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gwoka

Guadeloupean dance of African origins (*n'goka* in Sango). Accompanied by a low-pitched and two high-pitched drums, all made of oak barrels tied together with ropes and topped with goatskins, the form has seven rhythms expressing different emotions: *toumblack* (joy, love), *léwoz* (fight, melancholy), *graj* (spirit of work), *roulé* (work), *kaladja* (suffering, sadness), *mendé* (collective escape), and *padjanbèl* (joy, freedom). The *boulayè* (accompanists), sitting astride their drums, set a cyclical, continuous tempo and rhythm for the *vokal* (singer), the *répondè* (choir), and the dancer(s). Most importantly, the *makéyè* (marker or improviser) uses his fingers, hands, elbows, and feet to conduct the ensemble and the dancers through refined improvisations, while the overlapping rhythms of the three drums link the audience to the performers. During the period of slavery, *gwoka*, sung in creole, expressed resistance, revolt, joy, suffering, solidarity, and encouragement—and it still does today for people of African descent, particularly in the cities.

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