappy condition of Jamaica's many poor inhabitants. Reggae is inextricably linked with the political movement called Rastafarianism; originally the lyrics came from Rastafarian poems and stories of unrest, although now many different subjects are covered in reggae-style songs.

TERMINOLOGY:

- **Abeng** A Jamaican wind instrument made from a hollow cow horn and used by the Maroons to communicate secretly over long distances.
- **Arawak** The original inhabitants of Jamaica. These indigenous people are descended from the great monument building civilizations of Meso-America (Incas, Mayas, Toltecs, Dolmecs) but were killed off by diseases brought with the first European colonists.
- **Calypso** The style of music that arose in the Caribbean in the early part of the last century. It uses rhythmic offbeats and native drum and percussion instruments, plus a European harmony system, and light, entertaining lyrics.
- **Corrida** A Latin American song style that uses improvised lyrics to tell news of current events.
- **Flute** A wind instrument that appears all over the world. The Jamaican variety is often played by the youngest participants in a musical gathering.
- **Maroons** Group of escaped and eventually freed slaves who lived in the Jamaican highlands for several generations in the 15th and 16th centuries.
- **Patois** A word that means dialect or lingo of a particular region. Jamaican patois, which gave English such terms as "sugar daddy" and "dutchie jar," uses a combination of several languages that derive from the ancestors of the island's inhabitants.
- **Rap** A modern American popular music style that owes its beginnings to the spontaneous lyrics of corrido and the beat-boxing of Jamaican disc jockeys.
- **Rastafarians** The followers of Haile Selassie who believed in emphasizing the African roots of Caribbean and Latin American culture.
- **Reggae** Considered by many the national music of Jamaica. This modern electrical sound uses Calypso and Latin rhythms plus lyrics expressing hope for a better life for Jamaica's poor.
- **Ska** A style of music influenced by the British popular artists' use of Reggae. Ska uses electric percussion and synthesizers, plus a driving, harsh Reggae beat and Rap-like chanting.
- **Soca** Southern calypso. This style of music mixes Latin American rhythms and beats with Jamaican music, and has a faster, more intense sound.

ACTIVITIES:

BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE

Look up Jamaica in the encyclopedia and in an atlas. Discuss its culture, climate, major industries, and geographical features. Consider researching the history of Jamaica and ask the



students to write and present reports on one aspect of the island.

AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

Present a research project on one particular music style. Take that style and discuss its most famous performers, the different elements that contributed to the development of that style, a brief history of the musical innovations and people who invented them. Play a song in that style.

Make drums out of old coffee cans or oatmeal cartons, use plastic bottles filled with dried beans for rattles, and find any other available objects to make percussion instruments. Decorate the instruments, and then create a rhythm section so the class can investigate the way drums and percussion instruments are played with and against each other. For example, assign one loud, low drum the task of keeping the beat. Then have several other smaller pieces play a faster pulse.

Finally, add an instrument with a completely different sound (something metal when the other instruments are wood.) Have students listen to how the rhythms interact.

GUIDELINE QUESTIONS FOR STUDENT FEEDBACK?

- How did you feel during the performance?
- What instruments were displayed and how were they interesting?
- How does traditional music influence today's music?
- Learning about a different culture made me realize that.....
- I like listening to other types of music because...
- These pictures show what I saw today and I'll write what I've learned....
- From what you saw and heard, why would you like to visit Jamaica?

Please send artwork / essays / evaluations to:

International Music Foundation
Maria Valdes-Vargas
30 E. Adams Street, Suite 1206
Chicago, IL 60603