

"Mi Ackee To Linstead Market"

"Carry Mi ackee go a Linstead Market" -What a sad song.

This Jamaican folk song is one of the most wellknown, and the stock in trade for many performing. The problem is that most performers are clueless about the original sadness associated with the song. You see, most times the song is performed with a sense of levity and excitement, very up tempo, with performers wearing colourful costumes and bright smiles. The truth though is that it really is a very sad narrative detailing the sense of despair and hopelessness of a market lady. Think about it "Carry mi ackee go a Linstead market, not a quattie wut sell" - the point is the market lady has made no money, because not even a quattie's worth of her produce has been sold and she is going home empty handed after a whole night of selling. The song goes on "Waih, what a night, not a bite, what a Saturday night" everybody come feel up feel up, not a quattie wut sell. So how did we ever get the notion that this could have been a happy song? This song falls in the category of Jamaican folk songs called the Dinki. The main function of the dinki, originally held on the ninth night after the death of a person, was to banish grief from the bereaved. So many of the sad songs were sung in a very up tempo fashion to cheer the spirits of the grieving family. This song has been treated in popular culture in much the same way that the English treated Ring Around The Roses (in Jamaica we say Ring A Ring A Roses). That song was a narrative about the Bubonic Plague which affected England for a number of years with a major outbreak in 1349 wiping out almost one third of its population. This is what guided the construction of the song - Ring around the roses" referred to the flush in the cheeks of those who had contracted the disease, as high fever was a symptom. With the general feeling of malaise, many patients did not bathe. To counteract body odours, they used to carry posies (small bunch of fragrant flowers) in their breast pocket, giving us the line 'a pocket full of posies'. The line 'Asham, Asham' referred to the sneezing associated with the pneumonic strain of the disease, and 'We all fall down' suggests that everybody dies. Because of the number of deaths, cremation became extremely popular spawning the line 'Ashes in the water, ashes in the sea'. The final line 'We all jump up with a 1...2...3' is a clear indication of an attempt to deal with a negative situation by turning it on its head and making the best of it.