

Kumina element



Kumina drummers at nine nine for late Kumina Queen Bernice Henry

Name and Identification of the element:

1. Kumina is a Kongo based religious tradition, a world view and a living cultural preserve in the Jamaica.

The element is identified as representing an important element of the quantity of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Jamaica as it manifests the following four domains of ICH as specified in the 2003 UNESCO Convention.

- Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle
- Performing arts
- Social practices, rituals and festive events
- Traditional craftsmanship

Name of the element in the language and script of the community or group concerned:

Kumina

I. Short, maximally informative title (including indication of domain(s)):

Kumina is dance - music ritual, centred primarily on communication with ancestors of the Congo people and their descendants in Jamaica.

II. Communities Concerned

Communities that recognize the Kumina element as part of their cultural heritage include St. Thomas where many of the indentured labourers settled. However, Kumina groups are also found in Portland, St. Catherine, Kingston, St. Mary and other areas.

III. Physical Locations of the Elements;

Many of the indentured labourers, the African from the Congo region in African settled in St. Thomas and it here that Kumina is strongest. However, Kumina groups are also found in Portland, St. Catherine, St. Mary, Kingston and other Parishes

IV. Short Description.

The element of Kumina is based on the Central African belief in each person possessing a dual soul: the personal spirit (which contains the personality of the individual) and the individual's shadow. On death, the personal spirit goes directly to the all powerful god Nzambi Mpungu; these spirits can become ancestral spirits and return to the earth. The shadow remains in the grave with the corpse but can leave it at will. If not given a proper burial, it will become a wandering spirit and a menace not only to the family but to all the people in the area.

Kumina ceremonies are always held for specific purposes such as death, births, wedding, thanksgiving, healing and to remove the wrong kind of spirit from someone afflicted with 'spirit sickness'. Singing, dancing and drumming are the three most important elements in a Kumina session which usually begins at sundown and takes place around a central pole. Dancing and singing are essential as they help to attract the spirits.

Characteristics of the Element

I. Associated tangible elements

Associated tangible elements include the drums and other traditional musical instruments, libation, centre pole, silk cotton tree, ritual table and the costumes or mode of dress.

II. Associated intangible elements

Associated intangible elements include ancestral spirits, Nkugu language, Kikongo language, the songs, dancing amongst others.

III. Language(s), register(s), speech level(s) involved

The Kikongo language is used in kumina ritual and ceremonies. Kumina members say their prayer in the Kongo/Kikongo language and Country songs are usually sang in this language.

V. Perceived origin according to community-

The community believed that Kumina practices and beliefs were brought to Jamaica by slaves and indentured labourers who particularly came from the Congo region in Central Africa.

Persons and Institutions Involved with the Element

I. Practitioners(s)/performer(s): name(s), gender, and/ or professional category, etc.
Individuals/groups involved in Kumina rituals usually include queen/leader, drummers and percussionists, singers and dancers and members of other Kumina bands

II. Customary practices governing access to the element or to aspects of it
Customary practices governing access to the element or to aspects of it include gaining the approval of the unseen and obeying the Kumina rules/principles.

III. Modes of Transmission
Modes of transmission include organized training for competition, intergenerational teaching and learning for transmission and spiritual calling.

IV. Concerned organizations (NGOs and others)
Organizations concerned with the Kumina include the African Caribbean Institute of Jamaica and the Jamaica Cultural Development Commission. The African Caribbean Institute of Jamaica is mandated to preserve the presence of African retentions in the Caribbean and the Jamaica Cultural Development Commission is responsible for the Jamaica Festival of the Performing Arts Competition which is held annually to unearth, develop, and showcase the creative talents of Jamaicans from all walks of

life. This cultural opportunity has benefitted many Jamaicans through training, exposure and recognition.

State of the element: viability

I. Threats to the enactment

Due to the popularity of television and other mass media mass entertainment, attracting the majority of the younger generation for Kumina performances has become a challenge.

II. Threats to the transmission

There are no threats to transmission of the element.

III. Availability of associated tangible elements and resources

All associated tangible elements such as the drums and other traditional musical instruments, libation, centre pole, silk cotton tree, ritual table and the costumes or mode of dress and made by members of the Kumina community and the resources to produce them are easily available.

IV. Safeguarding measures in place

Safeguarding measures in place include the transmission of the ritual practices from the older devotees to the younger generation. Also at another level many young persons learn the dancing, songs and drumming for theatrical and festival involvement. Documenting, researching and publishing on various aspects of the element by scholars also contribute to the safeguarding of the element

Data gathering and inventorying

1. Consent from and involvement of the community/group in data gathering and inventorying;

Consent forms were signed by community member who participated in the data collection process.

2. Restrictions, if any, on use of inventoried data;

Restrictions on use of data collected are protected by the Copyright regulations which provides a legal framework for the protection of the element.

3. Resource persons(s): name and status or affiliation;

- Imogene Kennedy – Late Kumina queen

- Mr. Gerald Walker- Kumina drummer and practitioner

4. Dates and place of data gathering;

The data was collected in the parishes of St. Catherine, St. Thomas and Kingston from 1987 to 2015.