

## AGUA DE ESCLAVO

Ginger “Dizzy” Jenkins

### Coro:

*Dime negrita tu sabes, sabes del mar y el dolor*

*Habla negrita tu sabes, sabes del mar y el dolor*

Agua de esclavo

Pal pelo malo

Agua de sal que lloro

Ay no te mojes

Ay no te mojes

Ay no te mojes mi amor

*Dime negrita tu sabes, sabes del mar y el dolor*

*Habla negrita tu sabes, sabes del mar y el dolor*

Agua mi tumba

Agua mi tumba

Agua mi tumba papá

Cae aguacero

Cae aguacero

Muerto vuelve huracán

*Dime negrita tu sabes, sabes del mar y el dolor*

*Habla negrita tu sabes, sabes del mar y el dolor*

Traigo arena  
 Traigo arena  
 Arena pa mi bebe  
 Olas me llaman  
 Olas me llaman  
 Dicen que soy rebelde

*Dime negrita tu sabes, sabes del mar y el dolor*  
*Habla negrita tu sabes, sabes del mar y el dolor*

I wrote this song thinking about the historically turbulent relationship we, as Black people, have had with water. From so many of our ancestors in the transatlantic slave trade making the ocean their final resting place, to a public pool that contained Black swimmers being doused with acid, to my own experience of not being allowed to get my hair wet, water has always posed challenges that seem impossible to overcome. This trauma has been inherited and perpetuated by society as we know it by the lack of representation in ocean/water sports such as surfing. My work with an organization called Brown Girl Surf happened to help bring this song to me from my ancestors. In 2019 as I worked at a summer camp with young Black and Brown girls, I had a conversation on the side with one of the moms whose daughter was attending camp and learning how to surf. She recommended that I read *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* by Alice Walker, which I promptly ordered online when I got home. We talked about how important this work is—getting Black people back to the ocean in a joyous and healing manner; to reconnect with the water and with nature. We talked about all the things that have kept us from this healing and what we have been committed to doing in order to break these cycles. I thought about how often I was discouraged by my mother out of her own fear and inherited traumas, “No te metas en la

agua nena!," "no te mojes el pelo" and so forth. Getting my hair wet was such a sin. Water would expose my roots; "el pelo malo," everyone called it. It took years to work through this and to undo this damage. On the way home from surf camp, going over the San Mateo bridge from Half Moon Bay with my natural hair in full effect, blessed by the salt water, exhausted from catching wave after wave, the coro for this song came to me in the tradition of Afro Puerto Rican music known as Bomba.

Bomba is another important healing tool in my life, another way to connect with my ancestors. To compose a bomba song about a Black woman in the ocean, about surfing, about our history, and our healing in the rhythm of Yuba in particular was not only a prayer to my ancestors who lost their lives in that awful journey, who are entombed by salt water, but also a way to heal and claim my mother ocean as my healer as well. I've had a lot of pushback from people I love about surfing. They say it's dangerous, I'm "crazy", it's for white people, and of course the ever-present question of "what do you do with your hair?" after I surf. I don't take offense to this. It goes back to a lack of representation in the sport itself that allows people to believe that me surfing and working with surf organizations like Brown Girl Surf and Black Girls Surf is so far-fetched. As I drove over the bridge that afternoon and hummed the song to myself I had to pull over to sing the song into my phone's audio recorder. The pull to write these lyrics was so strong it felt like it wasn't even my song.

*Agua de esclavo pal pelo malo, agua de sal que lloro.*

*Ay no te mojes, ay no te mojes, ay no te mojes mi amor...*

I always felt like I didn't ask for this trauma. I was always drawn to the ocean, fascinated by how we are made up of water, how water takes up most of the planet and how the ocean is still such a mystery to us.

*Agua mi tumba, agua mi tumba, agua mi tumba papá.  
Cae aguacero, cae aguacero, muerto vuelve huracán*

A long time ago I read that hurricanes are caused by the restless spirits that met their end in the Atlantic Ocean during the transatlantic slave trade and, since then, I have been drawn to this theory, to this notion.

*Traigo arena, traigo arena, arena pa mi bebe.*

*Olas me llaman, olas me llaman, dicen que soy rebelde...*

To many of my loved ones, it is much safer where the sand is. It is safer away from the shore, away from the waves. But I can't help but want to surf and continue being a perpetual student of the ocean. My connection to the ocean is how I continue to heal and connect to my ancestors that is unique to my experience. And, as I sit on my surfboard, waiting to catch the next wave, I sing to my negritas.

*Dime negrita tu sabes, sabes del mar y el dolor...*