

## *Musical Ancestries: The Caribbean Script*

Jaden was so excited he could hardly sit still when his favorite uncle, Alejandro, told him he had a HUGE surprise for him for his 12th birthday. “My birthday’s still 3 months away! What could it possibly be?”

**CUE #1 Steel band** – then under/fade out at end of section, <https://youtu.be/RixqRLVuhcA> (*BP Renegades*)

The unmistakable sound of **steel drum music** energized the room. “Since you’ve been working so hard in school, you and I are going to the **Caribbean** for your birthday! Your mom’s given us her permission. We’re visiting the **Dominican Republic** (where your mom and I were born)... then **Trinidad** (where your grandfather came from... and your name, too!)... then **Cuba**... and **The Bahamas!**” “*NO WAY!*” Jaden hollered, running over to his uncle and mom, hugging them both. Never, ever, had he expected this!

Before their trip, Jaden went online and down to the library, looking for anything he could find about the Caribbean. He learned that it has 4 regions – the Lucayan Archipelago, the Greater Antilles, the Lesser Antilles and the ABC Islands. With the help of a **satellite map**, he learned that an “**archipelago**” is really a large area of water with scattered islands, and when you see it from space, he realized all the islands are really just the tops of underwater mountains! The “**Antilles**” are the names of certain areas of the Caribbean, and the **ABC Islands** are **Aruba**, **Bonaire**, and **Curaçao**, three islands of the Leeward Antilles in the Caribbean Sea.

There are **13 independent countries**, he learned, and **17 territories** affiliated with other countries like Britain, France and the USA. Known as “The Melting Pot of Cultures,” all kinds of languages are spoken in

the Caribbean, but the *main five* are English, Spanish, French, Dutch, and Andillean Creole.

But the most exciting thing that Jaden learned about the Caribbean was the richness of its music and dance. When he listened to Caribbean music he HAD to dance – and he was good at it! Uncle Alejandro was a great bass player, too – so this trip with him was going to be incredible! **Calypso, salsa, merengue** and **bachata**... all these dances came from the Caribbean... and the two of them were going to experience it *together*... first-hand!

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The beautiful **Dominican Republic** was the first stop on Jaden and Alejandro’s trip. The second-largest country in the Caribbean, and one of the most diverse, it has enormous variety in its terrain... from rain forests to savannas, and highlands to breathtaking beaches. They stayed in the capital city of **Santo Domingo** on the south side of the island. One of the oldest cities in the Caribbean, it even has cobblestone streets and buildings that date back all the way to the 1500s!

In the Dominican, there was such a huge variety of music and mix of cultures, it was hard for Jaden to absorb it all. But when it came to music, **merengue** was clearly the favorite. As a matter of fact, **merengue is the national music and dance of the Dominican Republic. It has been proclaimed by UNESCO as “a masterpiece of the oral and intangible cultural heritage of humanity.”**

**CUE #2 Merengue** – fade out at end of “merengue típico” paragraph, <https://youtu.be/RMdnKayM-G4>

Alejandro explained that in most Caribbean music, many countries and cultures come together, and merengue is no different. “Look at the instruments themselves,” said Alejandro. “The **guira** is a *metal* tube

with ridges that resembles the ridged *gourd* called a **güiro**. It's played by rubbing a stick or a scraper across the ridges. It came from the extinct **Arawak** people called the **Taino**, who were the original native people of the Greater Antilles and Bahamas. There's also the **tambora** drum – it has a Spanish name, but was inspired by West African drums. Two-headed, they were originally made from rum barrels. (Remember, Jaden, most of these instruments were made from whatever scraps the people could find to use.) Another important merengue instrument came to the Dominican with the German tobacco traders in the 1880s – the **melodeon** – it's a type of **accordion**.”

Alejandro continued, “The oldest style of merengue is “**merengue típico**,” and it's still performed today in the Dominican and the US. Dating back to the 1850s, it came from a northern valley region near **Santiago** called the Cibao, and is sometimes called “merengue cibaeno.” Today's styles have tended to move toward fusion with other cultural styles like mambo (from Cuba) and reggae (from Jamaica). Just listen to this great merengue piece called La Bilirrubina performed by Juan Luis Guerra. I think you'll *really* like this one, Jaden – you just can't help but dance when you hear it!”

**CUE #3 Guerra** – La Bilirrubina, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f6vxmoSa1ok>

As Uncle Alejandro continued explaining some of the music of the Dominican Republic, Jaden learned about a second style and form of music... **bachata**.

**CUE #4 Guerra** – **Bachata en Fukuoka**, then under to end of section, <https://youtu.be/1OX0V3x2P4M>

Also a style that came from the lower class, it started as a string bolero (from Cuba) and was slow and sensual. Though the tempo has become faster over the years, the bachata is still a dance that is

performed closely and romantically with a partner, often accompanied only by guitar. Bachata has become more popular and refined in its music and lyrics through celebrities like Victor Victor and **Juan Luis Guerra**.

Guerra is widely considered to be “the ultimate” merengue and bachata player, and he’s made many recordings. Some of them are with Arturo Sandoval who is an internationally-celebrated *classical* trumpeter.

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Travelling from the Dominican Republic, Southeast over the Caribbean Sea, they arrived in **Port of Spain, Trinidad**, the original home of Jaden’s grandfather. **Trinidad** and its neighboring island, **Tobago**, are very close to Venezuela, South America, and they’re known for **calypso** music. Jaden was first captivated by calypso when he heard the great singer, **Harry Belafonte**, singing “***Jump in the Line***” at the end of his mom’s favorite movie, *Beetlejuice*. He loved that song!

**CUE #5 Jump in the Line** – then under/fade out at end of section, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=reNWJMZtvU0> (*Jump in the Line*)

Born in New York City, Belafonte’s parents were from the Caribbean (Martinique and Jamaica), and he became known as “The King of Calypso.” Jayden was also surprised to learn that Belafonte sang the traditional Jamaican song he’d often heard at sporting events – “**The Banana Boat Song (“Day-o”)**).

“You can trace **calypso’s** roots all the way back to West Africa,” Uncle Alejandro told him. “It began when the African slaves weren’t allowed to speak to each other in their native languages, so they communicated through improvised songs. These songs told about what was going on in the community, and that’s how calypso got its

nickname, **'the poor man's newspaper'**. But calypso is more than a song, it's also a dance with lively rhythms and energy, and lots of improvisation."

Alejandro went on, "Calypso music uses all kinds of instruments. You'll hear **trumpet, trombone, flute, saxophone and violin. There's also bass guitar, Spanish guitar, cuatro** (a small Venezuelan guitar), and **concertina** (a small 6-sided accordion with buttons instead of keys). Lots of percussion instruments are used, like **vibraphones, triangles, cow bells, bongo drums, congas, maracas, bamboo sticks, glass bottle & spoon, claves, and jawbone** (which in modern times has sometimes been replaced by the **vibraslap**)."

"But the *most* unique instruments to come from Trinidad and Tobago are **steel drums**.

**CUE #6 Like Ah Boss** – under/bring up at end of section, then out., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9czsuzbEWg> (*BP Renegades Steel Orchestra*)

"They were first made in the 1930s from huge discarded industrial steel containers (also called barrels or drums). The bottoms of these containers were shaped into a bowl, and then the bowls were hammered and shaped to create different notes. The first steel bands included hand-fashioned steel drums, plus other hand-made instruments like boxes, tins, and metal trash cans... anything the people could find to make music."

Alejandro explained that modern steel bands now use *manufactured* steel drums. Made for ensembles with anywhere from 4 to 100 performers, these drums (also called pans) are usually made in four sizes. From bass to treble, they're called "boom, cello pan, guitar pan, and ping pong." "The neatest thing about calypso music," said Alfonso, "is that it continues to change and evolve, adding in more instruments all the time."

Calypso music is fun! Most often in **common (or 4/4) time** with catchy **syncopations**, it uses **simple harmony**, along with **call and response** or **verse and chorus** songs.

When Alejandro had surprised Jaden with the trip, he'd played steel drum music, but neither of them *ever* guessed that they'd actually see the **BP Renegades Steel Orchestra** in person – right there in Port of Spain! They were preparing for an international competition, and playing “**Like Ah Boss**” arranged by Maestro Duvone Stewart. **(MSX up)** The sound was *HUGE!* Using all kinds of different scales and rhythms, they played like they were all one person, with incredible energy and accuracy, and they all danced as they played! Everyone in the crowd was dancing, too – especially Jaden!

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From Trinidad and Tobago, Jaden and Alejandro's next destination was **Cuba** – only 90 miles away from Florida – and there in **Havana** they experienced **salsa!** Having heard recordings of Héctor Lavoe, Celia Cruz and Marc Anthony, Jaden already knew a little about salsa.

**CUE #7 Marc Anthony – Salsa**, then under to end of section, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXnfy5YIDwk> (Marc Anthony video – music from recording, probably also a single – *Vivir Mi Vida*, from 1:22 on)

“There's an interesting history with this style,” said Alejandro. “Salsa is a newer version of older Afro-Cuban forms and rhythms. It has Cuban roots, but it *really* developed and came into its own in New York City in the 1960s. There are strong influences of Cuban, Puerto Rican and South American music – all three – but they fused together into a *new* style in New York! Then it travelled *back* to Cuba, Puerto Rico and South America, but at that point, each country's own individual style evolved. Salsa got its name from the spicy sauce, but in order to get

the performers to dance or play harder, people also used to shout out, ‘Salsa!’”

As they listened, Jaden realized that the singers were using **call and response** patterns, and sometimes they would go into a **chorus**. Many of the instruments were ones he’d already seen in other Caribbean music: **trumpet, trombone, and saxophone, bass, guitar, violin, piano accordion, and flute**. The percussion included **claves, maracas, conga, bongo drums and tambora**, along with **cowbell, marimba and vibraphone**. But the new one here was the African-influenced **bata drum**, with two heads and shaped like an hourglass.

The rhythm was particularly intriguing to Jaden, especially when he figured out that much of the music used mixed patterns, like **1-2-3, 1-2, 1-2-3, 1-2** in the **claves**. And he loved the quickness of the tempo. He didn’t even try to contain himself – he just danced – much to the delight of his uncle Alejandro.

Later his uncle explained that when salsa’s roots came to New York, one style of music shaped it more than any other...the **Cuban “son.”**

**CUE #8 Son**, under and fade out at end of section, <https://youtu.be/rL5VwEwZ7aU> (*Sexteto Habanero is a good exemplar of son*)

Dating back to the 1800s, this music, above all others, still expresses and identifies the cultural character of the Cuban people. Son is very flexible in both its music and dance, taking on different regional styles throughout Cuba.

Jaden felt like he could stay in Cuba for weeks! There was so much to learn here, and he loved the music, the food and people. But tomorrow they were headed toward home by way of the Bahamas.

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It was afternoon on New Year's Eve when Jaden and his uncle arrived in **Nassau**, the commercial center and capital of **The Bahamas**.

Tomorrow Jaden was turning 12 and he was jazzed! When they went shopping, Jaden found a small hand-crafted steel drum that Alejandro bought for him as a souvenir. After a delicious **conch** chowder, his uncle suggested they go back to the hotel for a nap.

*"A NAP?!?""*

"It's OK. We're getting up at midnight – exactly when you turn 12 – and we'll go out for a little while."

"OK," said Jaden, but he wasn't so sure.

When they got up, it was *noisy* outside. As they walked toward the middle of town, it was like midday. Hundreds of people were everywhere, all excited. Jaden kept hearing the word "*Junkanoo*," but he didn't know what it meant.

"OK, Jaden," Alejandro said, "Here's your final birthday present. **THIS** is the **Junkanoo Parade**. Every year, on Boxing Day (December 26<sup>th</sup>) and New Year's, there are two huge parades in Nassau; they're both part of a week-long festival called Junkanoo. It's a huge celebration of the culture of the Bahamas, and everyone gets totally involved in it. It's kind of like Mardi Gras combined with New Year's in the middle of a giant masquerade party. People make their own costumes, and they work on them all year long. Using cardboard or papier mâché, they decorate them with feathers and colored paper and sequins that look like mirrors. Some of these elaborate costumes are twenty feet high, and they're breathtaking. There are no cars or motorized vehicles – not even under the floats – *everything* is carried on peoples' shoulders. Let's grab some street food and go find a seat."

Jaden learned from Deja, a Bahamian girl about his age, that there are two main theories about how Junkanoo got its name. "The one

that is most accepted is that the festival is named for a folk hero named John Canoe who was a slave trader. He granted the slaves holidays on Boxing Day and at New Year's... so they still celebrate that act of kindness, and the holiday is named for him." Deja continued, "The second theory is that Junkanoo comes from the French "*gens inconnus*" (unknown people) because almost everyone in the parade wears a mask."

**CUE #9 Junkanoo parade music**, under & fade out at end of section, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yVeuG5GfzRE> (*highlights from 2019 New Year's Junkanoo Parade*)

The Junkanoo Festival and parade started at 1 AM! Brass instruments blared, traditional goatskin drums beat, whistles were going off, and everywhere there was the percussive clang of dual cowbells, made especially for this festival. The hypnotic sound made by the bells is called "kalik," and the people moved down the street, they took very small steps in a sort of dancing walk. As the bands and gorgeous costumes and floats passed, the music never stopped. It was absolutely electrifying. It wasn't so much about the quality of the music, but rather the joyous celebration of Bahamian culture and its traditions. Jaden and Alejandro were simply blown away, and stayed all night long! When the parade ended about 10 AM, and they said goodbye to Deja and the other people around them, everyone felt a very special bond – as if they were all family. What an unforgettable way to celebrate a birthday!

**CUE #10 Steel drums through end**, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JpUh5wUBkbM> (*Best Calypso Music – Trinidad & Tobago – Steel Drums*)

Jaden and Alejandro headed home, tired, but brimming with joy and excitement, reliving all their experiences together. From the Dominican Republic, down to Trinidad & Tobago, then up to Cuba and then

topping it off with the Bahamas... this trip was an experience that the two of them would never forget.

“Thank you, Uncle Alejandro. This was the most amazing week of my life.”

“It was truly my pleasure, Jaden. To watch you appreciating and getting involved in the music and dance of the Caribbean – our very own cultural heritage – that’s going to make me smile for years to come. Happy 12<sup>th</sup> birthday, Jaden...and welcome to manhood.”