

Speaker 1: [00:00:00] I'm Junior "Gabu" Wedderburn. [00:00:01][1.0]

Speaker 2: [00:00:02] And I'm Deborah Thomas. [00:00:03][0.8]

Speaker 1: [00:00:04] And we want to welcome you to Bush Music, a kumina podcast. [00:00:07][3.7]

Speaker 2: [00:00:11] We have been working together for over three decades, and for the past six years we have been co-organizing a kumina festival called Tambufest with Nicholas "Rocky" Allen and the Saint Thomas Kumina Collective. [00:00:23][12.0]

Speaker 1: [00:00:25] In this podcast, we want to take you on a journey to Eastern Jamaica to learn about the Afro-Jamaican tradition of kumina. You will meet some of the elder practitioners, and we will dialog about its history and its significance for the future of the country. [00:00:42][17.2]

Speaker 2: [00:00:43] Episode one. [00:00:44][0.5]

Speaker 1: [00:00:45] Bloodlines. [00:00:45][0.0]

Speaker 2: [00:00:48] In this episode, we want to introduce ourselves and members of the kumina community with whom we have been working on a yearly festival we call Tambufest. Tabufest is part community fun day, part reasoning, and part performed ritual practice, and it's designed to bring people together in community to reflect on issues that affect our lives. By bringing practitioners of traditional African Jamaican cultural practices together in ceremony, we celebrate elders, we support intergenerational engagements, and we support efforts to chart new futures, explicitly and unconsciously, through the portal of kumina and the relations it brings into being. In another episode, we will say more about the festival. In this episode, we want to give you a little background on who we are and how we came to this project, and we want to familiarize you with the practice of kumina. [00:01:42][54.4]

Speaker 1: [00:01:44] Greetings. My name is Junior Gabu

Wedderburn. I'm a Broadway musician. I've been working at The Lion King for the past 26 years. I'm originally from Port Antonio, Jamaica. I grew up around a lot of drumming traditions – nyabinghi, pocomania, bruckins, Jonkonnu, and kumina. . I've always been interested in promoting these traditions, which I think are at the foundation of reggae music. [00:02:14][30.6]

Speaker 2: [00:02:16] My name is Deborah Thomas. I am a professor of anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania. I also direct a center called the Center for Experimental Ethnography, which is a hub for faculty and students who have a creative practice at the root of their research process. I came to graduate school from a career as a professional dancer. I used to dance with a company in New York called the Urban Bush Women, which is how I met Junior because Junior used to be our percussionist. I am also Jamaican. My father is from rural Saint Catherine. My mother is American and I grew up mostly in America, but spent my early childhood in Jamaica. [00:03:01][45.1]

Speaker 1: [00:03:07] Let's allow some of the elders that we'll be talking with to introduce themselves. [00:03:10][3.6]

Speaker 3: [00:03:11] Yeah. My name is Bongo Shem. Born in St. Thomas. Known as kumina king. Born in 1969. 17th of June, Gemini. I'm born in Leith Hall Saint Thomas, you know? And perform everywhere in Saint Thomas. Everywhere. Every district, every community I perform

there. And all of the ancient ones them, of this culture, known I, and I also known most of them. I always perform and give people good energy as they claim. [00:04:01]/[50.0]

Speaker 4: [00:04:03] So I am Kerrieann Stewart. I was born in Seafort, raised in John's Town, Saint Thomas and all my life, ever since I know myself, I have been involved kumina. My mom, Miss Ivy Green, my dad, Mr. Lester Stewart, both of them pass now. So I knew nothing else. Grew up in kumina. [00:04:32]/[29.6]

Speaker 4: [00:04:38] I was born in the 1980s. 80, to be exact, May 16th, Taurus. [00:04:48]/[10.3]

Speaker 5: [00:04:50] Look here now. This is Mr. Torch, I'm 60 years old, the third of this month gone last week. You understand? I born in Arcadia here. I grow from here, Pear Tree River, Portland, St. Mary, and half of Westmoreland. You see this culture? Born in me and I live with it. [00:05:20]/[30.0]

Speaker 2: [00:05:21] And what's your mother's name? [00:05:21]/[0.8]

Speaker 5: [00:05:22] My mother name is Miss Catherine Beckford, called Miss Mama. [00:05:32]/[9.8]

Speaker 2: [00:05:32] And her mother? [00:05:36]/[3.6]

Speaker 5: [00:05:37] And her mother name is Rosina Beckford, called Na. [00:05:38]/[0.6]

Speaker 2: And her mother?

Speaker 5: [00:05:39] Her mother? Fi her mother is from far away, Pera, mi mean from far, Portland, Millbank, Ginger Hall. They mix up, Beckford, Harris, White, Sutherland, they are maroons.

Speaker 6: My name is Virgil Ennis, Virgil Ennis, me born same place right here, in Arcadia. All that land right up there is mine, go right cross. So is right here me born. Born 1944, 6th of July. Through me never really go to the church, but anywhere kumina is, me is there. My father was the best drummer round here, Mastan can tell you. If you see him, he's a little man about this, and if you hear him play a drum you can't believe. Also, my brother take after him, so come in like me take after them too.

Speaker 1: You brother is still alive?

Speaker 6: No, him die. My father die too.

Speaker 1: Me hear about your brother.

Speaker 6: Yeah man, big. Play a drum you wouldn't like fi hear, yeah man. Good good man, mi a tell yu, so me just take it up, and me just a carry on from. Everywhere me go, everybody like hearing me play drum. Me play drum by the song, you understand, me nuh just knock drum so. Me listen the song, and play the drum to the song. Me is the head singer. Anywhere me go, if me even go out with the guys them, it's just me them want to sing. Yeah, just me them want to sing [00:07:33]/[113.7]

Speaker 7: [00:07:33] See. My name is Valencia Hill. I'm living in Hayfield in the parish of Saint Thomas. I was born in Longwood, Portland. I went back to Portland when I was 14 and finished schooling in Portland, then returned back to Saint Thomas. From the day I was born, my mother was a revivalist. She went to Revival Church. And all her life she went to Revival Church. [00:07:58]/[25.6]

Speaker 2: [00:07:59] And then, people in the community around you. What kind of, were they going to the revival church? [00:08:07]/[7.8]

Speaker 7: [00:08:07] Some went to Methodist, some went to Anglican, Baptists and Assembly of God. Maybe 1 or 2 go to Adventist. Most people go to Sunday churches. I first encounter kumina when I was about seven years old. Me and my father go one dead yard down by Bath, and when we go down there, the drum play so sweet, and me start dance. And from then until now, me just grow love it. And me start play the drum. As when somebody dead, and me hear, me gone. As me reach to the kumina, somebody say, “V come, draw one tune.” And me sing the whole night. And me play the kata, and me shake the shaker, and me scrape the grater. Me do everything in the kumina, me just love it. Kumina is my life. From me hear the drum any at all, me haffi move to it. Anywhere it deh, when me hear the drum a knock, me haffi go to the kumina. And when me deh a kumina, nobody can tell me dem ready [to leave]. If dem ready, go home. When I’m ready, I will come because kumina still a play. That’s me. [00:09:21]/[73.4]

Speaker 8: [00:09:22] I’m Dwayne Granville Barrant. Born in Dalvey, 10th of October, 1983. Grow in Dalvey. From a young, growing up age, been a drummer, play drum at school, all over me play drums. Go church with my grandmother. [00:09:45]/[22.9]

Speaker 2: [00:09:46] These elders, even in their introductions, are pointing us to the importance of the drum, which has also been central to your life. So, what got you into drumming in the first place? [00:09:58]/[11.8]

Speaker 1: [00:09:59] Okay, so here’s my story. My parents, migrated to Portland from Westmoreland, from Negril, to be exact, in the early 50s. So I was born in Port Antonio, but my mother’s father, who died when she was five years old, was a well-respected drummer in the Hanover, Westmoreland region, a gerreh drummer. So, when I was born, I just came out and just started messing around with rhythms. So, it is said that, you know, my grandfather really came out in me, the spirit of my grandfather. [00:10:40]/[41.5]

Speaker 2: [00:10:41] And so tell us about your first drumming performances. [00:10:45]/[3.5]

Speaker 1: [00:10:45] As I said, I came up around a lot of drumming traditions. So I started early in school and at primary school they started using me as the drummer for the festival, when they entered festival for dancing and singing, I was the drummer. [00:11:02]/[16.6]

Speaker 2: [00:11:03] And as you came up... [00:11:04]/[0.7]

Speaker 1: [00:11:04] As I came up, there was a dance company that started in Port Antonio. Neville Black, he came to Port Antonio and started this dance studio, and I played for those dance classes. [00:11:17]/[13.3]

Speaker 2: [00:11:18] How did he find you? [00:11:18]/[0.8]

Speaker 1: [00:11:19] My friend’s father was working with one of the guys was responsible for sponsoring Neville Black coming to Portland. He was a millionaire, came to Jamaica to build a hotel, you know? Managed Blue Hole and all of that. Dragon Bay. For the purpose of supplying entertainment for his hotels, he had Neville Black come over and started this dance company. My friend’s father knew, and he invited me. I went by there. The first thing Neville Black said was, “You can play the drum for the class but you also have to take dance classes too.” So I really studied modern dance for four years. [00:12:01]/[42.1]

Speaker 2: [00:12:02] And then. So you were performing in the hotels? [00:12:05]/[2.8]

Speaker 1: [00:12:06] Yeah, I performed at the hotels, festival, all over the island. I met Capo through Neville Black, because he used to go there. He worked closely with Olive Lewin from the Jamaica Folk Singers, and the woman who really started modern dance in Jamaica, her name was Ivy Baxter, so I was able to meet Ivy Baxter and played for some of those classes. And then there was Lavinia Williams who used to visit, so I was able, I got exposed to different kind of rhythms. . [00:12:37]/[31.5]

Speaker 2: [00:12:38] And Lavinia Williams was from Trinidad. [00:12:40]/[1.7]

Speaker 1: [00:12:40] She was from Trinidad, but she used to travel around the Caribbean. Neville worked with her a lot so I was there. There was a dancer Carol Murdoch and myself who used to travel with him. He used Carol for demonstrating the movement and I was providing the rhythm. We were out there. I was able to go out to Queenie in St. Catherine. I went to St. Thomas to a lot of kumina sessions. I used to go to Kerriann's father's kumina, Stewart, in Seaforth, that was long before Kerriann was born.. [00:13:20]/[39.9]

Speaker 2: [00:13:21] And so why don't you tell us about Dominion Percussion? [00:13:24]/[2.6]

Speaker 1: [00:13:25] Okay, so I eventually went to the School of Music. [00:13:28]/[3.5]

Speaker 2: [00:13:31] When you were how old? [00:13:32]/[1.2]

Speaker 1: [00:13:32] When I was 16 years old. [00:13:33]/[1.3]

Speaker 2: [00:13:34] So how much years you spent at the School of Music? [00:13:36]/[2.3]

Speaker 1: [00:13:38] That was from 1976, end of 1976 going to 1980. But I didn't really start studies at the School of Music until, like 1978. I went to Kingston, I was playing at the dance school really. That was the first year that the dance school, the Cultural Training Center had opened that year, the same year I went there. So a lot of energy went into that, and couple years after, I actually started classes at the School. But I was there. Marjorie Whyllie, who was the musical director of NDTC, I was working closely with her, at the music school, playing rhythms. I used to go in, and Miss Marjorie would say "Go and teach the class." So I'd go and teach some kumina, or mento rhythms, or things that I know. But I had to run and leave Kingston. The most violent election period was in 1980, and they tried to kill me. I mean, there was a couple occasions that I got robbed and all that, but this one incident in 1980 had me, you know, it was 1979 going into 1980 really, so I left and went back to Portland. And then I formed a group, I call it Dominion Percussion, a group of six drummers and two dancers. And we did a lot. I entered the festival and got a couple gold medals, and the Tourist Board, represented the tourist Board, went to Florida with Miss Lou back them, it was a Jamaica tourist promotional thing in Fort Lauderdale Florida. And after a while I started touring with Burning Spear, I did a couple tours with Burning Spear and I had to stop that because that was going nowhere. I had gotten to a point that there was a craving to learn more rhythms. I knew New York was a place that I could come to, so the decision was to come to New York for just two years, really. . [00:16:02]/[143.8]

Speaker 2: [00:16:03] So when did you first, do you remember your first kumina? [00:16:09]/[6.3]

Speaker 1: [00:16:10] No, I don't remember my first kumina, not at all. Because kumina was right there around me. I just remember, I used to get whipped a lot, because as long as I hear the

drum I would sneak out of the house, gone to a kumina session, or revival church was fairly close by.... [00:16:31]/[21.3]

Speaker 2: [00:16:32] So your parents couldn't control you? [00:16:33]/[1.4]

Speaker 1: [00:16:33] They couldn't control me. Even though I know I was getting a whipping I would still go out there. Yeah, so I don't remember my first kumina. I got close to two really good kumina drummers, two elders who took me under their wing, you know, and like, started, like, taking me along to kumina sessions with them. So I learned a lot. But the interesting thing about kumina for me, I grew up in the church and I always knew that there was another force out there. So when I went to kumina, it was the first place I hear people start referring to themselves as Africans. And that appealed to me. That created a certain kind of comfort, and I felt like yeah, I belonged. This was it. And that was the guiding force really, because out of kumina I really grew to accept Rastafari, you know? And that was because I was searching for something other than the church that I grew up in. I knew that the church wasn't the place for me, I didn't feel that deep spiritual connection to it. So in my search for myself and how I relate to the drum, and the ancestral forces that I felt, it was only present in the kumina or in nyabinghi. The foundation of the nyabinghi and the kumina, the pulse is so similar. I think really because the nyabinghi rhythm came out of burru. And burru as a tradition is really close. The doctrine of Rastafari is also based in the Bible too, and because of early Christian background, I was able to relate to Rasta because kumina had nothing like that. Kumina was straight ancestral worship. That's why as a spiritual guide, I think I gravitated toward Rasta. But I still found Africa and my African-ness in Rastafari. At that time, Rastas would not accept kumina as a tradition because of the spiritual element to it, you know? But I knew one of the founding fathers of the movement of Rastafari used drum in his early teachings, he was out of Bath. And he used kumina drums. So even though I'm getting burned out, because in them days when the elders burn you out, you have to be strong to stand up and resist that kind of thing, you know?

We should tell the people what kumina is. [00:19:48]/[194.6]

Speaker 2: [00:19:49] Well, kumina is one of the African traditions that is concentrated in Saint Thomas and Portland, but it did not emerge from the period of slavery, like so many of the other African traditions in Jamaica. It was brought to Jamaica by indentured African laborers after the abolition of slavery in 1838. Emancipation happened over a period of four years in Jamaica. Great Britain abolished slavery in 1834 in all of its colonies, and established a period of what they called apprenticeship, where formerly enslaved persons would continue working on the estates where they had been enslaved. But now the idea was that they were being trained to work for wages. And what they found was that many people weren't interested in moving from having been enslaved on these plantations to being so-called free workers, doing the exact same thing that they had been doing when they were enslaved, in many cases, for the exact same people with the exact same overseers and "management structure." So that meant that in Jamaica, as in Trinidad, as in Guyana, and as in other places, the British brought in other laborers to do that kind of work. They started with a kind of African, indentured workers scheme, which was fairly short lived and then moved to bringing people from India, from the subcontinent, which is why Trinidad and Guyana have such large Indo-Trinidadian, Indian populations in those spaces. Also in Jamaica, but just not as much as those other islands. But at any rate, many of the Africans who came to Jamaica after slavery had ended were actually, called recaptives, right? These would have been people who had been taken as slaves from the continent of Africa on Spanish boats or Portuguese boats headed for places where slavery was not yet abolished, and then intercepted by

the British, who then, “released” those who were on the boats by taking them to Sierra Leone or Saint Helena in Africa. And many of those ended up back in Jamaica and elsewhere as indentured laborers. But interestingly, the Maroons had also had a trajectory after the wars in Jamaica ended in the 18th century, where they went to Nova Scotia for a time, and then they were repatriated to Africa to exactly the same locations, to Sierra Leone, to Saint Helena. So in those spaces, there would have been interaction between Maroons who had resisted slavery in Jamaica and fought against the British and then relocated to Canada, and then back to Africa and back to those parts of Africa, and people who had been heading to the New World to work as slaves on sugar plantations, who were intercepted and taken back to those spaces, then brought to Jamaica as indentured laborers. And they were mainly working in the eastern parishes where the sugar industry had not been quite as well developed during the height of the slave trade in Jamaica. Tell us a little bit about kumina itself. It's really, as you said earlier, an ancestral tradition. [00:23:54]/[245.1]

Speaker 1: [00:23:55] An ancestral tradition. Yeah. Kumina. Now, I'm not kumina blood because of where my parents are from. But it's the same experience I have. It is no different, kumina is the force to create change. As a ceremony, it is a very powerful thing. And the intelligence of the ceremony itself, to me, is very different. The language of the drum, how it communicates with the singing, with the dancing, with everything that is happening, when you are familiar with it, when you understand it, you appreciate it in a whole different kind of way. You can see and feel a force in a kumina session that you hardly find anywhere else. [00:24:45]/[50.5]

Speaker 2: [00:24:46] Yeah. The elders we spoke with also talk about this power. [00:24:49]/[3.1]

Bongo Shem: [00:24:56] Yeah, well, kumina, to me, I see it as a strong culture and the strongest culture that came from Africa. It is a spiritual, highly spiritual culture. And I as a youth coming up, I see a lot of people it help, you know? So it's a culture that I born. Even in my yard, where I born, I have some ancestors there, where if anything happen to anyone in my yard, which is them sick, them nuh haffi to go to no doctor, once there's something that can heal. Because there is a red dirt in my yard, that Leonard Percival Howell, his sister, bury in my yard. She name Christina Howell. She was what you would call a nana, nana was a nurse where, in those days you don't have a lot of nurse and thing like that, so she used to deliver babies, she used to heal people, she know all the herbs to use. So, it's a very spiritual, and a healing power within the kumina.

Speaker 2: How would you describe that power?

Bongo Shem: It's a spiritual power within the drums and the ancestors. Because the drum, it gravitate unto the drums. I see it many a time, so many times I saw it, because when the drums started to play, and the energy is set and on a level of smooth drumming playing, then the message deliver, where whatever message it is, the healing powers come in from there. It's natural. Kumina. It was born within I, I never go nowhere to learn it. My old lady, my grandmother, and her grandmother's side, old lady's side, everyone in my family do this. Everyone is a part of this, it's an inborn for all of us.

Dwayne: Well, my belief still, kumina is an inborn thing and teaching make it be more professional to you. But dem nuh really get it, just like me, just like how my sister come and get it. Most like dem say ancestors give it to you, give you the strength and the power. So me

woulda say me get it from the ancestors, it born in me, but growing up the ancestors bring it out more in me. And the same thing ketch my sister too.

Speaker 1: So you can direct it, you can use it, for what you want to use it for. [00:28:21]/[14.1]

Speaker 1: [00:28:21] And that comes from a dedication to it, or through it just born in you. [00:28:30]/[9.1]

Speaker 5: [00:28:31] Dedication, and born in me. You have to be dedicate but it born in you. [00:28:39]/[7.6]

Speaker 2: [00:28:39] So it's born in you but then you supplement that by practice and teaching too. [00:28:47]/[8.1]

Speaker 5: [00:28:49] Yeah. Put your head to it. Yes, this is my thing so not going to drop it.. [00:28:58]/[8.9]

Speaker 2: [00:29:00] You're learning from other people, but are you also learning from ancestors? [00:29:08]/[7.7]

Speaker 5: [00:29:09] Yeah ancestors teach me a lot, show me a lot of things too [00:29:10]/[0.4]

Speaker 1: [00:29:12] Yeah and you remember Torch said something about that, too. But I don't feel alienated in any way because the real energy, the vibe of the thing, is in me. I used to play my drum around my mother, and I could feel that spirit in my mother, like when she danced and she moved. You can't tell the difference. You know, that is the gerreh, but you feel that Bongo Nation vibe and spirit in how she moves. And it is not specific. I can't say you are from the kumina blood and you're the only one that can claim it. I had an experience once time, I had this group here in New York, Ancient Vibrations. We had a rehearsal, I'm here in Brooklyn and I needed a rehearsal space. And one of the spaces close by is Paul Robeson Theater, which is a few blocks over there on Greene Avenue. So I went and made arrangement to have a tour, rehearsal for a performance I was doing in the city. We're loading in the drums and thing and the first thing we were going to rehearse was kumina. I started playing, and I go around the drum, and the next thing I know I was out. I just fall back and out, and I come back to myself and say, "Come on, we leaving now!" And this is in New York City, you know? There is a force. So anywhere you go, it is there. It has the power to communicate with the ancestors and that is not restricted to Jamaica, or St. Thomas or Portland. Wherever you go as a drummer, when the drums play and the vibe is right, there is a presence. [00:31:05]/[113.0]

Speaker 2: [00:31:06] Well, as you know, I'm not born into kumina. And in fact, kumina would have been one of the various things my father would have been prevented from going to. [00:31:23]/[17.9]

Speaker 1: [00:31:24] Yeah. [00:31:24]/[0.0]

Speaker 2: [00:31:24] In Troja, in rural St. Catherine. [00:31:26]/[1.8]

Speaker 1: [00:31:27] But they could have but prevented him so much. Troja in St. Catherine? And Queenie and them are in Sligoville and Tredegar Park, so drums were playing. And nothing travels, especially at night, as drums and singing, for miles and miles. So I'm sure your father, if he's in his bed sleeping, that thing penetrated his cranium. And it is in you, I can feel it in you and I've known you forever. When you get around the ceremony and thing, and the way you move and respond to it, it is in you. Moving right along. [00:32:03]/[36.0]

Speaker 2: [00:32:05] Okay. Well, you mentioned Queenie, so maybe you should say who Queenie was. [00:32:10]/[4.7]

Speaker 1: [00:32:10] She was from Saint Catherine. During that period, Oliver Lewin and Eddie Seaga, Queenie was the go to person when it comes to the kumina tradition. The Revival was mainly Capo, and you know who Capo is. They were both from different parts of Saint Catherine. [00:32:29]/[18.5]

Speaker 2: [00:32:29] There are many people who have done research on kumina. I'm thinking about Kamau Brathwaite, people like Maureen Warner Lewis, people like Olive Lewin, Cheryl Ryman and Ken Bilby, the American researcher. They were interested in understanding kumina as African creativity in the New World, and really changed the ways one would approach it away from this kind of position of deviance and toward an understanding of the value that these traditions, practices and ceremonies have for communities who are trying to organize themselves as persons outside of the way the state is recognizing them, or outside of these international communities, but instead really understanding the strength and value and vision of African personhood in Jamaica. Why would somebody hold a kumina? [00:33:36]/[67.1]

Speaker 1: [00:33:37] Kumina is held for deaths, for birthdays, for weddings, for healing, just for healing. If you need help with anything, you know, people use kumina for who has court cases, just for the upliftment of the community. [00:33:56]/[18.7]

Speaker 2: [00:33:57] You mentioned going to Kerriann's father's kumina. [00:33:59]/[2.1]

Speaker 1: [00:33:59] Yeah. [00:33:59]/[0.0]

Speaker 2: [00:34:00] She said that's an end of year kumina, right? [00:34:03]/[3.0]

Speaker 1: [00:34:04] Kerriann's father had different kuminas throughout the year. The first time I went to Kerriann's father's kumina was with some elders from Portland. But then I went back again with NDTC, when I just started playing with NDTC, because two of the drummers for the kumina dance that Nettleford did were Obadiah and James, and they were from Seaforth. They were also drummers for Stewart, Kerriann's father. He was very welcoming to people outside of the community because he knew the importance of sharing and having people understand the real value of it. [00:34:50]/[45.3]

Speaker 2: [00:34:50] So are you saying that not everybody has that approach? Not welcoming? [00:34:55]/[4.5]

Speaker 1: [00:34:56] Yeah. I don't think everybody understands it in that kind of way. But Kerriann's father definitely did, just like Queenie did. They were interested in sharing it and having people develop a respect for it, an understanding of it. As you know, kumina in Jamaica can be a taboo. [00:35:17]/[21.0]

Speaker 2: [00:35:19] Well, talk about that for a minute, talking about the stigma. [00:35:21]/[2.0]

Speaker 1: [00:35:22] The stigma. Well, that comes from the church. I don't know if they were threatened, but kumina was looked on by most people who were connected to the church as an evil thing, they say it's obeah, vile worshippers they used to call them. Demonic. [00:35:40]/[18.2]

Speaker 2: [00:35:42] Do you think they were afraid of myal? [00:35:45]/[2.4]

Speaker 1: [00:35:45] They are still afraid of myal. And it's the strangest thing because I don't see much difference from myal and people getting possessed in the Pentecostal church. It's just the fact that it is ancestral worship. You're not going to get the teachings of Jesus Christ there, not according to the way Christianity presents religion. You're going to hear about the ancestors. You're going to use rum. You're going to be relying on the forces that comes out of a ceremony. [00:36:19][34.3]

Speaker 2: [00:36:20] Some of the people we interviewed talked about kumina having a kind of moral neutrality. It's not inherently good. It's not inherently bad. It can be used for either. What do you think about that? [00:36:34][14.0]

Speaker 1: [00:36:34] Just like anything else. There is a power. You can access that power. And you can use it in the way you feel to use it. Just as Manzie said. [00:36:44][10.0]

Speaker 5: [00:36:45] Kumina is a funny thing you know. Kumina is a dangerous thing. It can lift you, and it can put you down. It can lift you, and it can put you down. If a man make the real kumina fi you, you can't survive. You know? Real kumina, they call that one black and white kumina, you can't survive. You cannot survive. Anytime you see them make a kumina green, white and blue or so, peace, that is peace kumina. But from you hear about the black and white kumina, dangerous. Yeah. [00:37:36][50.8]

Speaker 2: [00:37:38] And so that's what people like Torch or Shem are talking about when they're talking about the 60 and the 61. [00:37:45][7.1]

Speaker 1: [00:37:45] The 61, yes. [00:37:47][0.0]

Speaker 5: [00:37:47] Listen to me, now, I'm going to tell you this now. Poco and Revival is the same tradition. But Poco is higher than Revival, because Poco is 61, those people, they worship God and they worship the dead. See? They jump different from the 60. 60 jump with one order, just lift right foot and drop it. The Poco people, they jump and bow, and you hear great deep sound come from them belly. You understand? When certain hours they dance themselves to burial ground. Yeah? So it's kind of stronger than the 60, but the 60 full of God. Understand? [00:38:39][51.5]

Speaker 2: [00:38:41] If you go over to the 61, you're going to the dark side. [00:38:50][8.9]

Speaker 1: [00:38:50] Exactly. [00:38:50][0.0]

Speaker 2: [00:38:51] I wonder why it's those numbers. [00:38:52][1.3]

Speaker 1: [00:38:53] I have no idea. [00:38:55][1.8]

Speaker 2: [00:38:56] So, define myal. [00:38:59][3.3]

Speaker 1: [00:39:00] Myal is when the spirit of the ancestors enter you. And normally when that happens, you take on the persona of that ancestor that enters you. Through that myal possession you can communicate the wishes of ancestors. This is the belief, you know? You can give guidance, and the wishes of ancestors. Helping healing. Myal is not just a light thing, myal is a thing which if you respect and understand it, it is a very useful thing and it's not something to be feared. [00:39:38][37.3]

Speaker 2: [00:39:39] And in fact it's welcomed. It's expected, it's hoped for. [00:39:42][3.3]

Speaker 1: [00:39:43] Yeah, yeah, yeah. [00:39:43][0.4]

Speaker 2: [00:39:44] When we asked Kerriann what it felt like to go into myal, here is what she said. [00:39:48]/[3.9]

Speaker 4: [00:39:49] It's really hard to explain, you know? You feel your whole body is like going up, your whole skin a raise, your head, I don't know how to explain it. It's hard. You see the ancestors you know, sometimes they're dancing with you, you know. Dancing, and you say, OK, not me today, not me tonight, so you're going to stop. Most of the time when I get into myal I do not know nothing. Nothing at all. But sometimes I can feel it coming on and I can resist it, like, stop dancing or, you know, do certain things and just cut it off. But when I go deep, I know nothing. Yeah. When I come back, a dirty. Mud up! Yes. [00:40:38]/[49.5]

Speaker 1: [00:40:39] What makes you want to resist it? [00:40:41]/[2.8]

Speaker 4: [00:40:43] Cause sometimes you just can't bother. When you come back to reality, you're dirty. You're sticky. You don't have clothes to change because you're not at home. So, it's kinda uncomfortable. You're sticky. You don't have to change because you're not at home. So it's kind of uncomfortable. And I saw a lot of people getting into myal and doing these things that could not be done. For instance, eating fire. I saw a lady, by the name of Karen. I can't forget! She was in myal, and daddy used to have this kitchen made out of zinc that he called the Tambu kitchen, that he would cook food for them other ones, without salt. And Karen went into that kitchen, took off a long fire stick like this, and she ate all the fire with not even a scorch on her lip. Tambu kitchen. [00:41:32]/[48.9]

Speaker 1: [00:41:33] Tambu kitchen. [00:41:33]/[0.2]

Speaker 4: [00:41:33] I saw Bottle Torch dad and his uncle eat grass, and making sounds like horses. Yes, eating the grass, on their knees eating the grass. Yes. [00:41:47]/[13.1]

Speaker 2: [00:41:49] And so when you would see those kinds of things as a child... [00:41:52]/[2.8]

Speaker 4: [00:41:53] Was I scared?

Speaker 2: Well, what did you think?

Speaker 4: No, I wasn't scared, I was. I don't even know what I was thinking. More than you know me just like it. Yeah. [00:42:03]/[10.1]

Speaker 1: [00:42:08] You say you love myal. Why do you love myal? [00:42:11]/[2.8]

Speaker 4: [00:42:12] I like seeing it. [00:42:13]/[0.7]

Speaker 1: [00:42:13] You like seeing it? [00:42:14]/[0.3]

Speaker 4: [00:42:14] I like seeing it. If I go to a kumina and I don't see myal, it nuh feel, it nuh feel nice. When persons get into myal, you know that the drumming is right, you're doing the right thing, and the ancestors them coming. And it takes a good drummer, proper singing, you know, everything has to be on the right chord for that to happen. So you can't take a 8 o'clock 9 o'clock drummer to play 11, 12:00 at night? [00:42:45]/[31.4]

Speaker 2: [00:42:49] Yeah. Mama V said Something similar. [00:42:50]/[1.7]

Speaker 6: [00:42:52] My aunt is a real kumina person, she have one eye, she live in Port Morant. Her name is Christine, everybody know her. And when me small, me and my father and Christine go kumina. And me see my aunt in myal. And she climb on top of the booth, go up

there, and she come back down headway. And when she come back down headway, she just take up a glass they have in front of the drum, with the sugar and water, and she just do so, and just bite up the glass and swallow it. And me bawl out and say, "Papa papa, auntie a go dead because she just eat the glass." And he said, "Don't worry yourself, nothing nuh do her." And the daylight she's there same way, until she live til she die. When a person get into myal, they will stand up here so, and somebody will stand up beside them, not even dancing, and they will drop. The spirit inna of them. People say it's duppy a work with them. Ghosts, work with them. Them fall inna myal, and the power weh dem have, sometimes all three, four, five persons haffi hold them, because the spirit inna them carry them and carry them and carry them. There have to be somebody with the power more than the spirit to clear them out of the myal. And that's me. [00:44:08][76.1]

Speaker 1: [00:44:09] I've seen some mystical things happen when people are possessed, you know. People do all kinds of things. First of all, you can't hurt yourself while you're in myal. No matter what you do. And I've seen people do some things that are out of the norm when they're possessed. And I've also seen people try to fake it. [00:44:33][24.2]

Speaker 2: [00:44:34] Yeah, Mama V said that too. [00:44:35][1.1]

Speaker 6: [00:44:36] Well, the strength and the power in a kumina, right now, sometimes you go kumina, and you see somebody say them inna myal. Me can know if them inna myal or not. The only thing you do when somebody say them inna myal, just throw some rum inna them eye. And if you see them rub them eye, you know them don't inna myal. You see, when a person in myal, if you throw rum inna them eye, them don't do nothing more than continue dancing. So you see it's a strength and a power and you have to understand kumina. When you go kumina, people who dance kumina and fall down, and get a bruk hand and a bruk foot, them wasn't inna myal. [00:45:14][38.3]

Speaker 1: [00:45:15] And you remember Torch said he learned the Ashanti and the ki-Congo language when he was in myal. [00:45:20][4.5]

Speaker 5: [00:45:21] With me now, the both language me a speak, Ashanti and Congolese. Yeah. You understand? You see me out there a talk to John little while and you come out there, and this one call to me, me change it from the Bongo language weh me talk to John and me change it to the Ashanti language. [00:45:40][18.8]

Speaker 2: [00:45:41] And so how did you learn that. You learned that in the space of kumina? [00:45:45][3.7]

Speaker 5: [00:45:46] Listen to me, I learned some in the space of kumina by when the ancestors did show me in myal. Deh pon ground deh fi all the whole day. You can't turn. Because anytime you turn and get up, the type of language weh me talk, and the type of kumina song, some people haffi consider if me did know them long time. [00:46:09][14.7]

Speaker 1: [00:46:10] You are one of the first man we talk to who actually get into myal. So tell me more about this. [00:46:15][5.9]

Speaker 5: [00:46:16] Me is a myal dancer. Me dance myal, nuff time me dance myal all on tree. For real. One time, when me much younger, myal would take me and two days me inna myal. Sometime me go a some kumina, and me play the drum and put people inna myal, and at the same me put them inna myal me put myself inna myal. You understand? Yeah, and me still haffi get back sober and rescue them[?] [00:46:44][27.8]

Speaker 1: [00:46:45] Myal is the thing, and I can't say to you that it's the only time a kumina has the power to create changes, because nobody has to be possessed for the ceremony to work. Kumina sessions can call the ancestors, and they work there and give guidance, and be present without myal. [00:47:05][20.8]

Speaker 2: [00:47:07] Myal really is no different from possession in other African diasporic religions, or practices like candomblé or santería, or vodun. It's not identical across these spaces, but it's a similar phenomenon. Whether it's a deity, or it's an ancestor, who is coming to you when you are in the right space in relation to the drum and the dancing and the music. You are open. [00:47:44][15.3]

Speaker 1: [00:47:45] You have surrendered. [00:47:46][0.8]

Speaker 2: [00:47:46] You have surrendered. [00:47:47][0.3]

Speaker 1: [00:47:48] Exactly. Yeah. [00:47:48][0.8]

Speaker 2: [00:47:49] As this episode comes to a close, we want to leave you with Torch and Manzie singing together impromptu on the top of a hill in Arcadia, Saint Thomas. [00:47:58][8.7]

Speaker 2: [00:48:31] We hope you will join us soon for our next episode, "Crossings." *Bush Music* was funded by a Fellows Grant from the Crossroads Project, a collaborative research initiative directed by Judith Weisenfeld, Anthea Butler, and Lerone Martin, based at Princeton University, and supported by the Henry Luce Foundation. [00:48:31][0.0]

[2762.1]