

KANAVAL: Haitian Rhythms & the Music of New Orleans

Hour One

Hosted by Haitian-American and New Orleans-based artist and musician, Leyla McCalla, a founding member of Our Native Daughters & alumna of the GRAMMY award-winning Carolina Chocolate Drops.

[Lakou Mizik - Iko Kreyol]

For people who know Haiti and New Orleans, the similarities are endless.

MICHAEL BRUN: It's a different country, but it's like a mirror

The deep connection between these places really comes alive in the music.

MARYSE DEJEAN: In New Orleans, music and dancing was a way to transcend any kind of difficulties that you had, and in Haiti it was absolutely the same thing

Haiti is home to many styles and sounds, shaped by indigenous Taíno, African, French, and Spanish inhabitants.

This music made its way to New Orleans when more than 10,000 free and enslaved Haitians immigrated to the city after their country's Revolution at the turn of the 19th century.

That shared history continues to influence the culture of both places today.

BRUCE SUNPIE BARNES: Historically, two places joined at the hip.

Kanaval: Haitian Rhythms and the Music of New Orleans examines and celebrates the origins, history, and persistent presence of Haitian culture in the Crescent City

I'm your host, Leyla McCalla.

Stay with us.

SEGMENT A

You're listening to Kanaval: Haitian Rhythms and the Music of New Orleans.

I'm Leyla McCalla.

[Blue Dot Session - Moon Bicycle Theme]

I'll never forget going to Cap-Haitien for the first time. It's a beautiful coastal city in the North of Haiti. Where colorful facades feature arched doors and overhanging balconies.

I remember thinking, "This looks like the French Quarter. Or - wait a minute - does the French Quarter look like Cap-Haitien?"

As a Haitian-American who lives in New Orleans, I often sense these moments of recognition.

The sound of a drum or horn.

The aroma from a kitchen. The look of the food.

A house I stumble upon that reminds me of one place or the other.

There are also more subtle ways of *being*. The way the people in both places are open to celebrating - we've elevated hanging out to a high art. The way Haitians and New Orleanians share a strong spiritual connection to the place they're from and the place they live in.

I was born in Queens, New York in 1985. My parents immigrated to the US in the 1960s during the violent and tyrannical Papa Doc Duvalier regime.

My parents became activists and have been involved in the movement for Haitian human rights in the US and in Haiti for my entire life.

Through them, I learned about Haitian culture and language.

But it wasn't until I moved to New Orleans in my 20s that I realized that Kreyol is more than a language - it's an identity. It carries a unique history that we should all know more about.

I've become passionate about finding ways to share the beauty and the connections between the culture of my ancestral and adopted homes.

My work as a songwriter, cellist, and singer explores these historical and sonic connections between the places I love: Haiti and New Orleans.

[Leyla McCalla - Me and My Baby]

Whether it's weaving together the poems of Langston Hughes with Haitian folk songs...

[Leyla McCalla - Mesi Bondye]

Or bringing musicians from Haiti and New Orleans together in one room to play.

[Leyla McCalla - Settle Down]

Or writing my own songs to sing in Haitian creole...

[Leyla McCalla - Mize Pa Dous]

Something feels like home in all this music. It's why those buildings in Cap-Haitien reminded me of the French Quarter. They share a deep cultural history that spans hundreds of years.

That history is evident in so much of what we cherish in New Orleans — and it's especially ingrained in the DNA of the music.

Yet, many people only associate Haiti with disaster stories the media tell again and again. Stereotypes that frame it as an irreversibly damaged place.

[Radio Haiti: Discours de François Duvalier, 2 janvier 1971]

The United States occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934 after its president was lynched in a coup'd'etat.

Later, Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier and his son Jean-Claude held power for nearly 30 years...

[Radio Haiti: Interview Jean-Claude Duvalier, Radio Canada-1979]

A violent, chaotic dictatorship that a popular uprising brought down.

After the installation of an interim military government, the first democratically elected president of Haiti — Jean-Bertrand Aristide — followed the Duvaliers.

[Radio Haiti: Jean-Bertrand Aristide-Al Gore- Boutros Boutros-Ghali-19951015]

Despite this victory for democracy, the early 90s were a very tumultuous time in Haiti. In part because the U.S. intervened, Aristide went into exile twice.

Corruption and repression mar his complicated legacy.

[NPR ATC: Thousands Feared Dead After Haiti Earthquake]

A catastrophic earthquake in 2010 killed hundreds of thousands of people... and displaced millions more.

[BBC: Haiti Risks Real Famine]

Even though the country struggles with systemic poverty and hunger, there are so many other stories to tell. There's so much gorgeous and vibrant expression that comes from Haiti.

The fact is: Other countries have deliberately held back Haiti's development since its inception.

[Blue Dot Sessions – Wistful]

It's possible to trace all of Haiti's major challenges to its colonial history...

Let's go back to before Haiti was Haiti. To when it was a French colony. Perhaps the most profitable land on the planet — because of what enslaved people made there.

Sugar.

Before Haiti was Haiti, it was a French colony, called Saint-Domingue.

LAURENT DUBOIS: Saint-Domingue was this powerhouse of the Atlantic economy, you know, it was like massively productive in terms of sugar and coffee and wealth.

ANGEL PARHAM: It was a very fertile, and fecund place.

NED SUBLETTE: Saint-Domingue was so profitable. The income from Saint-Domingue allowed for the growth of a bourgeoisie that could revolt in the French Revolution.

This wealth came, in large part, from sugarcane plantations. The process of turning cane into sugar was anything but sweet.

[Libera Borderau and Ti Yogan - M'Pas Bwe M'Pas Mange']

Angel Parham: It's a particularly brutal crop to bring in. When you're in the harvest season, it has to be harvested very, very quickly or it goes bad very quickly. And so that led to basically a 24 hour cycle of cutting it and then grinding it, and then boiling the juice and crystallizing the sugar.

Angel Parham teaches history at Loyola University in New Orleans. Her book, *American Roots*, examines the migration to New Orleans of people fleeing revolution in San Domingue.

That revolution had everything to do with making sugar.

ANGEL PARHAM: Enslaved people would have to do their regular shift during the day and then they had a double shift at night.

This was brutal.

[Libera Borderau - Coté Yo, Coté Yo (Mais Dance Song)]

ANGEL PARHAM: Because it was such a lucrative crop, it made so much money for the owners, that kind of the approach to slavery that the French took was to work their slaves to death. literally squeeze as much work and life out of them as they could, as quickly as possible, and when they died, just buy some new ones — new people.

LAURENT DUBOIS: The planters just calculated and understood that oftentimes people would only live three, four, five years. That very few children will be born. And that the model was essentially just buying more people from the slave trade. That was the economic model.

Laurent Dubois teaches history at Duke University. He's written extensively about the history of Haiti.

Dubois says enslaved people were constantly thrown together, snatched from their homes in West and Central Africa, speaking different languages and coming from a range of cultures. They were forced into close proximity.

Ned Sublette: In Saint-Domingue, they were jammed together in the confines of a labor camp.

Drummers of the Société Absolument Guinin - Rara

Writer and musician Ned Sublette. He's the author of *The World That Made New Orleans*.

Ned Sublette: No piece of ground in Africa had sustained that dense a population, ever, with that many people in close contact from so many different places learning to work together under military discipline.

LAURENT DUBOIS: This Africanness of the population is important.

Laurent Dubois.

LAURENT DUBOIS: At the time of Haitian independence, there's really a lot of people who had been enslaved maybe for like three to four years in their lives. You know, they had grown up say in central Africa or West Africa -- survivors of the middle passage, they arrive in this plantation world.

A plantation world that wasn't just brutal -- systemically, often sadistically brutal. In the late 1700's, it was *alive* with revolutionary ideas influenced by philosophers like Voltaire and Jean-Jaques Rousseau. Everyone in Saint Domingue was talking about what was going on in France -- a revolution.

ACTOR READING (from the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen): Men are born and remain free and equal in rights.

Those words, from the Declaration of the Rights of Man, reverberated across the ocean, says Angel Parham.

Angel Parham: there were colonists, white colonists in the colony of Saint Domingue who also felt that, you know, "We should have more autonomy. We're the ones actually living

here. We're the ones generating this wealth. Why should we have to answer to what's going on in France?

These colonists were mostly French, and white. They created a three-tiered society in Saint Domingue, with themselves at the top. At the bottom were enslaved Africans, who outnumbered them by about 10 to 1. In between, in numbers about the same as the whites, was a mixture, free people of color.

ANGEL PARHAM: Free people of color generally had some ties to Europeans, to the French, often had French fathers who would have educated their sons in Paris, were often wealthy in their own rights, sometimes slave owners in their own rights .

Free people of color wanted political rights too, such as the right to vote. So did Blacks. Talk of political rights and updates from France spread through the enslaved population by people who were privy to the news, coach drivers.

ANGEL PARHAM: Coach drivers were able to go from plantation to plantation, carrying the news to other enslaved people. And this idea of liberty, equality, and brotherhood sounded very good to enslaved people. You know, it sounded good to everyone.

LAURENT DUBOIS: People who were enslaved most certainly didn't buy the idea that they should be enslaved. They obviously thought that this was essentially some kind of crazy mad system that unfortunately they had found themselves in

Dubois says some enslaved people knew how to fight their way out of it.

LAURENT DUBOIS: A lot of people who were enslaved were actually former soldiers. many of them were captured in wars that had been accelerating in part because of the slave trade.

Captured in Central Africa and sold to European slavers.

LAURENT DUBOIS: Throughout the 1780s, the French were basically importing huge numbers of "African veterans," people who had fought in wars before. People who had been using firearms, been fighting in central Africa.

[Drummers of the Société Absolument Guinin – Rara]

Again, Angel Parham.

ANGEL PARHAM: So 1789, you get the beginning of the French Revolution, and just two years later, you get the beginning of the revolution in the colony of Saint Domingue, in August 1791.

Take brutal slave conditions. minority rule forced onto a majority of the people — some of whom have military training — just as ideas about equality rights are percolating, and what do you get?

Ned Sublette says, Revolution!

NED SUBLETTE: What we call the Haitian revolution, this umbrella name, is really a series of struggles.

It began in 1791, when two groups: maroons, who'd escaped enslavement and lived in the mountains, and enslaved people, still living on plantations and in cities organized together.

It's known as Boukman's Uprising, after an enslaved man named Dutty Boukman.

EDWIDGE DANTICAT: Boukman was was a slave. He was a maroon

Haitian writer Edwidge Danticat tells us Dutty Boukman was born in Senegambia, Africa where he was later captured and enslaved. First brought to Jamaica and then Saint Domingue, Boukman eventually became a coach driver who helped organize that initial uprising in the north of the island.

EDWIDGE DANTICAT: He had gathered people together and in one place in the ceremony, in the woods and it made everyone pledge to live free or die.

Legend has it that, alongside a vodou priestess, Cécile Fatiman, Boukman led a religious vodou ceremony in Bois Caiman, infusing the Haitian Revolution with a spiritual foundation.

They sacrificed an animal.

Boukman and Fatiman told the group of maroons and enslaved people that the god of their oppressors had called for their blood.

They must cast aside the image of the oppressors' god. Instead, they must listen to *their* gods, and to the liberty beating in their hearts. They must change the situation. This ceremony sparked the Haitian Revolution into action.

EDWIDGE DANTICAT: Of course in our history, there's always kind of the myth and there's the history and in the, in the myth mix of history is that, that night, all those people were there who eventually went on to actually do the actual fighting. So inspired by him.

That first uprising, energized by Dutty Boukman--

NED SUBLETTE: ...coordinated across a wide area in the North, takes the big sugar installations, destroys them, flattens them.

Without these slave labor camps, Sublette says, there would be no more sugar or coffee. No more wealth for the colonists.

NED SUBLETTE: Slave owners were terrified by this. This was the culmination of what had been feared all along, and now it seemed to be coming true. And indeed it was.

The revolution started in 1791. A dozen years later, it ended in a showdown with the most powerful fighting force of the time, the army of Napoleon Bonaparte.

NED SUBLETTE: Napoleon had thought he would re-establish plantation slavery in Saint-Domingue and Louisiana, and that the vast revenues from this would fund his military conquest of Europe.

Christoph Spering, Chorus Musicus & Das Neue Orchester - Oratorios pour le couronnement des princes souverains de la chrétienté_ No. 1, Allegro fieramente

And so...

NED SUBLETTE: Napoleon sent the largest military force that had crossed the Atlantic up to that point, headed by his brother-in-law General LeClaire to Saint-Domingue to subdue the Africans— some were Africans, some were Creoles. These primitive people as Napoleon saw them - no one thought that the Black people in Saint-Domingue could withstand the onslaught of Napoleon's mighty army.

But they did.

Between yellow fever and the resistance, Napoleon's army lost — spectacularly. In 1804, Haiti declared independence.

[Rara Machine – Badé]

Haiti abolished slavery and became the first independent Black nation on earth. Without this incredibly profitable island, Dubois says, Napoleon had no need for the land called the Louisiana territory.

Laurent Dubois: What Napoleon needed was a North American support colony for the Carribean. Like he needed a place to get wood and provisions and that kind of stuff. That was what essentially the plan was for Louisiana was to successfully turn it into a kind of North American settler colony so that the Caribbean could be rebuilt to its former glory as a plantation society.

Ned Sublette: When Napoleon saw that he was not going to be able to retake Saint Domingue, he spent no time at all. Made a quick decision. Last thing he wanted was for the British to have it. And he offered it to Jefferson's men.

Who, Sublette says, bought it for 15 million dollars. About four cents an acre. The Louisiana Purchase nearly doubled the size of the United States. Meanwhile, Haiti, the nation that made this possible, the first nation to abolish slavery ...

NED SUBLETTE: Immediately, Haiti became a pariah.

France refused to recognize the new nation. Also...

NED SUBLETTE: United States was not about to recognize a successful slave revolution.

That would have been way too risky. The US economy ran on slavery. Americans, in particular slave owners, were terrified that what happened in Haiti would spread like a contagion to the United States.

[Atis Indepandan - Speak to me]

Haiti's leaders were desperate for recognition — so they could negotiate trade deals and bring in money. The country's presidents tried and tried. Finally, 21 years after independence, in 1825, president Jean-Pierre Boyer made a deal. France would recognize Haiti, and in exchange, Dubois says, Haiti would pay *reparations*.

LAURENT DUBOIS: Essentially to kind of compensate the planters who lost their ...property. The property, most of which was invested in human beings. People who had been enslaved or whose parents had been enslaved were paying money to their former owners because they had dared to be free.

You heard that right: people who were stolen from their homes and forced into brutal unpaid labor had to pay *their former owners* for their freedom. This arrangement was so unpopular in Haiti, President Boyer went behind his parliament's back, Sublette says, to make the deal.

[Frisner Augustin and La Troupe Makandal - Simbi Dio]

NED SUBLETTE: The Haitians had to pay France millions of *francs*, which were borrowed from a bank and then repaid into the 20th century. Basically, they had to buy themselves back from the slave owners, which crippled Haiti's economy, from the very beginning.

Laurent Dubois.

LAURENT DUBOIS: They were paying what's known as the double debt.

They were paying interest on loans to pay the first debt throughout the 19th century and this at certain points, took up a huge portion of the Haitian treasury.

At times, *half* of the Haitian treasury. This debt to French banks lasted until 1947. Other countries also punished Haiti for daring to be free. Many refused to trade with the fledgling nation.

It took almost six decades and the Civil War before the United States officially recognized Haiti on June 5, 1862.

But by then, Haiti had already transformed the United States.

You're listening to Kanaval: Haitian Rhythms and the Music of New Orleans. We'll be back in a minute.

SEGMENT B

Welcome back to Kanaval: Haitian Rhythms and the Music of New Orleans.

I'm Leyla McCalla.

In the 12 and a half years between the Haitian revolution's beginnings in 1791 and its declaration of independence in 1804, Sublette says, many left the island.

NED SUBLETTE: There were various waves of refugees fleeing the various stages of what we collectively call the Haitian Revolution.

[Rara Inorab Kapab - Guantanamo Rara Sont]

My brothers, I'm leaving, they sing. We sold our pigs, we sold our goats to go...

These refugees were white *and* free people of color. They spoke French. And they brought with them a hybridized French-African island culture, along with the wealth they could take with them: the people they'd enslaved.

They settled in Baltimore, Philadelphia, Charleston, New Orleans, Jamaica, all along the Eastern seaboard and throughout the Caribbean. Like Cubans fleeing Castro a century and a half later, Angel Parham says, many stayed as close to Saint Domingue as they could.

ANGEL PARHAM: There was a very large group that went to Eastern Cuba in the area of Santiago de Cuba. And that was strategically a smart choice because it's just to the east of Haiti.

NED SUBLETTE: Maybe 25 to 30,000 people came.

Again, Ned Sublette.

And, at this time, the population of Santiago de Cuba was only something like 10,000. So they transformed the culture and economy of Eastern Cuba.

[Drummers of the Société Absolument Guinin – Mazoune]

Angel Parham says they brought sugar cane production, and also dancing, drumming, and rhythms rooted in Africa.

Angel Parham: I think people fleeing the revolution are thinking, "Okay, let's just kind of cool out here in Eastern Cuba. When things die down, we'll go back." And that didn't happen. Right? So once independence is declared, it's clear that the leadership has changed decisively.

So...for years...they stayed in Cuba. Then, in 1809, things got hostile between France and Spain. Napoleon installed his brother on the Spanish throne, and...Sublette says...

NED SUBLETTE: Cuba, the ever faithful isle, remained loyalist to the Spanish King. So, these French slave owners in Eastern Cuba were viewed with great fear at this point....

Spanish colonists in Cuba wanted the French out.

NED SUBLETTE: Not everyone left, but about 10,000 left within a span of four months in a flotilla, organized by the governor of Louisiana to New Orleans, where they came in late 1809, early 1810. Roughly a third white, a third free people of color, a third enslaved.

A Domiguan coffee planter who'd moved to New Orleans wrote a letter describing his new home.

ACTOR READING: "I thought I saw in Louisiana the place that would offer the most advantages to a poor colonist forced to flee, because, first of all, they speak the same language. What's left of our Negroes is worth a lot more money, and they are more easily rented. Moreover, one finds there the same habits, as well as Frenchmen who know more or less who you are, either personally or by reputation."

10,000 Domiguans landed in New Orleans—six years after the Louisiana Purchase and two years before the U.S. admitted Louisiana to the Union. At that time, Anglo-Americans wanted to make Louisiana *less* French, and, more like the rest of the country.

ANGEL PARHAM: And now here comes along almost double the number of people...

Again, Angel Parham.

ANGEL PARHAM: ...who are French speaking, who are Catholic, who are from this strange racial system, and they are then also bringing enslaved people and they're like, "Didn't they just, like, butcher all of these white people in San Domingue? Like, we really don't want them over here."

[Adelaide Van Wey – Salangadou]

Like Saint-Domingue, New Orleans had a tri-racial caste system: enslaved people at the bottom, free people of color in between, and whites at the top.

Angel Parham: The whites, their whole income strategy was to use their slaves to then make a place for themselves here in the United States. And if they were not going to be complete charity cases then they needed to bring those enslaved people, and they had different strategies like renting them out for income. So it became necessary to let all of them in. And that very much transformed New Orleans.

The arrival of 10,000 Domiguans straight up doubled the city's population. Also --

ANGEL PARHAM: It fortified the French-speaking culture. It fortified, amongst the enslaved people, the African influence as well.

Because, Parham says, enslaved people from Saint Domingue were different from most of the enslaved people already in the United States.

Angel Parham: Two-thirds of the enslaved people in the colony of Saint Domingue were originally from Africa, right? So this was not what's called a Creole, slave population, which would be people who are born in the Americas. It was overwhelmingly people who remember having been snatched from their homes, in West and Central Africa, remembered the Middle Passage and then, you know, how they were forced into slavery.... And then, also, two-thirds of that migration were people of color, you know, some of them free people of color, some of them enslaved. So then it becomes a Blacker city overall.

Some Domingans migrated up the Mississippi River to start plantations. Some free people of color went to what's now Texas but was then Mexico, where slavery was illegal.

NED SUBLETTE: So, not everyone remained...

Writer Ned Sublette.

NED SUBLETTE: ... but the arrival in New Orleans of such a large caste of white people, many of them with resources, with all kinds of connections in a large enough community that they could do business with each other, not all of it legal.

This, Parham says, greatly increased the “Frenchness” of New Orleans — already embodied by Creoles—people who’d been in Louisiana before the Louisiana Purchase.

ANGEL PARHAM: For a while they maintained a bit of a community amongst themselves, as San Domingue émigrés, but rather quickly they began to blend into the larger Creole community of French-speaking Catholic Louisianans who were already here.

NED SUBLETTE: The Domingans brought the professions of journalism, brought the profession of law really.

Ned Sublette.

[Louis Moreau Gottschalk - Op. 2 Bamboula (Roger Lord)]

NED SUBLETTE: The first great concert attraction in the United States, the great 19th century US composer, Louis Moreau Gottschalk, was a Domingan descendant. Audubon, *Audubon*, John James Audubon....

The names and influences go on and on, and are very much alive today. For people who know Haiti and New Orleans the similarities are endless.

[Eddie Bo - Eddie's Gospel]

MICHAEL BRUN: You know it's a different country, but it's like a mirror

ANGEL PARHAM: You know, linguistically, culturally, racially

LAURENT DUBOIS: The way that some of the older houses are built, the 19th century architecture

MICHAEL BRUN: There's people on the streets and there's music, and everybody's dancing and singing

LEYLA MCCALLA: The fauna and flora

MICHAEL BRUN: The painted doors

LEYLA MCCALLA: The cemeteries

PAUL BEAUBRUN: we're looking at the picture, I'm like: yeah, this is Jacmel. They were like, no no, this is New Orleans. I'm like: oh my god.

MARYSE DEJEAN: The pattern of people's speech reminded me of the cadence of Haitian Kreyol

PAUL BEAUBRUN: for example, when you're in a restaurant, it's like: Hey, what you getting, baby? It's like the way Haitians would talk -- very affectionate.

STEEVE VALCOURT: When I'm in New Orleans, I'm like the food, the spicey. I mean, its like I don't miss home

MARYSE DEJEAN : Red beans and rice -- oh my goodness! This is so much like Haiti!

Win Butler + Régine Chassagne: Same religious underpinning -- like Catholicism mixed with kind of African religion and Voudou

Bruce “Sunpie” Barnes: The rhythms that Mardi Gras Indians were playing, what you would hear in the church

Paul Beaubrun: What you see in New Orleans — like street music — here is Haiti we have that too but a little faster

MARYSE DEJEAN: In New Orleans, music and dancing was a way to transcend any kind of difficulties that you had, and in Haiti it was absolutely the same thing

LEYLA MCCALLA: It's kind of in everything. It's sort of in the DNA.

MICHAEL BRUN: It's like a brother or a sister. You know, it's like close, like almost, they look alike, but it's different

LAURENT DUBOIS: You know, the Frenchness of New Orleans is really more like the Haitianness of New Orleans.

Laurent Dubois and Ned Sublette make clear what many New Orleanians know: the cultural exchange left an enduring mark.

It's the major reason I moved here more than 10 years ago and stayed.

NED SUBLETTE: This Domingan diaspora, which remained more or less in power for about 30 years until it aged out, retarded the Americanization of New Orleans by a couple of generations.

Eventually though, New Orleans did become more Americanized (Americain). That included a re-sorting of the racial pecking order.

[Louis Armstrong - Pleadin' the Blues]

The Domingan/Orleanian three-tiered racial structure flattened into an Anglo-American hierarchy: you were either Black or white. Angel Parham says people of mixed heritage had to choose sides.

ANGEL PARHAM: There is more and more of a kind of pressure on white Creoles to be clear about their whiteness and to defend their whiteness.

This was true during and especially after the Civil War, during the backlash against Reconstruction.

ANGEL PARHAM: Rather than being something of just kind of a nuisance, earlier in the 19th century, this became actually dangerous. Are you white or are you not white? And if you could possibly be construed as being not white, that was going to be very dangerous for you in every way possible, physically, legally, economically.

On top of lynching and other violence came segregation. It spread from the Anglo South to New Orleans and cut into the rights people of color had long held in the city. One man, a descendant of Haitian immigrants, famously challenged segregation. His name was Homer Plessy. In some ways, his worldview was an extension of the Haitian revolution.

Duke University's Laurent Dubois.

LAURENT DUBOIS: One of the main battles in the Haitian revolution was that at first, free people, who were not enslaved, were demanding equal rights.

That's what Plessy wanted: equal rights. This French-speaking, light-skinned man of color bought a train ticket for a "whites only" car in an act of civil disobedience planned by a civil rights group in New Orleans.

LAURENT DUBOIS: That community that was advocating for equal rights, first of all, they met, they talked in French, you know, they were drawing on kind of ideas of universal citizenship that had, you know, very strong links to the Haitian revolution and to the French 19th century. They were called the Comité des Citoyens.

And their action sparked the landmark Supreme Court decision that bears Plessy's name, Plessy v Ferguson. Laurent Dubois says the connection between the Haitian Revolution and New Orleans continues in the ongoing struggle for equal rights.

It also lives *physically* in New Orleans.

[Sounds of Congo Square]

LUTHER GRAY: So, you all are on sacred ground.

You want somebody to explain Congo Square? Call on Baba Luther. On this day, he's talking to students from Chicago...

LUTHER GRAY: This was an area even before the arrival of Europeans - the Houma Indians used this area for corn harvest rituals in the Fall.

Luther Gray — Baba Luther — helped list Congo Square on the National Register of Historic Places. To these students, a marching band who've come to New Orleans to perform in a Carnival parade, he explains what the place meant:

LUTHER GRAY: The beautiful thing about being here in Congo Square is that you're on sacred ground. So there's a very, very thin veil between the physical world and the spiritual world. In other words, any prayers you might make here could really, can really manifest themselves.

Luther points across the street, to the part of town where the French started a colony in 1718.

Luther Gray: The French Quarter was the city - and the French Quarter was surrounded by something called ramparts. So that's Rampart Street. So the word rampart - rampart is a French word that means wall or fortress.

On the *other* side of the French Quarter is the Mississippi River, where ships arrived, carrying enslaved people from the Congo, Benin, and Senegal. Ships from Haiti landed there, too. New Orleans was Catholic; people didn't work on Sundays. But enslaved Africans, by and large, didn't spend their free day in church. Instead, they honored their ancestors.

LUTHER GRAY: They really couldn't do it in the city, so they came outside the ramparts over here to Congo Square. So this is the place where, on Sundays, Africans would have a

marketplace and they would share with each other. And they would dance, they would drum

[Sounds of drumming in Congo Square]

Baba Luther plays percussion. Every Sunday, for decades, he's convened a drumming circle in Congo Square.

LUTHER GRAY: The drums is the language of Africa. Drums are the second oldest musical instrument next to the human voice. So the drumming that came out of the Congo Square and the dances that came out of the Congo Square and the songs that came out of Congo Square, they kept evolving. So this is how this unique culture of New Orleans began, because it had all these different influences.

Luther points again.

LUTHER GRAY: On that side is the French Quarter, on this side this is Treme. Treme is like one of the oldest African-Americans neighborhoods in the United States.

This is where jazz comes from, Baba Luther explains, and where the music has evolved over 300 years.

Music medley:

[Vaccines of La Perchoire - Voodoo Danse]

[Lakou Mizik - Iko Kreyòl]

[Johnny Rivers - Rockin' Pneumonia And The Boogie Woogie]

[Luther Gray and Bamboula 2000 - Drummer Man]

LUTHER GRAY: In other parts of the South, they were under the English. They banned drumming, they banned dancing. You couldn't even have a church service. In Louisiana it wasn't like that. So the culture, it was able to really evolve in a very specific way. And that's why New Orleans is so rich in this culture.

Again, Ned Sublette.

NED SUBLETTE: I also argue that Congo Square — famous as a laboratory where a new African American music was formed — wasn't *only* a marker of Black resistance. It was also a marker, perversely, of French resistance, Creole resistance, because this kind of gathering at Congo square would have been nothing special to see in Cuba or in Saint-Domingue.

To this day, New Orleans drums and dances its difference from the rest of the United States in Congo Square. It's one place that we *hear* the city's connection to Haiti, and to a broader Afro-Caribbean culture.

LAURENT DUBOIS: Congo Square is the kind of legendary version of something that's going on all over the region.

Laurent Dubois

LAURENT DUBOIS: It's like a very visible manifestation of something that you can think about being just repeated thousands and thousands of times across different parts of the Caribbean, where you had different groups kind of coming together and dancing and sharing music.

Of course, dancing and sharing music: this happens everywhere in New Orleans, not only in Congo Square. Just like Haiti.

[Bruce Barnes - Danse Codan]

BRUCE SUNPIE BARNES: There are lots of connections between cosmopolitan Haiti and cosmopolitan New Orleans, and I guess I would say South Louisiana.

Bruce Sunpie Barnes is a musician, park ranger, and writer based in New Orleans. Music lovers consider his band "Sunpie and the Louisiana Sunspots" one of the finest zydeco bands in the world.

The Sunspots have toured Haiti many times.

BRUCE SUNPIE BARNES: Historically you know, two places really joined at the hip and maybe at some point got separated by socio-political means, different wars, but the movement of, of what people have had to endure and the survival skills are so, so similar.

He says New Orleanians are *stubborn* about the way they hold onto their culture.

BRUCE SUNPIE BARNES: They weren't looking for nobody to tell them how to cook, how to talk, how to make music, dance, sweat, love, none of that. And when you go to Haiti, you, you get the same feeling, because those people were in the same context. Isolated for an extremely long time. You don't need to tell them how to cook, how to dance, how to make music, how to call spirits. They got that.

So spiritual energy lives in certain places, much stronger than it does in others.

The history of that spiritual energy is deeper and wider than we'll ever be able to conceive, to really understand. But the vodou cosmology Haitians created after the revolution generated one of the richest musical cultures in the world. It flourishes to this day.

You're listening to Kanaval: Haitian Rhythms and the Music of New Orleans. I'm Leyla McCalla.

We'll be back in a minute.

SEGMENT C

You're listening to Kanaval: Haitian Rhythms and the Music of New Orleans.

I'm Leyla McCalla.

Sounds from NOLA All Saints/All Souls Day Celebration in the Treme on November 1, 2020.

"... the Treme Brass Band is going to come up..."

LINDA RENO: Alright so it's November 1st... the day after Halloween, the day of the dead. *Fete Gede*. And I'm down here at the Backstreet Culture Museum in the Treme.

This is my friend and New Orleans neighbor Linda Reno. She runs an organization called Haitianola. Its mission is to nurture the deep cultural and spiritual connections between Haiti and New Orleans.

Linda's at an All Saints Day ceremony. It's one of the first opportunities people have had to publicly honor those who've died since the start of the pandemic.

LINDA RENO: The Treme Brass Band is actually about to play. But there is about a few hundred people here — they made sure everybody is wearing masks. And they're going to give out some blessings to people who have passed — in particular Sylvester Francis of the Backstreet Museum... all of who were lost this year. It's somber but not sad.

*This gathering coincides with fete *gede* — a Haitian ritual that also happens every year at the beginning of November. The *gede* represents a family of loa — deities, spirits — in the Vodou tradition.*

They stand at the crossroads between the living and the dead.

During Gede season, people honor the loa and ancestors with family traditions and at ceremonies, concerts, and parties.

LINDA RENO: There's a bunch of altars up in front of the museum. There's a bunch of Haitian *Drapo* - some vodou flags, as well as behind the altars. And people are currently going up and dropping offerings — it looks like some flowers, lighting candles, I think I just saw cigarette go down on the table as offering. Makes sense for Gede....

Lori Martineau: The party I went to was a neighbor's party. The vodou priest was from a different area but he's a friend of my friend. And the drummers were from my mountain. It was just a mixture of friends coming together to celebrate Gede.

This is Lori Martineau. She runs Haitianola with Linda Reno.

On the same day Linda's in New Orleans, *Lori's* in Jacmel, a colorful beach town on the southern coast of Haiti.

Lori Martineau: Gede is really, really, really raunchy... So this one kid — Gede visited him and you could tell in body because he was gyrating and slow gyrating and then fast gyrating. Really dirty. And then the music is really dirty....

This family of spirits — *loa gede* — show up as a skull smoking a cigar, wearing a top hat, a black suit and glasses with a lens missing. They're famous for being vulgar.

Their colors are purple, white and black. Everybody knows they love hot peppers.

These two places 1,500 miles apart — Jacmel and New Orleans, Louisiana and Haiti — share so much. In both places, music binds history and family, life and death.

And gathering is sacred.

Haiti is where *this* ritual — *fete gede* — originates. And here in New Orleans, it's just one more tradition that reminds us of those refugees from Saint Domingue who came here over 200 years ago. Whose influence is seen, felt, heard and tasted every day in the Crescent City.

In the next hour of Kanaval: Haitian Rhythms and the Music of New Orleans...

[Boukman Ekspereyans - Nou Pap Sa Bliye]

We go deep into the music of Haiti... including the vodou cosmology at its heart.

Elizabeth McAllister: vodou affects daily life and, even if you're sitting there shelling peas, you can be singing to the spirits.

The artists and musicians who use their platform to inspire and empower the people.

MARYSE DEJEAN: Music in Haiti is really the weapon for revolution..... If you are on the ground in Haiti, I think that you are constantly resisting.

RICHARD MORSE: Haitians are looking for that parable that's going to help them get through the smoke, and help them get through the night.

CREDITS

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For more stories, visit our website at xpnkanaval.org.

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I'm Leyla McCalla. Thanks for listening.