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Reputation in a Musical Scene: The Everyday Context of Connections between Music, Identity and Politics

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Since the late 1970s ethnomusicologists, allying themselves with other theorists of performance, have insisted on the actual power of music, as a socially constructed symbolic discourse, to shape other socially constructed discourses such as those of politics, history, and identity. Anthony Seeger phrased this perspective as a “musical anthropology” in contrast to an earlier “anthropology of music” (1987). During the 1980s the field also incorporated postmodernism’s emerging critique of anthropology for ignoring the politics embedded in symbolic production. Discussion of how global and national economics and ideologies touch even the most “traditional” music is now mainstream. Many works manage to do both—to show music making politics and politics making music. Nonetheless two recent books seem to me to convey an especially intimate sense of how this works from a musician’s point of view. These are Benjamin Brinner’s *Knowing Music, Making Music* (1995) and Ingrid Monson’s *Saying Something* (1996) (as well as an earlier article, Monson 1990). Brinner and Monson undertake close analysis of “the music itself” treated as “process” rather than “product” (Blacking 1973), guided by performers’ cultural understandings, and including social issues (interaction, authority, politics, race) as part of the musical process. It is this last inclusion—social issues as part of musical process—that strikes me as offering intriguing new possibilities for analyzing the role of ideas in performance.¹

Both books treat interaction between musicians as central to the process of making music. To a great extent, musicians’ musical lives transpire in relatively small, face-to-face musical networks—this is as true of the urban jazz musicians Monson describes as it is of the traditional gamelan musicians in Brinner’s book. It is in this context, through and in their in-

teractions with one another, that musicians incorporate ideas about politics and identity into their own musical worlds. They focus those “larger” ideas on other musicians they know personally and on musical performances with which they are often directly involved. They use those ideas to interpret one another’s music, to make sense of it, and to situate one another as human beings in a broader social universe. By applying the “larger” ideas to their own lives they make those ideas concrete; they focus the macrocosm through the microcosm. In describing this chain of interpretations Brinner and Monson manage to suggest how issues of identity and politics play into musical process, while remaining focused on that process. Brinner describes his underlying concern as being “to connect practice with theory. . . [to offer] a sociologically informed view of interactive relations that is not shaped solely by political or economic assumptions. . . . Rather than a sociology of music focusing on social issues, we then have a socially aware ethnomusicology, focused on music-making and music made, yet cognizant of the web of interpersonal relations in which music-makers are entangled” (1995:320, cf. 286 and the entirety of Chapter 10). Similarly, I wish to explore how art and politics relate in social practice, without accepting performers’ assumptions at face value yet without spinning off into abstractions, without losing sight of such realities as performers’ relations with one another, and without overlooking such crucial but delicate immediacies as artistic style.

A major factor in the play of ideas through musical networks is the micro-politics of authority and hierarchy that arises from musicians’ working together, depending on one another, and competing. I believe that the ongoing construction of authority in musical scenes—reputation-building—is a pervasive theme in most performers’ lives. When musicians apply ideas about identity and politics to one another, they tend to do so in ways that help them manage their musical networks and assert authority. This mundane, manipulative use of ideas is normally masked by the glamor of the ideas themselves, but is equally worthy of study. It is one of the key sites where ideas of identity and politics become concretely related to music. In the final section of this article I will suggest why the use of ideology in everyday settings is often disregarded as trivial. Meanwhile I will explore how performers make and manipulate connections between music, social identity, and politics in the context of making and manipulating their reputations. (My comments can apply not only to performers but also to organizers, patrons, critics, listeners, politicians, and others involved in musical scenes. For the sake of clarity I will concentrate on performers, which in the case under study includes musicians, singers, and dancers.)

Ethnomusicologists often hear performers make assertions to the effect of, “We are the *X*, and this is our music, and it expresses our politics.” At

one level such a statement may be more or less factual. At another level it is less a statement of fact than of intent: it imagines a community (Anderson 1983) and invokes allegiance to that community. At yet another level the statement positions the person making it in relation to other performers with whom he or she works and competes. It plays a role in the micro-politics of a musical network; it stakes the speaker's claim to belonging and authority.

Much ethnomusicological writing has focused on the second of these three levels: imagining communities and invoking allegiances. To take only one example—which I choose not in order to criticize, but because it achieves its goals so clearly—Louise Mientjes (1990) describes how various interested parties interpreted and contested Paul Simon's "Graceland" album. Mientjes begins with the recording process as viewed by Simon and his South African musicians, explaining, among other things, what the recording meant to the South Africans' careers and how this affected their political interpretation of the music. In this part of her ethnography Mientjes's emphasis is close to mine. Mientjes then passes from production to reception, reporting on debate over "Graceland" by the media, critics, and the public. This debate took the album out of the immediate context of the performers' lives and related it to various identities and political positions—black, white, Left, Right, and so on—arguing about who the album represented and whose interests it served. In this case, as in most such cases, perceptive performers and commentators recognized that connections between music, social identity, and politics were constructed—that is, motivated and non-objective. Their debate was over the correct interpretation of those connections. This debate was important, but it was about ideas of identity and power on a large scale rather than in the specific lives, relationships, negotiations, and performances that went into making "Graceland." Mientjes's presentation highlights how interpretations of music extend outwards from their original context. My aim is to focus on that original context in more detail, to show what happens to ideas in the lives of performers.

A few terms require immediate definition. By "reputation" I mean the informal, consensual evaluations by which performers judge one another's competence and relate to one another in a social network. Reputation is an ever-present concern for most performers. Performers judge each other constantly, and their judgments combine several elements: aesthetics; social identity, or membership in various large-scale social groups (such as ethnic groups); and alliances with one another within performance networks. I suggest that performers typically filter ideas about identity and politics—ideas drawn from high-profile, public realms of discourse such as nationalist ideology, oppositional movements, and the media—through this immediate context. Conversely, the immediate context of reputation-build-

ing forms an underlying layer of meaning even in seemingly straightforward political assertions.

By “network” I have in mind the sociological idea of fluidly extending connections—informal, face-to-face, and flexible, but often lasting as well. I also use the term “scene,” drawing on an article by Will Straw (1991). While people may participate in social networks in the course of their everyday lives, musical scenes are more intentional. Straw describes them as fluid “cultural spaces” characterized by “the building of musical alliances and the drawing of musical boundaries” (1991:373). For Straw, underlying “logics” of inclusion and exclusion control the drawing of boundaries and thereby constitute scenes. Such logics may appear as sheerly aesthetic choices to participants, but they are more than aesthetic. They create “affectual links” (*ibid.*) between people and scenes even if the people involved are anonymous to one another, as are the dance club-goers and record collectors whom Straw describes. In this sense, presumably, a musical scene could exist as an “imagined community” in the absence of an actual social network. However, the Martinican *bèlè* scene I examine is both a musical scene and a social network.²

Reputation has been remarked upon many times in the ethnomusicological literature, but not treated extensively. Brinner (1995: Chapter 10) discusses the influence of performers’ reputations on their interactions in the course of performance, and the resulting effects upon the evolving musical piece. Also recently, Donna Buchanan describes the relation of ideology and individual reputation in Bulgaria (1995). Robert Faulkner (1971) and Bruce MacLeod (1993) note how individual reputation regulates hiring practices in popular music networks in the United States. In the field of Caribbean performance, Roger Abrahams introduced the theme of reputation with his writing on “men-of-words” (1983; cf. Midgett 1977). In Caribbean anthropology, Karen Olwig (1993), Brackette Williams (1991) and Virginia Young (1993: 2–3, 193–197) have recently revived Abrahams’ focus on the dramatic interplay of reputation and respectability in Caribbean ritual, Carnival, and politics. Steven Cornelius mentions that Cuban American rehearsals and gigs are fecund sites for negotiations of status (1991); James Robbins examines how Cuban musicians manipulate “taxonomies” of musical genres (1989). Lois Wilcken (1992) and Gage Averill (1989) describe how Haitian musicians use the concept of authenticity to legitimate themselves. Elsewhere in the literature on Africa and its Diaspora, John Chernoff describes competition among West African drummers (1979), and many authors have noted the importance of consensual competition among jazz musicians (as in “cutting sessions”). Ingrid Monson’s earlier article describes the deep gap between the judgments black and white US jazz musicians make about one another; these judgments are at once about aesthetics and social identity (1990).

Once one begins thinking about it, the variety of phenomena related to this subject grows. Consider the prestige accruing to song ownership among Native Americans both North and South (McAllester 1954:79; Merriam 1967:10, 30; Seeger 1987); the authority passed from master to pupil through “musical lineages” in India (Kippen 1988; Silver 1980; Wade 1984); song duels in Sardinia (Lortat-Jacob 1995); or the rise and fall of different musical styles within the canon of Western classical music—historical reputation being a reflection of contemporary authority (Becker 1982: Chapter 11; cf. Feldman’s similar description of the Turkish classical canon [1990]). All of these studies could throw light on the phenomenon of reputation in musical scenes, but this topic has generally been treated as tangential to other issues.

Interestingly, one case study with a perspective close to mine is Henry Kingsbury’s study of a musical conservatory (1988). Here, musicians use aesthetic judgments about “talent” and “music” in intensely competitive reputation-building. As Kingsbury writes elsewhere, “a great deal of everyday talk within the conservatory could be construed as an ongoing negotiation of . . . professional esteem within the musical community” (1991:212). Some reviewers felt that Kingsbury exaggerated the conservatory’s terrors, but in any case it is likely that different musical scenes are characterized by different degrees of competitiveness. In this regard, please note that despite any competitiveness I describe within Martinique’s traditional music scene—which might be interpreted as criticism—I found Martinican performers overall to be supportive of one another, and more so than performers in some other musical scenes in which I have been involved.

Background: Martinique and bèlè

The music with which I have been working in addressing these issues is *bèlè*, a traditional style of Martinique, in the French West Indies. I lived in Martinique from September 1993 through June 1995, studying bèlè as a drummer and dancer as well as ethnographer. My entry into the bèlè scene was facilitated by close contact with three clubs, or *associations*: Association Mi Mes Manmay Matinik (known as “AM4”), Bel Alians, and Maframé. Such clubs play a major role in the social organization of contemporary bèlè. The constituency and activities of these three clubs varied somewhat, but generally they provide bèlè performers a chance to get together and dance, they teach bèlè to novices, and they occasionally perform at public events or tourist hotels. I will discuss them and their differences further below. First, let me place them in context by describing the history of bèlè and its various constituencies.

Martinicans use the term “bèlè” to refer to a number of genres.³ Generically, “bèlè” may apply to any dance-drum style associated with rural

life, plantations, and, in the more distant past, Africa. More specifically it refers to two genres of dances, one from the island's North Atlantic coast (particularly the countryside around the town of Ste-Marie) and one from the south. However the latter is usually distinguished as *bèlè du sud*. Other regional dance-drum forms include *lalin klé* and *kalenda*, both originally from the North Atlantic area. The martial art/dance *danmyé* (or *ladja*) was practiced traditionally through the entire island, including the cities. Performers and others with specialized knowledge may draw a distinction between Ste-Marie *bèlè* dances proper and these others, or may lump them all together as "bèlè." I will follow this last usage except where I need to be more specific.

The Ste-Marie *bèlè* repertoire proper consists of several dances incorporating quadrille (square-dance) choreography. These are limited to eight dancers at a time (four couples), who must know their complicated choreographic sequences. Line and circle dances (*lalin klé*) use a simpler choreography, and the lead singer acts as a *koumandé* ("commander" or caller). They are therefore open to as many people as want to dance. Call-and-response singing, one to two drums, and supporting percussion accompany all of these dances.

These dances share a similar history. They are all "neo-African" styles (Roberts 1972) that developed on plantations during slavery. In Martinique as elsewhere in the African diaspora, slaves were allowed their own outdoor dances on Saturday afternoons and nights, after Mass on Sundays, and on holidays. Dances similar to today's seem to have developed within the first few generations of slavery. St.-Méry's 1796 description of a *kalenda* (1976:52-53) could describe one of the contemporary *lalin klé* dances, *mabelo*, exactly. St.-Méry made his observations on a plantation just outside Ste-Marie.

In the 1700s contredanse (line dancing) was imported from France, followed by quadrille (square dancing) in the late 1700s and early 1800s (Cyrille 1989; Rosemain 1986). Both of these originally elite genres became widely popular, found their way into the Martinican countryside, and developed into regional styles such as those of Ste-Marie and the south (*bèlè du sud*). The current Ste-Marie *bèlè* choreography, incorporating quadrille, probably consolidated around 1820-1840.

After abolition (1848) rural dances in the Ste-Marie area, if not the rest of rural Martinique, were hosted on a rotating basis by an informal network of households. Evenings of dance were known as *swaré* (from the French "soirée," evening event). There were *swaré bèlè* for the *bèlè* dances proper (those incorporating quadrille choreography) and *swaré lalin klé* for the line and circle dances. ("Lalin klé" derives from the French "la lune claire," full moon. In Martinique as elsewhere in the Caribbean, nights of the full

moon provided villagers with opportunities for dancing and storytelling events.) The hosts often charged a small entrance fee, and guests contributed food and money (Cally-Lézin 1990; Gerstin 1996). The swaré thus created a self-sustaining network of economic reciprocity.⁴

At least several generations ago—I could not discover precisely when—the Ste-Marie bèlè dances proper (as opposed to *lalin klé*) became a speciality of perhaps ten to twenty large families. These families produced, and still produce, a disproportionate number of highly trained and virtuostic singers, dancers, and percussionists. My interviews revealed a history of semi-formal dance classes-cum-rehearsals within the families, and sometimes for interested outsiders, since at least the 1950s. When outside entrepreneurs began organizing tourist troupes in the 1950s and 1960s, the Ste-Marie bèlè families used their prestige and social network to supply the bulk of rural performers to those troupes.

Just after World War II, in 1946, Martinique became an overseas *département* of France, roughly equivalent to a state in the United States. The island's intellectuals and Left-leaning politicians viewed departmentalization as their best chance for full economic and political equality. (Their view contrasted with that of local leaders in the Anglophone and Hispanophone Caribbean, who sought independence.) But shortly after departmentalization, economic depression set in. The main plantation crop, sugarcane, had been competing unsuccessfully since the early twentieth century with European-grown sugar beets. Now the major landowners—descendants of the colonial French known as *bèkè*—realizing that a modernizing society would make new economic demands, began withdrawing their land from production and putting their capital into businesses such as import/export, banking, and construction. By the early 1960s unemployment had climbed to between thirty and forty percent, where it has remained since. Migration from the countryside to the capital and only sizable city, Fort-de-France, and from there to the *metropole* (continental France), severely disrupted island life. Those who remained in Martinique struggled to benefit from a disproportionate rise in tertiary sector employment (civil service, tourism, services) and, increasingly, state-administered welfare. Even in these contexts, metropolitan France proved unwilling to extend the rights and benefits that Martinicans, as full French citizens, had expected from departmentalization. This led to a small but visible nationalist movement. But a greater number of Martinicans, striving for middle-class respectability, turned away from rural and urban working-class traditions, including bèlè as well as the Créole language, local ways of dress, cooking, and so forth.

As a result of rural disruption and urban disinterest, bèlè and related dances underwent an “eclipse” (Jallier and Lossen 1985:91–92) in the 1960s and 1970s. Oral testimony indicates, however, that the “eclipse” was mainly

in the eyes of middle-class and elite beholders; the rural and urban working classes continued to practice these arts. The same may be true for other elements of Créole culture such as the Créole language, which was absent from politics, intellectual discourse, the schools, and the media during these years yet was heavily used in everyday settings. Nonetheless, *l'assimilation* of Martinican culture and identity became a concern to the island's intellectuals, although it was precisely a political assimilation they had sought through departmentalization in 1946.

In reaction to this situation, the island's leading politician and intellectual, Aimé Césaire—mayor of Fort-de-France since 1946—turned to the philosophy of *négritude* that he had founded, along with Senghor, Damas, and other writers, in the 1930s. Beginning in the late 1960s Césaire promoted an anti-assimilationist cultural movement, the *retour aux sources*, and founded a series of cultural centers and artistic festivals that produced local work and offered public classes in performing and visual arts, free or at low cost. However, this approach, largely centralized in the capital city of Fort-de-France, did not address the underlying problem. Through the 1970s and 1980s and into the 1990s, what the Martinican critic Edouard Glissant called the island's condemnation to “painless oblivion” (1989:2) intensified. Martinicans have found themselves increasingly cast in the role of a “consumer colony” (Burton 1978:13), a dumping ground for French imports and for foreign imports filtered through France. These include cultural products—movies, TV programs, commercial music—which magnify the specter of assimilation. Today's younger generation is, at least in the eyes of its elders, particularly seduced by mass consumerism.

Despite the general drift towards assimilation, Martinique has known a number of oppositional political and cultural movements. Césaire's *négritude* was the most important of these for some time. Many older and quite a few middle-aged Martinicans regard Césaire's ideas, along with his example as a forceful leader, as the island's first decisive break with colonialism and assimilationism. However, Martinicans on the Left have come to view Césaire's long administration as more conciliatory than oppositional. Césaire has built up an impressive administrative structure, but it has become the status quo, serving largely to mediate state power by channeling administrative and welfare funds (Burton 1992; Constant 1994; Réno 1994a; 1994b).

Since the early 1980s several newer movements have emerged. Most visible has been *créolité*, a revival of the Créole language and culture at the popular level and a highly prestigious literary current at a more elite level. Also important have been revivals of *kont kwéyol* (oral storytelling) and *bèlè*, and the emergence of numerous small political parties, largely on the Left and including a notable environmentalist wing. The new parties criti-

cize both France's domination of Martinique and Césaire's conciliatory administration. At the same time they benefit from the space for local autonomy that Césaire has opened up, competing for electoral power at the town and *commune* level.

What strikes me about these movements is the way in which they balance opposition with accommodation. In deliberate contrast to *négritude's* imagination of a pan-African identity, an Other starkly opposed to Europe's Same, the *créolistes* celebrate Martinican identity as a hybrid: "Neither Europeans, nor Africans, nor Asians, we proclaim ourselves Creole" (Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant 1989; translation Khyar 1990:886). One thrust of the *créolité* movement has been to "update true memory" (*ibid.*), to describe Martinique and its history through Martinican eyes. This includes an effort to valorize Martinique's traditional Créole culture. ("Créole culture" as the *créolistes* perceive it includes cooking, dress, folklore, and beliefs as well as language, but the practical efforts of the *créolistes* have been mainly linguistic and literary. Other customs have been honored more in literary description than in daily life.) At the same time, the *créolistes* recognize that French and global culture is part of Martinican identity. They thus embrace modernity as well as tradition, and the global as well as the local. Through such an embrace, by enfolding the global within a persistent sense of the local, they can admit the fact of assimilation yet retain a sense of difference. In their actions, also, the *créolistes* engage the contemporary world: they advocate use of the Créole language in the local media; they write best-selling novels which they expertly promote in the French media.

Largely through the media success of the *créolistes*, and through their public support of the new political parties, the ideology of these movements intermingles. Thus, for example, Martinican political economist Fred Réno takes a phrase from the *créolistes* and describes the rise of the new political parties as "the creolization of politics" (1994a:13), meaning that the parties seek to localize power as the Créole language has indigenized French. Similarly, the island's major environmental action group, ASSUA-PAMAR, uses the slogan "*sauvegarder et promouvoir*" (safeguard and promote). The phrase deliberately combines past and present in a manner advocated by the *créolistes*. This, then, is the ideological and political context of the *bèlè* renewal.

The *bèlè* renewal and the contemporary *bèlè* scene

The *bèlè* renewal emerged in the early 1980s. Its leaders are mostly men in their thirties and forties. They have grown up and been educated in the city and have established professional careers, yet they are old enough to

remember when rural poverty dominated the lives of most Martinicans, and to have been shaped politically by Martinique's active labor and *indépendentiste* movements of the 1960s and early 1970s. On the other hand, they are young enough to have escaped the urge towards narrow standards of respectability that led many slightly older Martinicans to reject their rural past.

The leaders of the *bèlè* renewal view their movement as oppositional. *Bèlè*'s cultural specificity counters the general trend towards assimilation, preparing Martinicans psychologically for further resistance in the future: "A Martinican culture exists. . . . To defend it is to preserve our specificity, to bring forth and stabilize the bases of the new Martinican culture. . . a new culture because it must take into account the sociological givens of the modern epoch" (AM4 1987). As this quotation suggests, the *bèlè* renewalists, like the *créolistes*, balance the recuperation of Martinican tradition with adaptations to modernity. The renewalist group AM4 even shares the slogan "sauvegarder et promouvoir" with the environmentalists. At a practical level, the renewalists combine past and present by promoting new practices for *bèlè*: urban *swaré*, classes for adults and in the schools, published texts and instruction books, recordings, and appearances at local festivals.⁵

Most of the renewalist groups are organized as *associations de 1901*, roughly equivalent to incorporated non-profit organizations in the United States. Association status allows the groups to seek certain government funds, although such funds fill only a small part of their needs. Martinican associations may recall the voluntary mutual aid organizations familiar from the literature on Africa and its diaspora, but they are also thoroughly French, and associations de 1901 have played a major role in at least one French grassroots political movement (Alland 1994).

Despite the ideological parallels between *créolité*, the new political parties, and the *bèlè* renewal, there remain gaps between these movements.⁶ *Créolité* and the new parties have received a good amount of public recognition and media attention. *Bèlè* remains marginalized, restricted to a small world of performers and aficionados. Most of the leaders of the *bèlè* renewal avoid identification with political parties. They feel that advertising their own Leftist views could scare off potential recruits as well as alienate the typically conservative elder rural performers. In addition, they avoid close association with the *créolité* movement. Partly they view *créolité* as an elite, literary movement; partly they are old enough to remember the importance of *négritude*, which *créolité* largely rejects. Yet in my opinion the *bèlè* renewalists cannot help but respond to *créolité* as the most visible oppositional ideology in Martinique today. I also suspect that in the renewalists' appropriation of *créoliste* perspectives there is an element of legitimization at work. As the *bèlè* renewalists promote *bèlè* to the public,

they tap into the créolistes' rhetoric. In particular, the créoliste idea of tradition-as-relevant-to-modernity helps to legitimate bèlè. At the same time, ideas that legitimate bèlè as relevant to modernity also legitimate the bèlè renewalists as the leaders best prepared to bring tradition to modernity.

Bèlè performers recognize another group within their ranks: *les anciens*, "elders." Whereas renewalists are considered younger, urban, and less traditional, elders are considered older, rural, and more traditional. The two groups are, of course, stereotypes, inadequately representing the complex web of contemporary Martinican generational, class, racial, and regional (rural/urban) identities. For example, younger rural performers fit neatly into neither category.⁷ These categories employ what Averill, writing of Haiti, calls "an implicit model of authenticity," in which authenticity and traditionality exist "in proportion to the physical, social, and historical distance from the neo-African peasant experience" (1989:207). Traditionality and authenticity are assumed to accrue to people who are older, rural, poorly educated, poor, and black, in contrast to those who are considered young, urban, well educated, middle class or professional, and light-skinned.

Although an "implicit model" of authenticity exists, Martinicans rarely use the term *authentique* as anthropologists and ethnomusicologists have come to do. Instead, one hears the terms *traditionnel* or *patrimoine*, which contrast to *moderne* or *modernité*. One frequently hears the term *folklorique*, but this term is ambiguous. Many people use it synonymously with *traditionnel* and *patrimoine*, but others, including the bèlè renewalists, associate *folklorique* with tourist troupes, and use it in the sense of inauthentic "folklorism." Despite these different terms, the issue they raise is the same as that which anthropologists and ethnomusicologists recognize: who legitimately represents a community or tradition? In Martinique as elsewhere, authenticity bestows authority, and vice-versa—an authoritative person is likely to be able to assert his or her version of tradition as authentic.

Most of the older rural bèlè performers I know are more conservative politically than the renewalists. Their conservatism is partly generational. Several elders told me stark tales of life under the Vichy government that controlled Martinique during World War II. For them the return of Martinique to free France represented a liberation, and departmentalization and citizenship seemed the best route from prejudice to equality. They maintain these allegiances. In addition, the elders I know are less concerned than the renewalists with attempts to modernize tradition, or with the renewalists' modern ideas *about* tradition. Such ideas belong to the urban, intellectual world.⁸ On the other hand, the elders are acutely aware of the effects of racism and cultural dominance in their personal lives. Their awareness shows up in bèlè songs such as "Bélia Macedoine" ("Bélia Mix-up"), which describes racial prejudice in the French Army, and "Bato-a rivé

pé pa chagé" ("The boat has arrived, it isn't loaded"), concerning a strike by stevedores in Fort-de-France.

When I began work in Martinique I quickly became aware of the different perspectives and motives of renewalists and elders. Yet as my stay progressed I recognized that the two groups cooperate extensively. The renewalists respect the elders and want to learn from them. They have been somewhat successful at winning respect for the elders from the public. They have given the elders a voice in the *bèlè* renewal itself, for example by including them on the boards of associations. The elders recognize and appreciate the renewalists' efforts. Besides, both sectors recognize that the *bèlè* scene is so small that lack of cooperation hurts everybody.

The social organization of *bèlè* facilitates cooperation. The main groupings in the scene, apart from the renewalists' associations, are the dozen or so traditional *bèlè* families of Ste-Marie and a handful of performance troupes. The *bèlè* families are still cohesive to a remarkable degree, still performing together, exchanging goods and services with one another, and maintaining their prestige among *bèlè* aficionados. The performance troupes draw members from both the traditional families and the renewalists. They play for Martinican audiences (for example, at saint's days celebrations in small towns) and for tourists at hotels. Different troupes folklorize their material to varying degrees. Membership in both the associations and troupes is flexible. Performers often appear with more than one group, and pass between them readily. This helps increase cooperation. In addition, the fact that there is little money at stake in *bèlè* performance, even on the tourist circuit, helps dampen competitiveness.

Still, I found that differences between renewalists and elders remain. In particular, renewalists and elders hold different ideas about the meaning of the *bèlè* tradition. For example, the renewalists have their political ideas about *bèlè*, which the elders ignore. Such ideas seemed to me more than abstractions; I sensed them playing some active role in the *bèlè* scene, somehow affecting relations between its actors. I eventually recognized that representations of tradition perform certain work within the *bèlè* scene: they are part of an informal negotiation of hierarchy and authority. The particular ways that performers slant their representations of tradition help establish their authority to represent that tradition. I now turn to a more detailed account of reputation in *bèlè*.

Reputation in the *bèlè* scene

I give the name "reputation" to the informal negotiation of authority within the *bèlè* scene. Because the *bèlè* scene is small and organized at a grassroots level, the informal authority of reputation is its strongest social

glue. Reputation determines who gets respect, who works with whom, whose presence makes an event come alive, whose description of tradition is passed on. It comprises an intricate skein of evaluations on which performers base their interactions. Reputation is hierarchical and competitive—one person enjoys much while another gets little. It is also consensual, a collective judgment. A performer tries to outshine others but he depends on those others to recognize his skills.

Reputation accrues to both individuals and groups. An individual's reputation is affected by the groups to which he or she shows allegiance, and a group's reputation is built around those of the key individuals in it. Each of the associations, families, and performance troupes in the *bèlè* scene has its reputation: this troupe is authentic, that one touristic; this renewalist association is known for its organization of public events; that Ste-Marie family has excellent singers and dancers, but is untrustworthy.

Reputation is a consensual judgment about both artistic and social prowess. It combines at least three types of evaluation: *aesthetic* evaluations of performers' skills and knowledge; evaluations of performers' *social identity* (whether they are rural or urban, old or young, traditional or not); and evaluations of their *contribution* to the *bèlè* community. The elders of Ste-Marie rank high in all three factors because they are considered to have the greatest performance skills, to be the most traditional in their social identity, and to participate in the still-extant economic and social network of rural Ste-Marie families. In other cases, a high standing in one area can lead people to overlook deficiency in another. For example, the drummer Georges Dru is president of the largest renewalist group (Association Mi Mes Manmay Matinik, or "AM4") and a well-educated professional from the city. He does not fit the social profile of a traditional performer. Yet he enjoys a high reputation because of his undeniable drumming skills, demonstrated knowledge of the repertoire, and many contributions to the *bèlè* community.⁹

The evaluations that make up reputation are constructs, not givens. Aesthetic evaluations of performers' skills, and assessments of their contributions to the community, are arrived at through negotiation and consensus. Social identity is also constructed. For example, the performance troupe I worked with most closely, Bel Alians, is established around a few key elders from Ste-Marie, and filled out with younger members from both Ste-Marie and Fort-de-France. (The younger members from Fort-de-France do the organizational work, a pattern followed by most of the performance troupes.) Some of the younger members from Ste-Marie are not from the *bèlè* families and grew up with little exposure to *bèlè*. But through association with the elders in the group, all of the younger members enjoy the mantle of traditionality. Those who do not know them personally assume

they are traditional rural performers; those who know them better admire their ties to the traditionalists.

In contrast, *bèlè* performers and the public generally view the members of renewalist groups as urban, elite, and non-traditional. As do all stereotypes, this view glosses over nuances and exaggerates commonalities. I surveyed the 120 members and students of the largest renewalist group, AM4, and found that more than half are from working-class backgrounds; about thirty percent are themselves working-class. About thirty-seven percent are of small-town or rural backgrounds. Two-thirds first learned about *bèlè* through networks of family and friends, that is, through oral tradition, which is active even in the city. The dozen or so founders and core members of AM4 fit the stereotype somewhat better, and probably account for it, but even here there are exceptions.

Individuals frequently mediate social and aesthetic categories in order to enhance their reputation. A good example is Bel Alians' main organizer, Etienne Jean-Baptiste, who is from a working-class family in Fort-de-France. During his childhood he trained as a classical trombonist and dreamt of attending a conservatory; he did not even hear *bèlè* until he was in his teens. He later obtained a business degree and opened a music school, where he teaches both Western music and *bèlè*. His school is one of the few places in the city where one can study *bèlè*. Studying *bèlè* in this manner is somewhat non-traditional (although I have some evidence that the *bèlè* families in Ste-Marie offered their own members semi-formal instruction since at least the 1950s). However, in his teaching Jean-Baptiste emphasizes expressivity (an aesthetic value associated with traditionality) over analysis, setting himself off from AM4, which teaches according to a stricter system. Jean-Baptiste emphasizes his close personal links to the elders in Bel Alians. He is a close friend with some of the elders, and frequently exchanges food and favors with them and their families. Meanwhile he contributes noticeably to the urban *bèlè* scene by drumming, dancing, organizing, publishing, and teaching. All of this adds up to a high personal reputation as a man who operates successfully in both traditional and modern, rural and urban worlds. As the *créolistes* might say, Jean-Baptiste's modern Créole identity consists of the ability to assert such categories in order to shift between them, in what Réno calls a "continual balancing" (1994a:8).

All *bèlè* performers wish to earn respect *as performers*. To do so they must put themselves on the spot in *swaré*, where they are evaluated and evaluate others. If a singer sings at a *swaré*, he knows that the other singers present judge him against themselves, and he judges himself against them. While one may guess that aesthetic considerations dominate consciousness during such moments, other factors are nonetheless present. Performers enter into relationships with one another based on competition,

hierarchy, cooperation, respect, affection; those relationships are active during performance—inherent in the process of evaluating—and performers are aware of them. This is likely true even in those musical scenes that are less competitive than others.

In the *bèlè* scene the elders retain a great deal of personal authority. Their aesthetic judgments carry a great deal of weight, especially in the context of performance. In fact, elders tend to limit their comments about other performers to aesthetics; they seem to feel more comfortable or more respected in this realm. The critical style of many elders is rather disconcerting. Unless a performer is either very bad, so that he disrupts others, or quite spectacular, they say nothing. They just fold their arms and watch. As Siméline Rangon, lead singer of *Bel Alians*, told me, “We expect you to recognize your own mistakes and make improvements.” A performer looks around and meets silence, and is forced to acknowledge the authority of the folded arms.

The above comments on reputation in the *bèlè* scene may be extended, I believe, to other small musical scenes around the world. They also apply to larger, commercialized scenes. In rock and jazz, for example, reputations are both competitive and consensual; they combine aesthetic evaluations, assessments of social identity (such as the authenticity of black jazz players), and contribution (for example, musicians known to be punctual and sober get calls for gigs). In fact, for practical purposes the social organization of large musical scenes often consists of the same type of flexible face-to-face networks as in small scenes (Faulkner 1971; MacLeod 1993; Monson 1990).

Reputation in practice

The above points arise out of ethnographic concerns: How do authenticity and authority, representing and representations, work in practice? How do performers make connections between evaluations of performance skills and social identity? How do they “read” identity from performance? How do they evaluate certain performers as traditional and others as not traditional? How do some performers—largely the *bèlè* renewalists—feed political concepts about Martinican identity into their evaluations of performers’ skills and social identity? To frame these questions in terms of this article’s guiding questions, how are music-identity-politics connections made in practice, and are they made in the same way by all performers?

One method I used to explore these issues was to review, with the performers, videotapes of different groups performing, and to elicit commentary. Initially, I showed my videotapes to performers so that they could help me analyze technical aspects of their work. However, their comments spun off into other realms. I found that using the videotapes enabled me

to gather private opinions, criticisms, and gossip that would not have been expressed in public settings such as swaré.

In order to understand performers' comments on one another we can take a brief look at bèlè performance and aesthetics. The several Ste-Marie bèlè dances proper differ in their specific steps, feeling, time signatures, rhythmic patterns, and songs, but all of them follow the same basic choreographic sequence, a modified quadrille. Four couples enter the dance space in a ring (*kouri won*, from the French "courir rond," "circular run"). Two couples form a *kwadril* (quadrille, square) while the other two couples watch. The two couples in the *kwadril* dance towards one another, with each dancer selecting one of several steps appropriate to the particular dance. The dancers change places; they repeat the approach/exchange sequence three more times. Then the other two couples form their *kwadril*. After the second *kwadril*, the partners of one couple dance towards one another, exchange places, dance towards the drum (*monté tanbou*), and climax their partnership in front of the drum with various flirtatious moves. The other three couples each have a turn, and then all eight dancers reform their ring and exit.¹⁰

Only one *tanbouyé* (drummer) accompanies the dance. Often there are two drummers, but they take turns: one plays for the first *kwadril* and the other for the second, and then they play for alternate couples. Drums (*tanbou bèlè*) are single-membrane barrel drums and are played transversally, that is, lying on their side; drummers sit on them and use their heel to change pitch. There are also supporting percussionists who play unvarying rhythmic ostinati: one or two players of *tibwa* ("petit bois," a pair of sticks), and sometimes one *chacha* (cylindrical metal shaker). *Tibwa* is played either on the shell of the drum behind the seated drummer, or on a length of bamboo mounted on a stand. (For details on these instruments see Cally-Lézin 1990; Desroches 1985, 1989.) The drummer follows the choreography closely. Each time the dancers dance towards one another—four times in each *kwadril*, and twice for each couple—the drummer plays a groove pattern. For each of the bèlè dances there are several specific steps from which dancers can choose for their groove sections, and upon which they can build variations. There are also several groove patterns for drummers to choose from and vary. This framework allows much room for variation, expressivity, and demonstrations of skill. Dancers and drummers may subtly vary their patterns. Dancers end their danced grooves and move to new positions with a variety of spins, jumps, pelvic thrusts, and other moves. Drummers match these moves with dramatic improvisations. The length of groove sections and the timing of transitions is not fixed, and there are no definite cues. Yet dancers and drummers synchronize their kinetic and musical improvisations quite consistently.

Successful *bèlè* performance depends, then, on individual expression stemming from a well-internalized yet flexible base of knowledge. As an elder dancer, Vava Grivalliers, told me, the way that dancers do even the most basic steps should show personal style or “flair”: “It’s your body. It’s for you to find a style of dancing that fits you.” Drummers and singers also exhibit a wide range of personal style. Such individualism seems to have been a strong part of Ste-Marie tradition.

Bèlè performance demands a fairly high level of competence. Since the number of performers is small—eight dancers, two or three percussionists, a lead singer—much responsibility attaches to each role. An incompetent performer would be booted offstage. (The exception is chorus members, for whom volume and enthusiasm are the main requirements.) Established singers and drummers know most of the other singers and drummers (though not the dancers, who are more numerous) and informally screen would-be performers. Novices will not begin performing until they are confident of their skills. They typically begin their public careers at small *swaré*, waiting to perform until the end of the evening after the experts have finished. During performance itself, performers and audience members pay close attention to individuals’ technique and style. Performers recognize, savor, and strive to imitate the skills and mannerisms of their favorite experts, much as jazz saxophonists might study and imitate the styles of Lester Young or Charlie Parker. Most of the audience at a *swaré* comes to watch, not to participate, but many of them are quite knowledgeable—the minority of Martinicans who enjoy *bèlè* at all tend to follow it closely.

As they commented on my videotapes, performers focused on valued characteristics of personal style: technical skill, spontaneity, expressiveness, professionalism, and traditionality. For instance, the dancing of one of the members of Bel Alians, Wiltor Cébarec, elicited comments on *spontanéité* (spontaneity). At one point Wiltor advanced towards his partner with tiny steps on the outside edges of his feet, completely suspending the beat. His stiff torso and outflung arms increased the sense of suspension and made him look rather like a scarecrow. His partner’s big, rhythmic hip swings set off Wiltor’s apparent clumsiness. Yet as the drummer broke into a change, Wiltor moved with him and ended perfectly on the beat. Watching this sequence, the other members of Bel Alians laughed at Wiltor’s clowning yet at the same time laughed *with* him. “Everyone laughs at Wiltor,” commented Etienne Jean-Baptiste. “He’s not always on the rhythm but he has a manner of expression. He looks like he’s going to fall, but he never does. In the end he’s a good dancer.”

Wiltor submerges his command of technique in favor of *spontanéité*. He plays on the stereotype of rural rusticity and authenticity. In fact, apart

from being young Wiltor fits the social profile of a rural performer: he is from one of the traditional Ste-Marie bèlè families, lives in the Ste-Marie countryside, and works a low-status job as a laborer on a banana plantation. However, as I have indicated, the bèlè families have been specialists for some time, and Wiltor's skills are hardly untrained.

Bel Alians members contrasted Wiltor's spontanèité to the correct but restrained movements of one of their women dancers: she moved, they said, "on rhythm" but looked "like she's afraid." In other words, she was inexpressive. But expressiveness and skill need not clash; a dancer may exhibit both at once. Watching the videotape, master drummer Paulo Rastocle noted several instances in which the dancer Casimir Jean-Baptiste (Etienne Jean-Baptiste's brother) anticipated his own drummed changes, caught up after missed changes, signaled his intentions so that Rastocle could follow, and cued or responded to other dancers, all while dancing strongly and with self-expression. Rastocle praised Casimir's dancing as "professional." This choice of term evokes the specialization of the large bèlè families and their participation in the island's tourist troupes; it is not incompatible with "tradition." Although Casimir is from Fort-de-France he, like his brother Etienne, has earned the respect of rural performers and is considered a legitimate bearer of tradition.

When members of Bel Alians commented on videotapes of AM4, they described AM4's dancers as inexpressive and non-traditional: "We practice the old dancing. Them, they practice modern. . . . It's been transformed"; "Their style, it's cold"; "It's too poised, it's much calmer than us, [they remain] in their places [too long]"; AM4 lacks "dynamism in the comportment of each person"; AM4 "turns out clones among their dancers." What strikes me in these comments is that Bel Alians' members focused on stereotypical constructions of social identity (rural versus urban, traditional versus modern) and associated aesthetic characteristics (spontaneous and expressive versus systematized and inexpressive). They limited the full range of evaluations they had previously applied to themselves: not only spontaneous and expressive but also funny, timid, strong, and professional. Along with these simplifications, Bel Alians' members contrasted themselves to AM4 as one group against another rather than as individuals. They glossed over the varied personal styles and social backgrounds of individual members—the fact that some rural dancers are limited in skills and expressivity, that the Jean-Baptiste brothers are from the city, and so forth.

I showed the same videotapes to members of AM4. One response was that AM4's dancers and drummers are better trained and more knowledgeable than those of Ste-Marie, due to years of research into the bèlè dances, and to their rationalized and comprehensive teaching practices. As one AM4 member put it, AM4 is "*more* authentic than the elders." AM4 dancers noted

that they take care to display the traditional choreography, i.e., the patterned changes of place, rather than rush through those changes. (Contrast Bel Alians' criticism, "[they remain] in their places [too long].") AM4 dancers also pointed out that they are well-known for their flirtatiousness and humor.

AM4's comments deconstructed the rural versus urban, expressive versus inexpressive stereotype. They defended AM4's traditionality, skill, and spontaneity (such as flirtatiousness and humor). Yet another AM4 comment pointed directly to the fact that the stereotypes *are* stereotypes: "The differences are among individual dancers, not groups. In a swaré, everyone dances with each other anyway." This deconstruction is part of the ideology AM4 shares with the créolité movement: the embrace of a hybrid Martinican identity in which both tradition and modernity, rural and urban, are authentic.

AM4's deconstruction also has the effect of legitimizing AM4's members as the appropriate heirs of bèlè tradition. It is they, not the elders, who are educated and urban, and know how to organize, document, teach, and promote the bèlè tradition among contemporary Martinicans. It they who recognize bèlè's potential contribution to a sense of Martinican oppositional identity.

Commenting on videotapes was an unusual situation. Normally, the leaders of AM4 and other renewalist groups direct their particular representations of bèlè towards one another, their students, and outside the bèlè scene towards the wider public. These are the audiences receptive to such ideas. With elders, renewalists tend to mute their politics. Members of AM4 explained to me that this muting has enabled them to work closely with a large number of elders, because, even though those elders know AM4's politics, AM4 keeps its politics out of the way. Within the scene, the renewalists also mute their claims to authority as tradition-bearers. The AM4 member who told me that AM4 is "*more* authentic" would not have said this had any Ste-Marie elders been present. The elders, for their part, tend to stick to aesthetic evaluations, a realm in which their authority still holds.

Reputation and representations of tradition

Since the early 1980s a good deal of anthropological attention has focused on how traditions are invented and manipulated in the service of power (Clifford 1988; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). The bulk of this work has looked at how representations of tradition work at a large political scale, such as how an ethnic group presents itself within a nation, or how colonized and colonizers contest images of identity. Largely missing is a focus on the small scale—on the role that ideas of tradition and identity play in individuals' lives and small social networks.

In Martinique, “tradition” is a word that plays well in both rural and urban worlds, but the two worlds give it different spins. The elders recognize that the strongest part of their reputation remains their claim to traditionality. It might appear that their understanding of tradition is static and essentialist, in comparison to the renewalists’ recognition of change and hybridity. But in contexts where the elders do not need to assert their authority, they do not confine themselves to a narrow view. Siméline Rangon, who is considered one of the most traditional *bèlè* singers, has composed her own lyrics on modern themes, for example a visit to Fort-de-France. Another respected singer, Ti Raoul Grivalliers, is an exception to my statements above about the elders’ apoliticality. Using traditional melodies, he composes new lyrics about current political and cultural events: for example, songs praising the Créole language and the *créolistes* (“*Kréyol à lékol*,” “Créole at school”) and the overthrow of Haiti’s “Baby Doc” Duvalier (“*Yo chassé Bibi Dok-la*,” “They chase out Baby Doc”). Even the most traditional of traditionalists lives in the modern world.

The claim that *bèlè* represents Martinican tradition—a claim made by both renewalists and elders—involves hidden assumptions. It requires the imagination of a community: “traditional Martinique” (Anderson 1983). But the island has been home to different regional traditions, musical and other. The Ste-Marie *bèlè* dances were just one such regional tradition. Nor are these traditions today a primary means of expression for the island’s urban majority. To claim that they represent the identity of Martinicans as a whole requires a rather large leap of faith (cf. Manuel 1994 on *bomba* as Puerto Rican national music).

One can trace the course by which Ste-Marie style *bèlè* became, for its aficionados, the most visible symbol of vernacular Martinican dance/music. The process began in the recent past, as the island’s first tourist dance troupes were founded in the 1950s. The organizers of the tourist troupes—entrepreneurs, the Ministry of Tourism, and at least one folklorist (Bertrand 1968)—found in the large Ste-Marie *bèlè* families a ready source of highly skilled performers. In return the families found in the tourist troupes a source of income, and made sure that the troupes recruited through their network. Many of today’s elders have performed at some point in their career in these troupes. In addition Ste-Marie style *bèlè* fit tourists’ stereotypes of what Caribbean dance should be: rustic, sexy, “African,” and harmless. The tourist troupes were probably the major venue for public performances of indigenous dance during the 1960s and 1970s, a period when the rural *swaré* network was in decline.

During the 1960s and 1970s intellectuals turned away from *bèlè* because of its association with the tourist troupes, and because the *négritude*-influenced *retour aux sources* privileged African rather than local tradition.

Not until the 1980s did a younger generation of performers, today's renewalists, claim Ste-Marie style *bèlè* as generic "Martinican tradition" and as a "national art." The renewalists have attempted to popularize *bèlè* throughout the island by organizing swaré and classes. They have, fairly successfully, attempted to increase the respect shown to *bèlè* elders. At the same time, the renewalists subtly differentiate themselves from the elders. For example, the renewalists reject the folklorique (inauthentic), even demeaning and racist, excesses of the tourist troupes. Accordingly they portray the era of authentic *bèlè* as having been before World War II—before departmental status, the tourist troupes, and the upheavals of Martinique's modernity. But the performing career of today's generation of elders has been largely since the War. The renewalists thus diminish the elders' contribution, and bolster their own.

Similarly, the renewalists (AM4 in particular) research and teach some of the repertoire ignored by both the tourist troupes and the current groups based around Ste-Marie elders. For example, AM4 teaches *bèlè du sud* and the martial art *danmyé* in addition to Ste-Marie style *bèlè*. On the other hand, AM4 tends to focus on those dances that it perceives as "African" in derivation, most representative of what AM4 terms *les musiques afro-martiniquaises*. Thus, AM4 does not teach *haute taille*, a quadrille dance from the mid-Atlantic region (south of Ste-Marie), which is perceived as "more European" in style.

The renewalists sometimes rationalize tradition, analyzing things into neat categories and filling in missing pieces. For example, AM4 names and codifies all *bèlè* dance steps. The elders name only a few, and not all elders use the names consistently. AM4 distinguishes a separate dance, *bidjin bèlè*, from the dance *bèlè* (not to be confused with *bèlè* as a category of dances). Some elders told me that *bidjin bèlè* is simply a stylistic variant of *bèlè*. AM4 uses such fine distinctions to bolster its claim to represent tradition legitimately. When the AM4 member told me that AM4 is "more authentic" than the elders, he referred specifically to AM4's command of a large, rationalized repertoire. The elders, for their part, criticize such distinctions as too finicky. Arguments over the fine points of the repertoire lie within the realm of the elders' aesthetic authority, and they are comfortable challenging the renewalists in this realm.¹¹

Philip Bohlman's comments on the flexibility of folk repertoires are applicable here (1988). Folk repertoires have both canonical cores, comprising material upon which everyone more or less agrees, and peripheries, which are contentious. In this case the core is the Ste-Marie dances that everyone in the scene knows (*bèlè*, *gran bèlè*, *béliá*, *kalenda*, etc.). The periphery would be possible stylistic variants (*bidjin bèlè*) as well as more obscure dances (*bèlè du sud*, for example). The contention is not so much

about the material *per se* as about inclusion and exclusion—what belongs and what doesn't. These arguments are also about identity. What a music is defined as also defines, and is defined by, the group of people who perform it. And contentions over the repertoire are also about who has the authority to designate belonging and to evaluate those who belong.

Reputation and the ethnographer

My recognition of the role of reputation in the bèlè scene was intimately connected to establishing my own reputation as a bèlè performer. Within several weeks of my arrival in Martinique I began playing tibwa (the supporting stick *ostinato*) at *swaré*, and with the troupes Bel Alians and Maframé for both local and tourist audiences. After about ten months I began performing at *swaré* on drum. Since the bèlè ensemble is small, when I played I was in a responsible and very visible role. To add to my visibility, I was one of very few outsiders ever to take an interest in bèlè. Although I always felt well received as a researcher, when I began performing I felt people watching me in a different way.

I worried that people watched me because I was an outsider, a white man, or—worst of all—a bad drummer. But I quickly realized that I was being treated as Martinicans treat one another. All new performers must establish themselves. There is a routine of testing the newcomer: staring him down, playing louder than him, and other tricks. At the second *swaré* at which I played drum, the drummer playing with me—who should have alternated *kwadrils* with me—played for the first *kwadril* and continued playing through the second, leaving me sitting there, feeling like a fool. I asked Etienne Jean-Baptiste, who was watching nearby, what was going on. He told me what I suspected: this is what Martinicans do to one another, and when he started drumming they did it to him. So on the next song I blew through the other drummer's turn. This was, of course, the kind of response the other drummer expected. It was competitive, but competition was only part of it. Through his challenge and my response the other drummer and I began to establish a consensual relationship, a relationship between ourselves as performers.

Making one's own place in a network of social relations is inherent in the participant-observation technique common to ethnomusicology and anthropology. As I matured from observer to learner to participating performer, other performers began treating me as they treat one another. This process was no different from, for example, Napoleon Chagnon's learning to fight back against Yanomami argumentiveness, or Carolyn Stack learning to signify on her African American friends (Chagnon 1992; Stack 1974:15-16). The usual anthropological tag for this process, "learning to

behave in culturally appropriate ways,” has always struck me as shallow, as if one need only learn a program of behaviors. The process is much less mechanical than that. It involves, among other things, what sociologist Erving Goffman calls “impression management” (1959)—interpreting others’ behavior, and attempting to have others interpret one’s own behavior, in specific ways. This, in turn, means entering into actual relationships in a given social network. Ethnomusicologists who perform learn not just music, but how to negotiate musical relationships. As they enter into such relationships they also enter into, and help to create, the consensus of aesthetic evaluations existing in specific musical scenes.

In Martinique I was evaluated not only aesthetically, but also in terms of my social identity and contributions to the *bèlè* scene. For example, as I played the videotapes of Bel Alians and AM4 for Bel Alians’ commentary, Siméline Rangon turned the tables on me, asking which group I preferred. I began with what I thought was a diplomatic response (“I like both”) but stopped short when I saw the disgusted look on her face. She was challenging me to ally with one group or the other, to enter into an existing network of relationships that were not neutral. She asked that I demonstrate not just musical skills, but also a sense of identity and contribution. Caught out, I listed some things I thought Bel Alians did better, but still felt embarrassed by this particular interaction.

The relationships that ethnomusicologists establish as performers are, I believe, similar to the performing relationships of the people they study. Music and dance involve somewhat restricted repertoires of social action, and people are unlikely to change those repertoires much when they incorporate an outsider. The drummer who played through my turn challenged me to retaliate (or, if I were a weak performer, to slink away). Siméline Rangon invited me to ally myself to one or another group, just like Martinican musicians do. Even when people treat an outsider differently, they do so according to indigenous standards for treating people differently. If, say, people judge an outsider to be an inept musician yet ask him to perform with them for reasons of prestige, they are manipulating him according to their standards of manipulation.

For ethnomusicologists who perform, the process of establishing their own reputations as performers is well worthy of attention. They may be tempted to downplay this process, not wishing to appear to their academic colleagues as unduly intrusive in the scenes they study. Or perhaps they prefer to view their musical relationships as non-competitive, egalitarian friendships. Yet interpersonally constructed authority is part of every musical relationship. It is not necessarily non-egalitarian; two performers may establish a relationship as equals. And it is part of the field experience of every ethnomusicologist who picks up an instrument and attempts to participate.

Reputation and ethnomusicology

Performers, like most other people, make abstract ideas concrete by referring them to their own lives. They connect their music to their ideas about identity and politics by applying those larger ideas to themselves and to one another. This application is motivated, not impartial. Performers use ideas about identity and politics to assert and contest authority *vis-à-vis* one another. When a performer asserts, "We are the *X*, this is our music, and it expresses our politics," she is not just making a general statement about group identity and musical style. She is defining the *X* and their music in a particular way, and staking her own claim to authority as a member of the *X* and a performer of their music. Her practical use of ideas becomes an intrinsic part of their meaning.

Most performers are probably aware of the practical side of their assertions, but it seems unimportant. The woman who states "We are the *X* and this is our music" is sincere; she will defend her assertion as such, and is right to do so. Similarly, as students of musical scenes, ethnomusicologists may dismiss the strategic side of general statements: "Of course musicians make claims about music and identity that just so happen to bolster their own authority. What else is new?"

The statement "We are the *X* and this is our music" is multiply determined; it is sincere and strategic at the same time. Such general statements command attention because they are dramatic and glamorous. Their glamor masks their mundane effect, the work they do in the everyday context of performers' social networks. This work thereby becomes less visible, taken for granted—as sociologist Harold Garfinkel would say, it becomes part of the background assumptions of everyday social practice (1967). Perhaps such backgrounding makes the work of reputation-building possible. Perhaps reputation-building *must* be somewhat indirect. Performers need to cooperate as well as compete, especially in small, face-to-face musical networks.

Conversely, if the strategic use of glamorous ideas were not backgrounded, those ideas might not seem so glamorous, and people might not get so excited over them. Assertions about the music-identity-politics connection are built, at some level, on leaps of faith. They posit correlations that work best if taken for granted: "*Of course* we are the *X* and this is our music." When someone wishes to challenge such a statement, the first thing they do is question its "naturalness": "Who are the *X* anyway? Aren't you part *Y*? Aren't you leaving out the *Z* and their contributions to 'your' music? And what about this other style that you play, but you're ignoring?"

It is useful to ask whether the masking effect that leads performers to downplay the role of reputation in their use of ideas may work on ethnomusicologists as well. Ethnomusicologists, like performers, get excited over

the drama of ideas. Issues of identity and politics are important to them, both intellectually and in their role as advocates of the musics they love. They tend to highlight such issues in their writing and may possibly reify those issues, as do the performers they study, ignoring the more grubby manifestations of ideas in everyday musical life.

Yet the practical use of ideas, their role in face-to-face social networks, is a topic deserving of attention. Reputation provides an immediate, unglamorous context for the concrete shaping of larger ideas, ideas in which both ethnomusicologists and the performers they study take an intense interest. In reputation's combination of judgments both artistic and social, ethnomusicologists have an excellent opportunity to see the practical linking of music and social life, the classic twin faces of their field.

Notes

1. A version of this article was presented in October 1995 at the annual meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology in Los Angeles. The research on which this article is based was undertaken with the aid of grants from the J. W. Fulbright Foundation, Wenner-Gren Foundation, and University of California, Berkeley. For discussion and criticism of ideas in this article I would like to thank Gage Averill, Ilesa Barbash, Ben Brinner, Vévé Clark, Dominique Cyrille, Alan Dundes, Kathleen Chen Gerstin, Nelson H. H. Graburn, Jocelyne Guilbault, Adam John, Jill Leonard, Aletha Stahl, John Stiles, Lucien Taylor, Bonnie Wade, and all of the Martinican performers involved, especially Georges Dru, Pierre Dru, Etienne Jean-Baptiste, Siméline Rangon, Paulo Rastocle, Constant Velasques, and the members of Bel Alians, Association Mi Mes Manmay Matinik, and Maframé. Ilesa Barbash, Matthew Lavoie, and Lucien Taylor assisted with the video production. Except where noted, all translations are my own.

2. Straw's article, while a touchstone of this article, analyzes musical scenes from a somewhat different perspective. Straw emphasizes "logics" of change as constitutive of musical scenes, and omits description of webs of authority in any particular scene. Missing, for example, is discussion of the power of DJs in dance clubs. This may be because Straw's investigation focuses on consumers in popular music scenes. Such consumers may have common interests, but remain separated by the fact that their consumption is anonymous. In one of Straw's case studies, alternative rock, consumption consists largely of record buying; here the anonymity of consumers is obvious. In the other case study, dance clubs, consumers do come into contact with one another, but again the contact may remain fairly anonymous. In contrast, the *bèlè* scene is a virtually face-to-face network of, to a great extent, performers and knowledgeable aficionados, many of whom have lasting contacts with one another.

3. For a more detailed description of the Martinican *bèlè* repertoire and its history than can be provided here, see Gerstin 1996. Major writings on the subject include Cally-Lézin 1990, Jallier and Lossen 1985, and the booklets self-published by AM4 (1992a; 1992b; 1994). Monique Desroches provides organological and ethnographic information (1985, 1989) and places *bèlè* in the context of other Martinican traditions, with an emphasis on the process of creolization (1981; 1990).

4. On the neighboring islands of Guadeloupe (Lafontaine 1982, 1986; Rosemain 1986; Uri and Uri 1991), Marie-Galante (Rey-Hulman 1986), and St. Lucia (Guilbault 1985; Midgett 1977), rural quadrille dances were, and still are, sponsored by voluntary associations known as *sociétés*. These *sociétés* seem somewhat more formal than rural dance organization in Martinique; for example, admission to dances is by written invitation. Unfortunately, sources are ambiguous as to whether dance *sociétés* as such existed on Martinique.

5. Jocelyne Guilbault writes that local actors in “the global/local nexus” have typically “generated two types of actions, one directed to the protection, the other to the promotion of the local cultural capital and identity” (1993:34–35). In Martinique’s case, and I believe in many others, these two approaches pertain to two conceptualizations of time and identity. One approach combats the way that modernization rejects the past by valorizing that past; it polarizes past and present. This attitude manifests in Martinican cultural and political life as a rejection of the French ideology of assimilationism, which identifies and denigrates Martinicans as “Other.” Négritude, the philosophy that dominated Martinican oppositional discourse in the 1960s and 1970s, reversed assimilationism by celebrating Blackness. However, as numerous critics of *négritude*, among them Jean-Paul Sartre (1963) and Frantz Fanon (1967:124–133), pointed out, simply inverting the value placed on Otherness was a weak approach, because it accepted the mutual exclusion of Us and Others, the reduction of Others to stereotypes, and even the terms of the stereotypes. If whites criticized blacks as irrational, *négritude* celebrated irrationality—but accepted the polarity. *Négritude* provided an antithesis rather than a transformative synthesis. Polarizing approaches are, I believe, typical of movements that seek simply to protect the past. In contrast, both *créolité* and the *bèlè* renewal have accepted and celebrate the Créole synthesis of Martinican identity (Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant 1989; Burton 1993). For the *créolistes* Martinique is both past and present, French and Other. This is an embracing rather than polarizing attitude. Such an attitude is, I think, typical of movements (musical and other) that seek to promote (*promouvoir*) rather than simply to protect (*sauvegarder*).

6. In my dissertation (1996) I examine at greater length why the *bèlè* renewal, *créolité*, and recent Martinican political parties have remained limited in effectiveness and appeal, and largely fragmented from one another. In particular, I ask why *bèlè*, unlike so many other ethnic music revivals, has not won greater public attention or support from other oppositional movements. I seek to explain this situation in terms of Martinique’s balancing of opposition and accommodation. While Césaire’s philosophy of *négritude* was starkly oppositional, departmentalization was integrative, and Césaire’s long administration has mediated these two tendencies by struggling for a degree of local autonomy within the French state. Martinique’s contemporary political and cultural movements build on Césaire’s foundation, both philosophical and political. Thus the *créolistes* celebrate their postmodern style of integrating cultures, and the *bèlè* renewalists embrace tradition within modernity. At the same time, the contemporary movements seem to become preoccupied with their own legitimacy and limited successes; they do not ally with one another, and they appeal only to the small portion of the public that is inclined to pay attention to their particular spheres of action (literature, music, and so on). *Créolité* has been able to capitalize on the high prestige of literature in the French world, but *bèlè* enjoys no such advantage.

In a discussion of nationalist ideology, Richard Fox hypothesizes that a dialectic exists between ideological production by hegemonic groups, and the everyday social action in which ideology is applied and appropriated, conformed with or opposed (1990). The grassroots adapts hegemonic discourse; hegemonic discourse eventually reappropriates that of the grassroots; the grassroots then creates new versions of hegemonic discourse; and so forth. Fox’s idea makes intuitive sense to me, but I found that in Martinique there is little feedback from the grassroots to hegemonic discourse, just as there is little feedback between the various oppositional arenas of cultural production. Ideas promulgated in the more “high-profile” realms of *créolité* and local politics find their way into the *bèlè* renewal, but the high-profile realms pay no attention. Accepting the plausibility of Fox’s model, the question becomes why the Martinican situation works against feedback and coalition. I have tried to explain this above.

7. It is, of course, a function of stereotypes to gloss over nuances and exceptions, while exaggerating commonalities. As Fredrik Barth put it with regards to ethnic stereotypes, there is only a loose fit between stereotype and reality, so that “simple ethnic dichotomies can be retained, and their stereotyped behavioral differential reinforced, despite a considerable objective variation” (1969:30). What seems intriguing about Martinican constructions of identi-

ty is that by giving people handles on which to hang identities, the stereotypes enable people to mediate those identities. Martinicans employ the stereotypes while constantly crossing their invisible lines. This seems to be an intrinsic part of Martinicans' créolité.

8. Alland, writing of a social movement within France itself, distinguishes between "affectives" and "politicals": "Affectives see problems in terms of human relationships, which generally take precedence over strictly political goals. . . . The politicals see each local issue in the context of a larger framework consistent with the general desire. . . to press for social and political change—a desire shared by affectives as well, though not always given first priority. . . . The affectives are, in large measure, native to the Larzac [the plateau region whose struggle Alland is describing], while the majority of the politicals are to be found among those militants who settled on the plateau during and. . . after the struggle" (1994:133). This distinction is analogous to mine between Martinican urban bèlè renewalists and rural bèlè elders. Alland's "politicals" are even organized, like the bèlè renewalists, into associations de 1901.

9. To reframe this discussion in theoretical terms, Pierre Bourdieu discusses how power and status result from cultural capital and social capital in addition to economic capital (1984). It is important what you know and who you know, as well as how much you own. In the small world of bèlè what you know (your performance skills), who you know (your alliances), and what you do (your contributions) help determine who you are seen to be (your social identity), and ultimately how much status (reputation) you have. This application of Bourdieu was suggested to me by Sarah Thornton (1996).

10. The "framing" of quadrilles by counter-clockwise circles suggests the embracing of a European sensibility by an African one, in a unique Martinican synthesis (cf. Lafontaine 1982, 1986 on the "framing" of quadrille sets by biguines, and Abrahams 1970 and Guilbault 1985 for similar cases). This, and other aspects of bèlè, would seem to be perfect symbols of Martinican identity as described by the créolistes—which only makes their failure to pay attention to bèlè more striking.

11. AM4's rationalization or over-distinction of tradition is similar to what Thomas Turiño labels "hypercorrection" (1993:209) in urban versions of rural Peruvian panpipe; to what Nicholas Thomas describes as the "objectification" of "fluid" traditions (1992:221–222); and to Brinner's comments on academic gamelan instruction in Indonesia (1995:157–159).

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