



About The Documentary

Mento music is a fusion of African and European musical traditions that began in Jamaica in the 19th century. Although widely played throughout the island for many years, it wasn't until the early 1950s that the first mento recording appeared on a 78 RPM disc. This decade was mento's golden age, as a variety of artists recorded mento songs in an assortment of rhythms and styles. It was the peak of mento's creativity and popularity in Jamaica and the birth of Jamaica's recording industry.

Interviews include commentary from leading political, cultural and musical personalities. Musical performances include a panorama of existing mento bands from all across Jamaica, some of which have been playing continuously for 45 yrs.

About Bilmon Productions

I began traveling to Jamaica in the Seventies and enjoyed recording some of the bands that I ran into (the first was a mento band playing for a stone crab race at one of the hotels in Montego Bay). Eventually this led to wanting to get a better sound, and so I began talking to studios about making a recording.

Ironically this began with a film project. Engineer Andrew Seidel recommended that I talk to Director Rick Elgood about doing a video of a band I wanted to record called the The Jolly Boys. After meeting with Rick and hearing about his enthusiasm for mento music, we both agreed that it would make more sense to expand the project to a documentary on the genre as a whole.

With knowledge supplied by recent NYU grad Dan Neely, who had just written his PHD on the subject, we knew who and where the important mento bands were. We conducted a series of island-wide stops across Jamaica, sometimes filming groups in remote, hilly parts of the island. The end of this tour brought us back to Kingston and a film/recording session with Blue Glaze Mento Band at Tuff Gong Studios.

While filming in the studio was meant to provide a different surrounding to showcase one of the bands, it would also give us a high quality, non-field sound, and I felt Blue Glaze was the best band to provide that. After listening to the results, however, I was convinced that the three or four completed songs could be the foundation for a new audio project. Thus began a three session recording that eventually brought in some prominent guest singers and instrument players.

These projects have been a great way to discover how resilient and age-resistant music can be. And unless the upcoming musicians neglect it, there is no reason why mento can't keep updating itself.

Bill Monsted