

Jamesie: King of Scratch * * *

(2006) 70 min. Andrea E. Leland.

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One of the dynamics of the internet music boom finds regional styles increasingly becoming overpowered by a handful of genres developed by a globally-connected music community. But some unique musical styles still sound pretty much like they did a century ago, practiced by a lonely breed of musicians with roots in another time. Andrea E. Leland's documentary focuses on one such artist, 79-year-old Jamesie-born James Brewster and the native music called Quelbe (or "scratch" for the scratchy-rhythmic sound) of the Virgin Island of St. Croix. Quelbe is produced by a unique mix of both homemade instruments (such as the tin-can banjo/ukulele-type instrument Jamesie is seen making at the beginning of the film) and conventional ones, such as drums, gourds, electric bass and guitar, sax, and even a triangle. Viewers will learn about the island culture and oral history of scratch (the lyrics often relate to the simple, humorous, and risqué events of the day; or expose class violence; or even poke fun at the misdeeds of a "rudie": if you've done something bad, someone might write a song about you), while also seeing performance footage of Jamesie and the All-Stars in Denmark, the Virgin Islands, and at world music festivals in Chicago and Indiana. As one observer puts it, Jamesie's music sounds like a crème brûlée. A tasty profile, this is recommended. Aud: C,P. (C. Block)