



**Swanky Kitchen Band**  
**Artist Information Sheet**  
**All Ages**

**Artist Biography:**

**Swanky Kitchen Band**

**Swanky Kitchen Band** is on an essential quest to revive the traditional music of the Cayman Islands. Set amidst the crystal blue waters of the Caribbean Sea, the three tiny islands are home to Kitchen Dance Music, an infectiously danceable fiddle-driven style. The Kitchen Dance sound, created through a crossroads of European and African influences, nearly disappeared save for the efforts of Swanky Kitchen Band, the last of the Caymanian Kitchen Bands.

“Swanky,” as the group is known to its loyal fan base, was founded, and is led by fiddler and songwriter Samuel Rose at a time when the rapid pace of development and societal change nearly ended the genre. Samuel grew up on the island of Grand Cayman, and first began violin lessons as a child receiving classical training. In his late teens he was encouraged to shift his musical journey in order to preserve the music of his homeland which had become critically endangered. Traditionally performed in community settings, the music was the soundtrack to festivities and gatherings where food, music, and community came together. The kitchen dance was led by master fiddlers including the late Radley Gourzong, who performed at the Grand Ole’ Opry in 1987, a surprising feat for a Caribbean fiddler. Sadly, by the time Samuel began to embrace his musical roots, most of the old fiddlers and kitchen band performers had already passed away. Having learned indirectly from previous recordings of old masters, Samuel’s playing reminds us of their legacy and the depth of this unique Caymanian art form. In 2003, Samuel along with guitarist Nicholas Johnson created Swanky Kitchen Band to preserve and revitalize this rapidly disappearing musical art-form.

The core of Kitchen Dance music is the driving sound of the fiddle surrounded by a rhythmic groove created with a snare drum, a scraper (like the one you would find in your own kitchen!) played by rubbing a metal brush or comb across the teeth of this indispensable kitchen tool, and a guitar or other stringed instrument. Samuel took these traditional core elements and built out a powerhouse dance band that is now 10-pieces strong including the scraper, full drum kit, saxophone, harmonica, electric bass, keyboards, electric guitar and multiple singers. Among the core members of the band are Paula “Ms. P” Scott, a master on the grater who was born from a family of drummers on Grand Cayman’s sister island of Cayman Brac, and Lammie Seymore, one of the most well known Caymanian musicians, having founded the wildly popular Memory of Justice Band that dominated the local airwaves in the 1970s and 80s. Together Swanky faithfully honors the traditional kitchen music songs while also contributing their own compositions and infusing more popular and modern dance sounds that attracts audiences young and old.

**Tradition:****Kitchen Dance Music**

Kitchen Dance Music owes its name largely to architectural necessity: because Caymanians traditionally lived in easily burned thatched-roof homes, their kitchens were constructed in open-air/semi-enclosed detached structures. Thus, the cooking of meals often became a community-wide event, with much comradery and celebration which often included music. In this unique setting, household kitchen tools, most notably a grater used for coconut and cassava, became the driving percussive foundation paired with cowskin or goatskin drums. Along with the grater, the most defining instrument in kitchen band music is the fiddle, which can be traced back to the British and Irish fiddling traditions brought to the Cayman Islands by its earliest permanent settlers. Since the 1700s' fiddle music has been the centerpiece of Caymanian folk music traditions- and included folksongs telling stories of love, loss, incidents and occurrences in the tiny, isolated maritime society known at one time as "the Islands time forgot". Fiddle-driven dance tunes were conjoined with the pulse of vibrant rhythms that crossed the Atlantic with the African slaves who were forcibly brought to the Cayman Islands. This blending of African and European heritage is evident in the Caymanian people and their unique traditions including their dialect, foods and dance but perhaps most strongly via their beloved kitchen dance music.

**Place:****The Cayman Islands**

Unlike most islands in the Caribbean, there is no record of native peoples living on the Cayman Islands before they were first spotted by Christopher Columbus during his final voyage in 1503 after his ship was blown off course. Columbus first named the islands "Las Tortugas" after the vast number of turtles that swam in its waters. Trade between Europe and the Americas expanded over the next 100 years or so, and the islands were often used as a stopping off point to catch these abundant sea turtles to feed sailors. Those turtles, once so dense in numbers that it was said they filled the seas and stopped ships from moving, were soon hunted to near extinction. It was the first of many times that the pressures from trade would impact the islands now called the Caymans.

The Caymans is made up of three Islands-Grand Cayman, Cayman Brac and Little Cayman. Until the early 1700s' the islands were sparsely inhabited, still used by ships to restock food and wood. Its relative isolation made it ideal for pirates, including the legendary Blackbeard, one of the most famous pirates of them all, who frequented the Caymans until settlements were created. When the first British settlers arrived in 1730 they brought with them peoples forcibly taken from Africa. The islands became part of the British Empire and by 1802 the largest of the islands, Grand Cayman, had only 902 people



living there, with over half of them enslaved peoples. In 1833, slavery was officially abolished on the Islands.

Today, the Caymans are a self-governing territory of Great Britain with its own Parliament. The population is a fraction of what you would find in a major U.S city (less than 100,000 people). If it were an independent nation, it would be the 11th smallest country by population in the world! Its small size helps make its local culture and traditions unique but also in danger of being easily lost. Its current population, while still tiny, is massive compared to what it was in 1960, when the total population of the Caymans was less than 10,000. At that time, the islands were home to small farmers, fisherman, boat-builders and net menders, many of whom were connected to the original families that settled the Islands in the 1700s. The historically low population and longtime lack of industry led to a relatively peaceful place where people were forced to live side by side and share their resources and traditions. These conditions led to a blending of ideas and peoples- a process known as creolization. The racial tensions felt in other parts of the Caribbean are not nearly as present in the Caymans for this reason.

In more recent years the country has become a force in international banking as it has developed a robust and growing tourism industry, leading to an explosion in the country's population and wealth. The islands continue to attract new residents, and the average household income is higher than most other countries in the world, resulting in Caymanian residents enjoying the highest standard of living in the Caribbean. This increased population, tourism and wealth has come at a cost however, as they have caused the local culture to be endangered and the land, once passed down through the generations, to be sold off rapidly. In response to this crisis, the Caymanian government has recently dedicated renewed energy towards preserving and celebrating its cultural traditions, with artists such as Swanky serving as their greatest cultural ambassadors and guardians.