

fROOTS



LAKOU MIZIK

Wa Di Yo

(Cumbancha)

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Regenerating Haitian roots.

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Wa Di Yo Cumbancha CMB-CD-38



Things have never come easy for the first independent black republic in the New World. A society forged through the violent overthrow of plantation slavery has no illusions about its heritage, or the human misery inscribed in its uneasy history. As a Haitian proverb has it, "The constitution is paper, bayonets are steel."

Lakou Mizik (a name signifying where one comes from, spiritually speaking) came together in the aftermath of the devastating 2010 earthquake, a vision of singer Jonas Attis, guitarist-singer Steeve [sic] Valcourt, and US producer Zach Niles (Niles previously worked with Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars). The ten-member ensemble comprises lead and call-and-response vocals, guitar, banjo, Haitian cornet (the distinctive local product of the carnival tradition), accordeon, and a variety of drums and hand percussion. The repertoire draws upon Haitian racine (roots) and vodou traditions, along with contemporary compositions and arrangements by Attis and Valcourt.

Haiti's close historical ties with other Caribbean locales, perhaps most strikingly New Orleans, are manifest, as on *Poze*, a traditional Haitian song with which Louisiana zydeco artists would readily perceive musical kinship. *Peze Kafe* is a children's ditty that emphasizes the centrality of coffee to the agricultural economy and national culture. *Panama'm Tonbe* revives another children's song and proverb based on the death of president Florville Hyppolite, who, in seeking to quell an 1890s rebellion, lost his Panama hat and subsequently died of a heart attack. The moral: When your hat falls off, trouble is heading your way. The persistence of the West African spiritual heritage is embodied in *Parenn Legba*, a tribute to Papa Legba, the loa or intermediary between the spiritual world and humanity. Accordingly, in testimony to Haitian resilience in the face of impossible circumstances, as the CD title declares, "Wa di yo, nou la toujou—You tell them we're still here."

Hear a track on this issue's *fRoots 58* compilation. cumbancha.com

Michael Stone