

New Ireland mortuary ritual. Ethnomusicologists interested in the region will certainly want to watch it.

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The Other Side of the Water: The Journey of a Haitian Rara Band in Brooklyn.

Directed by Jeremy Robins; co-produced by Jeremy Robins and Magali Damas.
In English. 72 minutes. Colour, DVD. Brooklyn, NY: Ibis Productions, 2010.
<http://www.thersideofthewater.org>.

I first encountered Dja Rara in 1999, when, for a graduate seminar on Caribbean music at New York University, I decided to write a paper on this emerging ensemble. The course was taught by my dissertation advisor, Gage Averill, whose book on Haitian popular music (1997), along with my own work as a saxophonist with Haitian dance bands, fuelled my fascination with Haiti's musical landscape. Produced by Jeremy Robins and Magali Damas, this documentary transports me back to those years, when I often caught the No. 2 subway train from Manhattan to Flatbush Avenue, the heart of Brooklyn's Haitian community. There, I heard lots of Haitian music, but my focus was on the musical worship of Protestant Christians, many of whom viewed *rara* as the work of Satan. The film doesn't shy away from exposing this side of the story—of balancing dissenting voices and allowing the diversity of Haitian perspectives to be heard.

The Other Side of the Water is equally compelling for its juxtapositions of past and present. A processional street-music genre with strong Vodou and carnivalesque influences, *rara* has existed since colonial times, and it clearly flourishes in its twenty-first-century Haitian diasporic context. At the outset, we see archival footage from Alan Lomax's 1930s research, which alternates with colourful images of Dja Rara. It is fascinating to watch the band's founder advocate "modernizing" *rara* to give his group a professional sound. We also hear opposition from those who feel that the older way is the best way—that Dja Rara is overly influenced by the rise of commercial "roots music" that began thriving in the 1980s.

Despite the film's celebratory tone, it shows us Haitians with varying opinions of *rara*, and everyone seems to have something deeply at stake. Its Bible-believing detractors allege that Vodou "sacrifices" play too significant a role in *rara* activities. Others express nervousness about *rara*-influenced social disorder (*dezòd*). But despite disagreements regarding *rara*'s meanings and origins, the producers do a superb job of showcasing the tenderness and warmth of Haitians who maintain love for family and country in the midst of political strife. I suspect any scholar still concerned with crises of representation will also find it refreshing that this documentary imposes no "authenticating" voice-over. With the exception of Elizabeth

McAlister, whose 2002 book is an obvious inspiration, we hear mostly Haitian commentary.

Viewers craving a depiction of *rara* soldiers marching in lockstep to a single beat may be disappointed. The film depicts *rara* as a multivalent genre caught in a web of politicized discourses. For many, it signifies the vitality of Haitian culture; others understand *rara* as a dangerous spiritual force; still others experience *rara* as a means for Haitian unity and hope. In one of the DVD's most riveting segments, a band member converses with his devout parents about issues he has with Christianity and about *rara*'s appeal for him. Later, a *rara* attendee explains, "Even though my Christian faith forbids me being here, it's stronger than me. It's in my blood." Portrayals of these kinds of emotional engagements with *rara* and the discourses surrounding it are revelatory in that they allow Haitians to exist in the complexity of their beliefs and practices. It is in this willingness to show both sides, rather than trying too hard to reconcile theocultural contradictions, that *The Other Side of the Water* achieves its greatest triumph.

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