

could give an overview of the issues as seen from Africa. We also lined up Foday Musa Suso, a traditional West African griot, a kind of folk troubadour who preserves a community's oral history and passes it on in musical form. It helped that Foday, who came from Gambia, had an album he was promoting, featuring his spectacular Kora, a 21-string harp-lute with a large sound box and long cylindrical neck which produces a beguiling twangling sound.

Representing African-American music we had Eddie and Julio, plus Gaile Peters, a jazz-blues artist in the mould of Billie Holiday, usually performing in small clubs and cocktail lounges back home. She had worked on tour in the U.K. with some of the same musicians as Eddie, albeit playing in a less percussive manner. I'd seen her perform and knew she would provide a different musical texture with her lightness of touch.

For Caribbean musicians, Julio took me to see Dennis Bovell, leader of The Dub Band and a very big name as a reggae producer and recording artist. Dennis had recorded with the performance poet, Linton Kwesi Johnson, with Julio contributing wailing and bluesy harmonica on a couple of tracks. We went to see Dennis at his home in Clapham Junction in London, where Julio received another warm welcome. Dennis was more circumspect with me, perhaps a little wary as I laid out our plans and explained how much we'd like him and the Dub Band in the show. He was born in Barbados, but most of his regular band had roots in Jamaica. Together they delivered a heavy but nuanced sound. I felt quite privileged to see Dennis nonchalantly improvising a surprisingly 'African' number at his keyboards in his living room. Suddenly he seemed at his ease and in his element.

So far we'd made good progress, helped by Julio's contacts and knowledge of the subject. We had one other lead to follow, the biggest name of all, James Baldwin, the writer and Civil Rights activist, widely admired for his passionate anti-racist eloquence, steeped in the cadences of the King James Bible. He had been a friend of murder victims Medgar Evers and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jnr, and was friends with numerous black musicians, including Ray Charles, Nina Simone and Miles Davis. I had read and been inspired by many of his novels and plays, such as 'Blues For Mister Charlie' and 'Amen Corner', plus his non-fiction works, especially his magnificent polemical 'The Fire Next Time'. His 'If Beale Street Could Talk' has recently been turned into a hit movie.

Julio had James's phone number in the South of France, and insisted that I ring him, which I did somewhat nervously. I sat in the office with Julio at my side asking everyone to keep quiet as I dialed the number. I was amazed to get James on the line at the first attempt, but found him in a slightly irritable mood, not wanting to be bothered. I explained what we were aiming to do in each of our programmes and he would surely adorn both commenting on what people had been saying or performing. Mention of Julio's role in instigating this exploration of black music across continents instantly put James at ease. Growing up in Harlem he was surrounded by music, especially gospel (a private recording of him singing 'Take My Hand, Precious Lord' was played at his funeral in 1987). Inevitably our conversation got onto colonialism, imperialism and – looming over everything – slavery and the slave trade, which he talked about with restrained intensity.

The ideas came tumbling out and James agreed to come to London to take part in the programmes. Sadly, that never happened. Persistent phone calls to sort out flights and a hotel for him were unanswered until he finally picked up, days before the shows were due to be recorded. He apologised profusely and said he'd been ill and he would have to withdraw from our project. He sounded sincere when applauding what we were trying to do, regretting that he wasn't well enough to take part.

The night before we recorded our first show all our main performers were invited to join our tiny team in a classy restaurant in Notting Hill. Our director Steve was there plus the PA, Andrea Gauld, and we all tried to get everyone relaxed and at ease so we just had to grit our teeth when all sorts of hangers on turned up, including agents and record-company PR men. Suddenly a relatively intimate gathering had turned into an expensive free-for-all. With dismay, I could see our small 'hospitality' budget disappearing down some capacious gullets. Steve spent much of the evening talking to Eddie about the Miners' Strike and police violence, while Foday kept nagging me to allow him to hold up his latest LP in the programmes, to the point of irritation, and the free-loaders scoffed as much food as they could. When they demanded cigars some uninvited guests brazenly helped themselves to handfuls to line their pockets. Julio had written a book on cigars, one of his great loves, but restrained himself, I was pleased to see.

The expenses claim I subsequently had to submit for our night out, several hundreds of pounds, was the largest ever in CPU, the stuff of legend. I hadn't really enjoyed the evening, but hoped we'd created some goodwill for the recording days.

The first programme, 'The Roots Of Black Music', concentrated on Africa and explored whether there really is such a thing as 'black music', which to some degree all agreed there was, including the belief that diaspora music was indeed ultimately rooted in Africa. Whether the discussions would have convinced musicologists I have no idea, but it was fascinating to see how there was unanimity on this point from people coming from very different communities, continents apart. Foday may have been a bit of a pain the night before, but his Kora performance was

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delightful. But the star was Francis Bebey, talking with great erudition about African music, and making musical demonstrations with his guitar and a tiny Sanza, or 'thumb piano', also called 'the little African piano', which captivated everyone. Julio was good at putting people at their ease, conducting things as relaxed conversations, rather than formal interviews.

The next day we recorded the second programme, 'The Blues & Beyond', which was purely a nightclub show, with a succession of performances on stage, including the solo artists and the band performances. In the afternoon we had rehearsed in correct running order and it mostly went smoothly, except things were not going well with Eddie C., which was surprising as he and the band had worked together regularly on his U.K. tour. Somehow the piano playing seemed pedestrian, and Eddie was clearly unhappy, having a bit of a go at the pianist, Craig Mackie. I came down from the OB scanner to intercede, asking what the problem was. I chipped in my view that the piano felt a bit tentative and should be more up front and heavier, to which Craig said, faintly dismissively, "Oh, I see, you want rock & roll." From that point on the piano was fine, rolling and rocking in the manner of an Otis Spann and Eddie was happy. I think maybe Craig was trying to display his jazz chops, which he could do when backing Gaile Peters, performing with a sympathetic lightness of touch. Eddie's band, including Peter Scott on bass, Leslie Morgan, drums and George Carless on tenor sax finally got in synch and harmony was restored. For all his experience as a performer, I think Eddie was quite nervous and that had affected the boys in the band.

When the invited audience were ushered in, including Peter Shertser, head of Red Lightnin' Records, who had issued recordings from 'The Devil's Music' sessions, there was a nice atmosphere and I was very happy with how the show went, hosted by Julio. We progressed from Africa to the Diaspora, featuring Dennis and the Dub Band representing the Caribbean, followed by Gaile from the U.S.A., performing 'Billie's Blues' and 'I Know How To Do It'. We built to a climax with Eddie and his now powerful Chicago-style blues band, featuring roaring tenor sax, plus Julio on harmonica. They delivered a fine 'Little Red Rooster', which I could tell went down well with those who only knew the number from the version recorded in the early days by the Rolling Stones, a timely reminder of how much our shared culture has been so deeply enriched by Black Music, however defined.

My wife Hilary was in the audience enjoying the show. She was six-months pregnant and she told me that as soon as Eddie's band began rocking our baby began kicking. I like to think that was a sign of approval at the sound of the blues.