



Dancing Spirits: Rhythms and Rituals of Haitian Vodun, the Rada Rite (Contributions to the Study of Music and Dance)

By Gerdes Fleurant

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The reflexive approach and the concept of bimusicality have made possible this in-depth study of the Rada rite, the foundation of the complex and sensationalized religion of Haiti, Vodun. Fleurant returned to his native Haiti to immerse himself in the socio-cultural life of those who practice the religion that was brought to Haiti by the people captured in Africa from the 16th to the 18th centuries. Through total immersion in daily life culture and apprenticeship in the music culture (reflexive approach and concept of bimusicality), the author has accessed information and provided a descriptive analysis heretofore unavailable to scholars. From this privileged position, the author details the complexity, sophistication, and beauty of the ritual, music, and dance.

The pioneering works on the music or the dance of Vodun have attempted to cover the whole ritual spectrum. Fleurant contends that the religion is too complex and too sensationalized to be treated in one volume and that each rite should be studied separately and in greater depth. *Dancing Spirits* examines drum rhythms, song tunes, and texts of the major Rada dances. A model of the Rada ceremony in Bòpo, a community located some ten miles north of Port-au-Prince, serves as a guide to the reader not familiar with Vodun liturgy. The work challenges studies that do not delve deeply enough into this complex religion, and serves as a model for further studies.

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Review

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About the Author

GERDÉS FLEURANT is Associate Professor of Music at Wellesley College. An initiated oungan and activist in the Greater Boston Haitian-American community, Fleurant lectures extensively on Haitian culture, Pan Africanism, Humanocentrism (a concept he coined), and music throughout the United States.

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