

The Bahamian festival of Junkanoo

Each year, the Bahamian festival of Junkanoo takes place during June and July, at Christmas and at the New Year. In downtown Nassau, in the early hours of the morning, local and national entertainers join the Junkanoo groups to parade. Over several months, men and woman come together to prepare this event, the theme of which changes each year. Indeed, the Junkanoo dance troupes train hard to make their choreographies as perfect as possible; the musicians work on their hypnotic rhythms in a cacophony of goatskin drums, whistles, cowbells and horns and the costume designers put all their heart into creating beautiful and magical costumes made out of

crepe paper and cardboard. At the end of this festival, judges give cash prizes for the best group presentation, best costume and best music.

There are a lot of legends as regards how this celebration started; opinions are divided. However, there is one that stands out, saying that Junkanoo comes from the days of

slavery. At Christmas, people enslaved by Loyalists in the late 18th century had three days off — they celebrated by singing and dancing along the houses on stilts. This tradition had almost disappeared after slavery but thanks to the evolution of the Bahamas, it is now a big festival attended by thousands of people.

The Junior Junkanoo

The Junior Junkanoo programme is very important to ensure continuity regarding the future of the festival. The children learn it at school and this helps them a lot, especially to gain confidence and self-esteem. It also contributes to the patriotism of children because it is important that they know their culture. This program helps students to develop their artistic and critical thinking, and also helps them to know how

to choose, organize and plan a project. After that, many children, who have participated in the junior Junkanoo programme join a group in the senior parade to continue their involvement. In addition, many of them have found their voice because they have become, thanks to this programme, professional dancers or great musicians.

Sarah Bouteiller



Junkanoo costume

Goombay Music

Taking their inspiration from the beauty of their people and their islands, music is also in the very bones of their natives. African rhythms, Caribbean Calypso, English folk songs, and the uniquely Bahamian Goombay that combines traditional African sounds to the influence of European settlers.

The Goombay music is both music and dance, with Goombay drums. It is a goatskin drum held between the legs and played with the hands. The lyricists write songs inspired from the everyday extraordinary events in the local community.

At the time of slavery, the Goombay bands without any money to buy instruments, created their drum out of a pork

barrel and goatskin, scraped a metal file over a carpenter's saw, and made maracas from seed pods.

Traditionally, this music accompanies the Bahamian Quadrille and Polka another example of mixing African and European culture.

The jump in dance is danced with Goombay music. It's from West

Africa. The dancers move in a circle for a dance solo in the center. They clap, sing and play percussions. After a few minutes, the center dancer chooses someone else, usually of the opposite sex, to take his place and the dance continues.

Camille Mauduit



Pirates of the Bahamas

The Golden Age of piracy began in the Bahamas between the late 1600s and the early 1700s. The capital of piracy was Charles Town, later renamed Nassau. Blackbeard is still one of the most famous pirates today.

Around the 1670s, the city of Charles Town was established as a commercial port. A short time afterwards, it became a true "pirate paradise" for lawless seafaring men. In 1695, the city was destroyed by the Spanish. Charles Town was rebuilt afterwards and renamed Nassau in honour of King William III. Edward Teach better known as Blackbeard is the most famous pirate. Blackbeard was born in Bristol around 1680. Around 1713, Edward Teach joined the crew of Benjamin Hornigold, one of the most terrifying pirates of the Caribbean at that time. Hornigold gave later him the command of one of his ships. Around 1717, Hornigold retired from piracy, and Blackbeard

became the captain of the crew. By 1718, he had plundered over 40 ships, but was killed around 1718, by the Royal Navy. During the battle, Blackbeard received five pistol balls and 20 cutlass wounds. The captain of the Royal Navy decapitated him and hung his head on the ship rigging. The pirating career of Blackbeard lasted about five years.

Claire Langolff

