

The Use and Performance of Hymnody, Spirituals, and Gospels in the Black Church

Introduction

Since the 17th century, Black Americans have participated in two culturally distinct religious traditions. The first tradition represents that associated with white Protestant denominations. The second was independently developed by Blacks, utilizing the concepts and practices retained from their West African heritage. These two traditions are easily distinguished by ideology, worship style, and musical practices. The musical repertoire of Black congregations that adhered to white Protestant doctrines is derived from official hymnals which include psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Conversely, the repertoire of churches, whose religious ideology is uniquely Black, consists of Black folk spirituals and gospels. Songs of these two idioms are derived from several sources: 1) West African musical traditions; 2) Black secular idioms; 3) original Black compositions; and 4) white Protestant psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.¹

The music, which characterizes autonomous Black congregations, differs in function and performance style from that of Black congregations that adhere to the doctrines of the white Protestant church. Music performed by the former group constitutes an integral and intrinsic part of the liturgy. The manner in which this music is performed is based on the

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¹ Eileen Southern, ed., *Readings in Black American Music* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), p. 110; Dena Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals* (Urbana: University Illinois Press, 1977), pp. 217-237, 276-278); Jeanette R Murphy, "The Survival of African Music in America," pp. 327-329 in *The Negro and His Folklore*, ed. Bruce Jackson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967); Elizabeth Kilham, "Sketches in Color: IV," in Jackson, pp. 120-133, and Pavel P. Svinin, *Picturesque United States of America! 1811, 1812, 1813*, ed. Avraham Yarmolinsky (New York: William Edwin Rudge Inc., 1930), p. 30.

aesthetic principles and social norms that have evolved from West African cultures. Whereas spirituals and gospels are the dominant musical forms found in autonomous Black churches, white Protestant hymns, especially those of Isaac Watts and the Wesley brothers, continue to be mainstays of the repertoire even today. When performed, however, these songs either conform to the dictates of Western European traditions or congregations may choose to modify them in accordance with Afro-American aesthetic principles.

The use and performance of music in the Black church will be explored in this discussion through an examination of 1) the events that led to the conversion of Blacks to Christianity; 2) the formation of independent Black religious groups, and 3) the social and cultural milieu which fostered the development of a unique Black religious music.

The Conversion of Slaves to Christianity During the 17th & 18th Centuries

During the 17th century, before slavery became a dominant institution in the United States, northern Blacks were exposed to most aspects of white culture. They generally lived in the homes of their masters and worked beside them in farms, in stores, and in the kitchen. The exposure of these slaves to Christianity was the moral responsibility of the families with whom they lived. For this reason, the clergy expressed constant concern about the recreational activities of slaves.² They interpreted these African-derived activities as contrary to the teachings of Christianity. The Reverend Morgan Godwin in 1680 expressed his disapproval:

. . . nothing is more barbarous, and contrary to Christianity, than their . . . *Idolatrous Dances, and Revels*; in which they usually spend the *Sunday*. . . And here, that I may not be thought too rashly to impute *Idolatry* to their *Dances*, my Conjecture is raised upon this ground . . . for that they use their *Dances as means to procure Rain*: Some of them having been known to beg this Liberty upon the Week Days, in order thereunto.³

Puritans and clergymen of the New England colonies believed that a knowledge of Christian concepts would encourage slaves to reject these so-called "sinful" activities and instead participate in religious activities. In an attempt to create satisfactory alternatives, slaveholders were encouraged or required by law to provide servants and slaves with religious

² Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), p. 66; Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 4-6; and Epstein, *Sinful Tunes*, p. 101.

³ Morgan Godwin, *The Negro's & Indians Advocate, Suing for Their Admission into the Church: or a Persuasive to the Instructing and Baptizing of the Negro's [sic] and Indians in our Plantations* . . . (London: Printed by F.C., 1680), p. 33.

instruction.⁴

Conversion to Christianity required a familiarity with the music repertoire sung during religious activities. Therefore, psalm and hymn singing was included in the religious instruction given to Blacks. The English practice of "lining-out, where . . . each line was read or intoned by the minister or some other person before it was sung by the congregation," was used to teach these songs to Blacks.⁵ With a knowledge of psalms and hymns, Blacks were able to become active participants in a variety of religious activities at church and in the home of their masters.⁶ The singing of psalms and/or hymns was included in exclusively Black religious assemblies. In one instance, a group of slaves living in Boston in 1693 agreed to always sing a psalm between two prayers during their Sunday worship.⁷ By the end of the 18th century, many Blacks were widely respected for their knowledge of psalm and hymn singing, and some could be found serving as singing-school masters for all white participants in northern colonies.⁸

Whether attending white churches or conducting their own services, Blacks were expected to sing songs from the established repertoire of Protestant hymnody according to the prescribed musical norm. For this reason, northern Blacks were unable to develop a distinct body of religious music prior to the founding of independent Black churches.

In contrast to the system of slavery in the North, many slaves in southern colonies lived on large farms and plantations that were located some distance from the master's house. The master and his family, therefore, had little if any influence on the religious education of these slaves.⁹ The first surveys of religious conditions among slaves in the United States was initiated by the Bishop of London in 1724. The responses from southern missionaries indicated that cultural differences, misunderstandings, language barriers, and resistance of slaveholders interfered with proselytizing efforts.¹⁰ During the latter part of the 18th century, these efforts were intensified by Presbyterian and Methodist

⁴ Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), pp. 35-37, 60.

⁵ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes*, p. 202.

⁶ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, pp. 33-42.

⁷ Robert Stevenson, *Protestant Church Music in America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970), p. 93.

⁸ Stevenson; and Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, pp. 79-81.

⁹ Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), pp. 7-25; Kenneth Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1956), pp. 30-41 and John Blassingame, *The Slave Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 154, 172-177.

¹⁰ William Stevens Perry, ed., *Historical Collections Relating to the American Colonial Church*, Vol. i (Virginia: [n.p.], 1870), pp. 267, 278, 283.

evangelists of the Great Awakening Movement. Camp meetings, stemming from this Movement, attracted a sizeable number of Blacks including slaves and freedmen. The emotional nature and informal structure of these meetings allowed Blacks to respond in a manner that was less restrictive than that tolerated by missionaries of the Anglican clergy. Furthermore, these services bore some resemblance to practices Blacks had retained from West African cultures. In spite of the appeal of these camp meetings among Blacks, the numbers converted to Christianity in the 18th century were very small in proportion to the thousands who were totally unaffected.¹¹

The system of slavery in southern colonies prevented slaveholders and other whites from defining the cultural frame of reference for slaves. Because slaves were isolated from mainstream society and had limited contact with whites, they were able to establish their own values, customs, and musical tradition. Missionaries constantly complained about the "barbaric" cultural practices of slaves and sought to impose their own values by converting them to Christianity. Evangelists of the 18th century emphasized the importance of music in their proselytizing efforts upon discovering that "slaves preferred the musical activities of the religious experience above all else."¹² The Reverend Samuel Davies, who recognized the value of music to potential Black converts, commented:

I cannot but observe, that the *Negroes*, above all the Human Species, that I ever knew, have an Ear for Musick, and a kind of extatic Delight in *Psalmody*; and there are no books they learn so soon or take so much Pleasure in, as those used in that heavenly Part of divine Worship.¹³

The success of Davies, a Presbyterian, in attracting slaves to his services, encourage the Anglican clergy to place a greater emphasis on music. In 1768, William Knox observed: "The Negroes in general have an ear for musick, and might without much trouble be taught to sing hymns, which would be the pleasantest way of instructing them, and bringing them speedily to offer praise of God."¹⁴

Toward the end of the 18th century, missionaries conceded that slaves were not willing to abandon their African worldview and musical practices for Christianity. They then were forced to modify their strict inter-

¹¹ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes*, pp. 104-109.

¹² Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, p. 58.

¹³ Quoted in Benjamin Fawcett, *A Compassionate Address to the Christian Negroes in Virginia, and Other British Colonies in North America, With an Appendix Containing Some Accounts of the Rise and Progress of Christianity Among the Poor People*, 2nd ed. (London, Slop., 1755), p. 37.

¹⁴ William Knox, *Three Tracts Respecting the Conversation and Instruction of the Free Indians and Negro Slaves in the Colonies. Addressed to the Venerable Society for Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (London: n.p., 1768), p. 39.

pretation of religious doctrines and incorporate musical practices of slaves when providing religious instruction or conducting services. Bishop Porteus of London, in 1784, even recommended that the clergy compose new songs in the musical tradition of slaves:

Many of the Negroes have a natural turn for music, and are frequently heard to sing in their rude and artless way at their work. This propensity might be improved to the purpose of devotion . . . by composing short hymns . . . set to plain, easy, solemn psalm tunes, as nearly resembling their own simple melody as possible. . . . These might be used not only in church, but when their task was finished in the field, and on other joyous occasions. This would make them see Christianity in a much more pleasing light than they generally do . . . and would be found probably a much more effectual way of fixing their attention . . . than any other that can be devised.¹⁵

The Bishop also encouraged the insertion of religious elements in the recreational activities of slaves by providing "the help of a little sacred melody adapted to the peculiar taste and turn of the Africans." Bishop Porteus and other members of the clergy adopted the philosophy that religious songs with an African flavor would increase the church attendance of slaves, prevent them from participating in "heathenish Sunday recreations," and provide them with an "instrument of moral and religious improvement" in the home.¹⁶

Despite this philosophy, slaves continued to define their priorities according to their *own* sense of values and customs. Charles Ball, a slave, summed up the response of slaves to Christianity:

There is, in general, very little sense of religious obligation, or duty, amongst the slaves on the cotton plantations; and Christianity cannot be, with propriety, called the religion of these people.

On Sunday afternoon we had a meeting . . . sang and prayed; but a great many of the people went . . . in search of fruits.¹⁷

Even though slaves were taught the Psalms and Hymns of Isaac Watts and other composers, missionaries eventually came to realize that slaves would not give up their own musical repertoire for that of Christian churches. The musical compromises made by missionaries paved the path for the evolution of a distinct Afro-American religious musical tradition beginning in the latter part of the 18th century.

The 19th Century Revival Movement and the Musical Tradition of Slaves

The 19th century Revival Movement proved effective in converting

¹⁵ Quoted in Epstein, *Sinful Tunes*, p. 108.

¹⁶ Epstein, pp. 108, 109.

¹⁷ Charles Ball, *Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball, a Black Man, Who Lived Forty Years in Maryland, South Carolina and Georgia, as a Slave . . .* (New York: J.S. Taylor, 1837), pp. 201-203.

slaves as well as southern whites to Christianity. By the 1830s, the majority of southern whites had become Christians themselves. As a result, the earlier resistance and indifference slaveholders expressed toward providing religious instruction for slaves also diminished.¹⁸ With the widespread approval of slaveholders, evangelists intensified their efforts to convert slaves by attracting them to camp meeting revivals.¹⁹

Descriptions of these meetings reveal practices similar to those of African rituals. Observers noted that loud emotional cries and groans could be heard throughout the service. In addition, men and women were known to leap out of their seats, scream, jerk, shout, fall into convulsions, speak in tongues, and engage in a holy dance.²⁰ Music played an important role in creating an emotional atmosphere during camp meetings. The hymns and spiritual songs, which were an integral part of services, were sung in a manner that resembled the musical practices of slaves. Many songs were performed in a call-response format, while others adhered to the verse-chorus structure. These practices enabled the congregation to join in on a familiar chorus or repetitive lines.²¹

Slaves responded to these familiar performance trends by participating with "exhubrance and excitement." Many 19th century accounts of singing at camp meetings give special attention to the singing that came from the Black side of the tent. As two observers noted:

Their shouts and singing were so very boisterous that the singing of the white congregation was often completely drowned in the echoes and reverberations of the colored people's tumultuous strains.²²

At every service the negroes were present in large numbers in a special section reserved for them, and many of them made professions of religion. Their singing was inspiring and was encouraged and enjoyed by the white congregation, who would sometimes remain silent and listen.²³

At the end of a camp meeting service, Blacks continued to sing throughout the night after returning to their segregated tents. One witness noticed that Blacks seldom went to sleep when services lasted past midnight; instead they would sing hymns until half-past five in the morning.²⁴

¹⁸ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes*, pp. 111, 195.

¹⁹ Southern, ed., *Readings in Black American Music*, p. 104; William Henry Foote, *Sketches of North Carolina, Historical and Biographical . . .* (New York: R. Carter, 1846), pp. 391-392, 402-404.

²⁰ Stamp, *The Peculiar Institution*, p. 376; and Southern, *Readings*, pp. 113-115.

²¹ Gilbert Chase, *America's Music from the Pilgrims to the Present*, 2nd ed., rev (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), pp. 208-231.

²² Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, p. 95.

²³ John Dixon Long, *Pictures of Slavery in Church and State*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Author, 1857), pp. 159-60.

²⁴ Southern, *Readings*, p. 106.

John Watson, a Methodist minister, criticized these unsupervised activities. He was particularly critical of the original songs Blacks sang:

Here ought to be considered too, a most exceptional error, which has the tolerance at least of the rulers of our campmeetings. In the *blacks'* quarter, the coloured people get together, and sing for hours together, short scraps of disjointed affirmations, pledges, lengthened out with repetition *choruses*.

We have too, a growing evil, in the practice of singing in our places of public and society worship, merry airs, adapted from old *songs*, to hymns of our composing: often miserable as poetry, and senseless as matter, and most frequently composed and first sung by the illiterate *blacks* of the society.²⁵

Watson also expressed his disapproval of the negative influence that Blacks had on the musical practices of whites:

. . . the example has already visibly affected the religious manners of some whites. From this cause, I have known in some camp meetings, from 50 to 60 people crowd into one tent, after the public devotions had closed, and there continue the whole night, singing tune after tune, scarce one of which were in our hymn books.²⁶

The comments of Watson and the observations of his contemporaries provided evidence for the existence of a unique Black religious music tradition in the 19th century. It appears that Blacks, when under the supervision of whites, generally adopted those customs that met the expectations of those in charge. However, away from whites, and in their own quarters, Blacks adhered to familiar customs of African cultures. The spontaneous singing and other unpredictable practices that characterized camp meeting services served to reinforce traditional customs of slaves. These newly developed practices were merged with those of West African traditions to provide the foundation for the establishment of a Black religion and a corresponding Black religious musical tradition.

The Establishment of a Black Church and a Black Musical Tradition

The Revival meetings held by 19th century evangelists produced a steady increase of Blacks who became Christians. Their numbers grew in such proportions that existing religious facilities and clergy could no longer adequately service the Black community. In towns, Blacks generally would attend services with whites, but their increased membership made it necessary for the clergy to conduct special afternoon or evening services. Churches in rural areas often were too small to accommodate large groups of slaves. Some slaveholders provided for their religious worship by building special "praise-houses" on the plantation. The insufficient number of clergy to conduct weekly services for slaves led to the systematic training of Black preachers beginning in the late 18th

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

century.²⁷

Black spirituals evolved in southern plantation "praise houses" and in northern independent Black churches, where religious meetings were conducted by slaves and freedmen. "The foundation for its style was established by slave preachers, whose chanted sermons and improvised songs motivated sung responses from the congregation."²⁸ These preachers, when unsupervised by whites, established musical trends, structured their services, and interpreted Biblical passages from the cultural perspective of their Black congregations. Practices associated with African rituals were fused with those of Christian origin to represent the worldview of Blacks in the United States.²⁹ This fusion led to the development of a Black style of preaching which emphasized congregational participation. Elements that characterize this dramatic and intense style of Black preachers include: 1) the use of vocal inflections, which produced a type of musical tone or chant, and facilitated the dramatic and climatic style of preaching; 2) the use of repetition for highlighting phrases of text; 3) the use of rhythmic devices for stress and pacing; and 4) the use of call-response structures to stimulate "spontaneous" congregational responses.³⁰

The chanted prayers and sermons of Black preachers together with spontaneous verbal, physical, and musical responses from the congregation did not meet the approval of missionaries.³¹ The Reverend Robert Mallard, son-in-law of missionary Charles Colcock Jones, expressed his displeasure after witnessing a service conducted by Blacks in Chattanooga in 1859:

I stood at the door and looked in—and such confusion of sights and sounds! . . . Some were standing, others sitting, others moving from one seat to another, several exhorting along the aisles. The whole congregation kept up one loud monotonous strain, interrupted by various sounds: groans and screams and clapping of hands. One woman specially under the influence of the excitement went across the church in a quick succession of leaps: now down on her knees . . . then up again; now with her arms about some brother or sister, and again tossing them wildly in the air and clapping her hands together and accompanying the whole by a series of short, sharp shrieks. . . . Considering the mere excitement manifested in these disorderly ways, I could but ask: What religion is there in this?³²

²⁷ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes*, pp. 196-197, 200-201, 229-230.

²⁸ Portia K. Maultsby, "Afro-American Religious Music: A Study in Musical Diversity," *The Papers of The Hymn Society of America* XXXV:8.

²⁹ Southern, *Readings in Black American Music*, pp. 113-115; Long, *Pictures of Slavery*, p. 383; and Mary Boykin Chesnut, *A Diary from Dixie*, ed. Ben Ames Williams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), pp. 148-149.

³⁰ Maultsby, "Afro-American Religious Music," p. 7.

³¹ Long, *Pictures of Slavery*, pp. 383-384; and Epstein, *Sinful Tunes*, pp. 202-207.

³² Robert Manson Myers, ed., *The Children of Pride; A True Story of Georgia and the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), pp. 482-483.

The organized, yet flexible structure of Black religious services accommodated a variety of individual and group forms of religious expression. Freedom of religious expression has always been a cultural value that is not merely tolerated but highly respected among Blacks. Those who criticized this practice failed to understand that Black religious trends, including the use of music, were rooted in an African cultural tradition, and therefore differed both philosophically and ideologically from religious practices associated with Protestantism, Judaism, and Catholicism. These differences were observed by a visitor from the British Isles, who stated that:

... the negro of our southern States prefers going to a church or meeting composed of peoples of his own colour, and where no whites appear. Slaves, also, sometimes prefer places of worship where greater latitude is allowed for noisy excitement . . . than would be tolerated in the religious assemblies of white people.³³

These cultural and philosophical differences, together with discriminatory practices, were major factors in the establishment of independent Black churches in the North.

In 1787, in response to direct acts of discrimination in Philadelphia's St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church, Blacks withdrew their membership. They later founded two Black churches in 1794. One of these churches, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, became the model for other independent Black churches founded in the 19th century. Bethel's founder and minister, Richard Allen, was successful in gaining full control of his church in 1816 when he won a legal battle that severed all ties with the affiliate white church, St. George's. This victory influenced similar developments in other cities and contributed to the formalization of a Black religious ideology in the North.³⁴

Richard Allen chose to establish a form of worship based on the aesthetic and cultural reference of his black congregation. Allen modified the Methodist worship style to accommodate his congregation and, in doing so, his services took on the character of those conducted by slave preachers on southern farms and plantations. Allen also reshaped the musical tradition of the Methodists. In addressing his congregation on the inadequacy of Methodist and other denominational hymn books, he stated: "Having become a distinct and separate body of people, there is no collection of hymns we could with propriety adopt."³⁵ Allen solved this problem by publishing a hymnal. *A Collection of Spiritual Songs*

³³ Robert Baird, *Religion in the United States of America. Or an Account of the Evangelical Churches in the United States* (Glasgow: Blackie and Son, 1844), p. 77.

³⁴ Portia K. Maulsby, "Music of Northern Independent Black Churches During Antebellum Period," *Ethnomusicology* XIX: 407-411.

³⁵ Allen, quoted in Charles Wesley, *Richard Allen Apostle of Freedom* (Washington, D.C.: The Associated Publishers, Inc, 1939), p. 167.

and *Hymns Selected from Various Authors by Richard Allen, African Minister*, "for the exclusive use of his congregation" in 1801.³⁶

This hymnal contains fifty-four hymn texts, including those of Isaac Watts, the Wesleys, and other hymns popular among the Methodists and Baptists. In the second edition, also printed in 1801, Allen added ten hymns including some of his own compositions. This edition differed from the standard hymnal in that Allen made textual changes in some of the original fifty-four hymns. He replaced complex words and phrases with simpler ones so that the songs "would have more meaning for the illiterate worshippers" in his congregation.³⁷ He also added repetitive refrain lines and choruses to the orthodox hymns. This new text, easily memorized by members who could not read, was sung after each verse. By making these textual changes, Allen insured the complete participation of all church members in the worship.³⁸

Further evidence that the singing in Allen's church was governed by the aesthetic principles and musical norms of the Black musical tradition is provided in the following description by Paul Svinin, a Russian visitor, who visited Allen's congregation in 1811:

... at the end of every psalm, the entire congregation, men and women alike, sang verses in a loud, shrill monotone. This lasted about an hour. When the preacher ceased reading, all turned toward the door, fell on their knees, bowed their heads to the ground and set up an agonizing, heartrendering moaning. Afterwards, the minister resumed the reading of the psalter and when he had finished, sat down on a chair; then all rose and began chanting psalms in chorus, the men and women alternating, a procedure which lasted some twenty minutes.³⁹

These musical practices observed by Svinin were condemned by the white Methodist clergy, who objected to the changes made in orthodox hymns, as well as to the use of original songs and the unique singing style, none of which conformed to the Euro-American aesthetic of reverence and refinement. Allen's innovations set a precedent for musical practices that became commonplace in other Black Methodist churches.

Whereas some northern Black ministers modified the structure of traditional Protestant services to meet the special cultural and religious needs of their congregations, others elected to structure their worship around the doctrines, literature, and musical practices of white denominations. One of the first major conflicts that divided the membership of independent Black churches was musical practices. Daniel A. Payne, who later became a bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, campaigned to change the style of worship that characterized this

³⁶ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*; p. 85.

³⁷ Southern *Ibid.*, p. 89.

³⁸ Southern, *Readings*, pp. 52-61.

³⁹ Svinin, *Picturesque United States*, p. 20.

church. Influenced by his training at a Lutheran seminary and his tenure as pastor in a Presbyterian church, Payne addressed the problem of the A.M.E. church in the following manner:

The time is at hand when the minister of the A.M.E. Church must drive out this heathenish mode of worship or drive out all the intelligence, refinement, and practical christians. . . .⁴⁰

Payne opposed the singing of spirituals, which he referred to as "corn-field ditties." He also objected to the hand clapping, footstomping, and "voodoo dances" that generally accompanied the spirituals. Payne was committed to teaching and preaching "the right, fit, and proper way of serving God."⁴¹

Bishop Payne made his first "improvement" in the service of Black Methodists by replacing the practice of "lining-out"—a hold over from the 17th century English music tradition—with choral singing and instrumental music. These changes were instituted in Philadelphia (1841-42) and in Baltimore (1848-49). Many members responded to these so-called "improvements" by complaining: "You have brought the devil into the Church, and therefore we will go out." According to Payne, "when choirs were introduced in the church, many went out of Bethel, and never returned."⁴²

The adoption of choral singing in many northern Methodist Churches resulted in withdrawals and splits throughout the United States. In spite of controversy regarding his innovations, Payne approved of the sweeping changes he had made:

The moral and religious effects of choral singing have been good, especially when the whole or a majority of the choir were earnest Christians. I have witnessed spiritual effects produced by Bethel choir in Philadelphia, and by Bethel choir in Baltimore, equal to the most unctuous sermons from the lips of the most eloquent and earnest preachers, so that Christians did rejoice as though they were listening to the heavenly choir which the shepards heard on the plains of Bethlehem announcing the advent of the Savior.

In a musical direction what progress has been made within the last forty years! There is not a church of ours in any of the great cities of the republic that can afford to buy an instrument which is without one; and there are but few towns or villages where our Connection exists that are without an instrument to accompany the choir. . . .⁴³

Bishop Payne's ideology regarding the "proper way of serving God" was shared by Black ministers of independent Presbyterian and Episco-

⁴⁰ Quoted in Miles Fisher, *Negro Slave Songs in the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1953), p. 190.

⁴¹ Southern, *Readings*, pp. 69-70.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 68, 66.

pal Churches. These churches exercised strict control over the order of worship, and over the actual training of ministers as well. Black ministers in these denominations:

. . . were not permitted to expound the Scriptures, or to exhort, in words of their own; to use extemporary prayer, and to utter at such times, whatever nonsense and profanity might happen to come into their minds. . . .

When the coloured class-leaders in the Protestant Episcopal Church were allowed to meet for religious exercises, they were accustomed to use *no other worship* than the regular course prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer. for the day. Hymns, or Psalms out of the same book were sung, and a printed sermon read . . . No extemporary address, exhortation, or prayer, was permitted, or used. . . .⁴⁴

The first African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, founded in Philadelphia in 1794 by Absalom Jones, adhered to the established doctrines of the Episcopal Church. It was Jones' decision to "abide by traditional practices even if it meant some personal sacrifice, for the sake of psychological equanimity and denominational support."⁴⁵ Unlike the church founded by Richard Allen, St. Thomas did not permit spontaneous verbal, physical, or musical responses. Absalom Jones along with Bishop Payne rejected the notion of a Black religious ideology and aligned their churches with the white denominational counterpart.

Although Jones and Payne established a precedent for musical practices in northern independent Black churches, some congregations refused to accept their ideology. In 1850, for example, Fredrika Bremer visited an African Methodist Church in Cincinnati and gave this account of the musical practices she witnessed:

I found in the African Church African ardor and African life. The church was full to overflowing, and the congregation sang their own hymns. The singing ascended and poured forth like a melodious torrent, and the heads, feet, and elbows of the congregation moved all in unison with it, amid evident enchantment and delight in the singing, which was in itself exquisitely pure and full of melodious life.⁴⁶

This description of Black singing styles provides evidence of cultural practices that were retained in many African Methodist Churches even after Payne had instituted his radical changes. The ideology espoused by Richard Allen and southern Black slave preachers had a greater impact on the musical tradition of pre-20th century Black religious groups than did those of Bishop Payne and Absalom Jones. In fact, only a small percentage of Blacks were committed to the philosophy of Payne and Jones.

⁴⁴ *Practical Considerations Founded on the Scriptures, Relative to the Slave Population of South Carolina* . . . By a South-Carolinian (Charleston: Printed by A.E. Miller, 1823), pp. 33-36.

⁴⁵ Wesley, *Richard Allen*, pp. 73-79. Cf. Carol George, *Segregated Sabbaths* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 62-63.

⁴⁶ Southern, *Readings*, pp. 112-113.

The majority of Blacks attended churches where services reflected *their* religious practices, *their* daily experiences, and *their* musical traditions.

The spiritual tradition⁴⁷ that evolved in autonomous Black churches has been described by various missionaries, European visitors, and American observers as "wild hymns," "barbaric songs," and "nonsensical chants." These accounts support the theory that the Black spiritual tradition differed radically from that of white Protestant hymnody. Descriptions of Black singing practices also expose the use of a different aesthetic criteria for musical performances. Many observers interpreted Black spirituals as "strange" and "weird" strains of disjointed and meaningless texts which were not sung but "yelled," "hooted," and "screamed."⁴⁸

These inaccurate and biased descriptions demonstrate the need for extreme caution when imposing western European musical forms and aesthetics upon musical traditions having a non-European cultural base. Black spirituals are grounded in a West African aesthetic which defies characterization and qualitative assessment from a purely European frame of reference. The use and performance style of Black spirituals, therefore, can be described accurately and only from an African-American cultural and musical perspective. The musical norms and aesthetics that govern the singing of Black Americans are representative of a cultural value that places emphasis on free expression and group participation. In view of this perspective, Black spirituals were almost always accompanied by gestures, dance, and verbal interjections, and represented an intrinsic part of the religious service.

Primary features which distinguish the Black spiritual tradition are: 1) the call-response structure; 2) extensive melodic ornamentation (slides, slurs, bends, moans, shouts, wails, grunts, etc.); 3) complex rhythmic structures, and 4) the integration of song and dance. Each of these elements is rooted in the principle of improvisation. The prevalence of the call-response structure facilitates both individual expression and congregational participation. The soloist, who presents the call, is free to improvise at will, while the congregation provides a stable repetitive response.

The use of melodic ornamentation in the Black spiritual enables singers to employ a number of vocal techniques that add variety and intensity to performances. This intensity is increased by the layering of rhythmic handclapping and footstamping patterns which results in complex

⁴⁷ Black spirituals exists in many forms and styles. Those that evolved in autonomous Black churches are known as folk spirituals. This spiritual form was later transformed into Europeanized choral songs by college choirs of southern Black institutions beginning in the 1870s.

⁴⁸ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes*, pp. 130, 220, 228, 230; and Charles Colcock Jones, *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States* (Savannah: T. Purse, 1842), p. 266.

rhythmic structures. These rhythmic structures provide the basis for gestures and religious dance movement.

Spontaneous gestures and dance movements, which accompany singing, dictate other rules for performance. Often the length and tempo of a spiritual, for example, is determined by the degree to which a congregation becomes emotionally and physically involved in the singing. The integration of song and dance was recorded by both Black and white observers. The following description was provided by a former slave, who preached for Black congregations during the 1830s:

The singing was accompanied by a certain ecstasy of motion, clapping of hands, tossing of heads, which would continue without cessation about half an hour; one would lead off in a kind of recitative style, others joining in the chorus.⁴⁹

The use of improvisation in Black song and dance accommodates the personal, spontaneous, and creative approach to musical performance.

The norms and aesthetics established by Blacks for musical performances were also applied to songs from white Protestant traditions. Frequently, these songs were transformed beyond recognition into a Black spiritual. An English musician, who toured the United States from 1833 to 1841, witnessed this transformation process while visiting a Black church in Vicksburg, Virginia:

When the minister gave out his own version of the Psalm, the choir commenced singing so rapidly that the original tune absolutely ceased to exist—in fact, the fine old psalm tune became thoroughly transformed into a kind of negro melody; and so sudden was the transformation, by accelerating the time, that, for a moment, I fancied that not only the choir but the little congregation intended to get up a dance as part of the service.⁵⁰

A similar situation was observed by Frederick Law Olmsted in 1853 who heard a hymn changed into a "confused wild kind of chant."⁵¹ Elizabeth Kilham, a school teacher in the South, expressed the widely held viewpoint that "Watts and Newton would never recognize their productions through the transformations they have undergone at the hands of their colored admirers."⁵²

The musical norms and aesthetic principles that govern the use and performance of Black spirituals are fundamental to worship in autono-

⁴⁹ James L. Smith, *Autobiography . . . including, also, Reminiscences of Slave Life, Recollections of the War, Education of Freedmen, Causes of the Exodus, etc.* (Norwich: Press of the Bulletin, 1881), pp. 163-164.

⁵⁰ Henry Russell, *Cheer! Boys, Cheer! Memories of Men and Music* (London: J. Macqueen, 1895), pp. 84-85.

⁵¹ Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854, with Remarks on Their Economy . . .* (New York: G. P. Putnam's, 1904. Originally published in 1856), pp. 26-29.

⁵² Kilham, "Sketches in Color . . .", pp. 123-130.

mous Black congregations. The establishment of a Black worship style and a Black musical tradition demonstrates that Black Americans historically resisted the concepts, norms, and aesthetic principles of religious and musical traditions that conflicted with their own cultural viewpoints. Independent Black congregations had the freedom to engage in a form of worship that reflected their own cultural perspectives and musical tradition which emerged out of an African rather than an Euro-American heritage. The worship style and corresponding musical tradition established by Black congregations in the 18th century were retained and expanded upon in the 20th century Black church.

Music in the 20th Century Black Church

Following the emancipation of slaves in 1865, the plantation system was replaced by segregated communities throughout the United States. This new social environment continued to keep Blacks isolated from mainstream society. Within the confines of the segregated community, Blacks relied on their own established cultural norms as a basis for self-identification, social interaction, and group solidarity.⁵³ Because these cultural values were most freely expressed in the Black church, this institution soon became the focal point of the Black community. The religious traditions practiced by Blacks in earlier centuries provided the foundation for worship styles and musical practices used in the 20th century Black church.

The music found in the earliest autonomous Black church at the turn of the century consisted of spirituals and lined-out hymns. The addition of tambourines, drums, piano, horns, and later guitar and Hammond organ to the traditional accompaniment of handclapping and footstamping led to the emergence of an original body of Black religious music known as gospel. Even though the first gospel songs were derived from spirituals, the use of instruments as an integral part of gospel singing distinguishes the two religious musical traditions.⁵⁴

Gospel music, in its developing stages, was performed only in the Black "folk church." This church, associated with Holiness, Pentecostal, and Sanctified sects, is distinguished from independent and mainline de-

⁵³ For historical information about the status of Blacks after the Civil War, see Franklin E. Frazier, *The Negro in the United States* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1949), pp. 171-272; Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); and C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 2nd Rev. Ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 11-65.

⁵⁴ Pearl Williams-Jones, "Afro-American Gospel Music: A Crystallization of the Black Aesthetic," *Ethnomusicology* XIX: 374, 381, 383 and Mellonee Burnim, "The Black Gospel Music Tradition: Symbol of Ethnicity," thesis, Indiana University, 1980, pp. 3-4.

nominations such as Methodist, Baptists,⁵⁶ Presbyterian, Episcopalian, and Lutheran Churches by its ideology and worship style. Whereas Black mainline churches evolved from their white Protestant counterparts, Black "folk churches" were created when dissatisfied members of these and other churches sought their independence. The official doctrine of the Black "folk church" encouraged free expression which unveiled itself in spontaneous testimonies, prayers, and musical expression. In evaluating the distinctiveness of the musical tradition in this church, Pearl Williams-Jones, gospel music scholar and performer, draws these conclusions:

The traditional liturgical forms of plain chant, chorales, and anthems do not fulfill the needs of traditional Black folk religious worship and ritual. They are unrelated and inappropriate as vehicles for folk-style religious worship services because liturgical musical forms do not represent the dominant cultural values of the Black community. These values encompass the whole gamut of Black expressiveness—which is relevant to the ritual of Black folk-style worship—singing and preaching, linguistics, testifying and praying. They are unique, personal, and highly valued within the community for their aesthetic values.⁵⁶

Members of Holiness groups were not allowed to interact with those belonging to non-holiness churches due to theological differences. Therefore, gospel, the music which characterized these groups, was not heard by the majority of Black Americans until Black Methodist and Baptist songwriters introduced gospel compositions in their individual churches.⁵⁷ The first attempt to capture the urban Black experience through religious song was made by Methodist minister, Charles Albert Tindley, who wrote his first songs between 1900 and 1906. These hymn-styled songs incorporated melodic and rhythmic principles of gospel singing from the Black "folk church." Under Tindley's influence, Thomas Dorsey, a Baptist, developed an original gospel style that was distinctively different from the tradition of hymnody. Dorsey's blues-based melodies and harmonies, combined with his ragtime, boogie-woogie piano style, captured an urban religious spirit that gave rise to a tradition of composed Black gospel songs.⁵⁸

Because gospel music expressed the essence of contemporary Black culture, it has moved beyond the boundaries of the Holiness-Pentecostal churches into many mainline Black churches, ranging from Baptist to Catholic parishes. Mellonee Burnim sums up the importance of gospel

⁵⁶ The worship style of the Primitive Baptist Church resembles that of Pentecostal congregations.

⁵⁶ Pearl William-Jones, "The Musical Quality of Black Religious Folk Ritual," *Spirit* I: 21.

⁵⁷ Horace Boyer, "Gospel Music," *Music Educators Journal* XIV: 37.

⁵⁸ Arna Bontemps, "Rock, Church, Rock!," *Common Ground* III: 76-77; and Boyer, pp. 36-38.

music in present day Black religion by stating "In the same way that the Negro spiritual was fundamental to the religion of the Black slave, so is gospel music the backbone of contemporary Black religion."⁵⁹

The use and performance of gospel varies within the Black church. In Holiness-Pentecostal churches, gospel is an intrinsic part of the worship and is sung by both the choir and congregation. Pre-1950s gospel styles, known as traditional gospel, dominate congregational singing, while choirs more frequently incorporate stylistic trends from commercial or contemporary repertoire. In independent and mainline churches, gospel is sung in conjunction with songs from the official hymn book. Gospel selections are sung by a gospel choir at prescribed places in the worship. Hymns, which frequently are accompanied by gospel harmonies and rhythms on the piano and organ, form the basic repertoire for congregational singing in these churches.⁶⁰

In all Black churches, gospel music is sung according to the musical norms and aesthetics that defined the spiritual tradition. Just as improvisation is fundamental to the performance of Black spirituals, it serves as the basis for interpreting the skeletal outline of melodies, harmonies, rhythms, texts, and accompaniment found in the printed score of Black gospel music. Renditions of gospel songs, therefore, may vary considerably from the music notation and the performers rarely sing a song the same way twice. Even though gospel songs are interpreted differently by various performers, the musical vocabulary, technical devices, and performances practices that represent a Black musical aesthetic, dictate the fundamental style that characterizes gospel singing. Research recently conducted by Burnim⁶¹ on the gospel tradition reveals that there are three primary areas of significance in gospel music performance: 1) quality of sound; 2) style of delivery; and 3) mechanics of delivery. Quality of sound is determined by the manipulation of elements of timbre, range, and shading which contribute to the overall tonal "complexity sought for and desired in this tradition." Such manipulations result in 1) sudden changes in timbre which extend from lyrical to raspy and percussive; 2) extreme and often sudden dynamic and tonal contrast; 3) the use of the falsetto voice; and 4) the juxtaposition of different vocal and instrumental textures.⁶²

The style of delivery in gospel music greatly mirrors Black cultural customs and behavior. The performer is expected to communicate through both musical and physical means. This prescribed mode of presentation demands that performers demonstrate their total involvement by

⁵⁹ Burnim, "The Black Gospel Music Tradition," p. 125.

⁶⁰ Maultsby, "Afro-American Religious Music," p. 15.

⁶¹ Burnim, "The Black Gospel Music Tradition," pp. 136-178.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 139-146.

utilizing the entire body—head, hands, and feet. The importance of song and movement in Black culture is further seen in the synchronized movements displayed by gospel choirs when they “march” into the church during a processional and when they “step,” clap, and “shout” to the music performed during the worship.⁶³

The quality of sound and style of delivery contribute to the intensity of a gospel performance. This intensity, however, is controlled by the mechanics used for delivery. Through the use of a variety of technical and improvisatory devices, performers are able to manipulate time, text, and pitch. Time, according to Burnim, includes rhythmic aspects as well as structural elements of the performance. Rhythmic structures often are expanded from the simple to the complex by “gradually adding layers of handclaps, instrumental accompaniment, and/or solo voices.” Likewise, the length of gospel song can be expanded by repeating phrases and entire sections of a songs and by adding a vocal or instrumental cadenza at the end of a song. In such cases, the intensity builds because each repetition brings more rhythmic activity as well as textual and melodic variations.⁶⁴

The manipulation of pitch results from melodic improvisation. Performers of gospel music employ a variety of technical devices to change or expand the melody including: repetition and the extensive use of melismas, shouts, slides, slurs, moans, grunts, etc.⁶⁵ A successful performance of gospel music is dependent on a performer’s ability to manipulate time, text, and pitch while adhering to cultural concepts that identify a Black musical tradition. These three basic components, operating in conjunction with one another, are

. . . subject to constant interpretation and reinterpretation by individual performers. Through cultural immersion, one learns how to determine which structural, rhythmic, textual, and melodic units are potentially expandible, then demonstrates the knowledge in his or her own personal way during performance.⁶⁶

The use and performance of gospel and spirituals in the Black church were determined by the cultural values established and adhered to by Black Americans. These values, derived from West African cultures, serve to dictate the musical norms and aesthetic principles that characterize the Black musical tradition. This tradition differs from non-Black musical traditions because the conceptual framework that governs musical performances emphasizes freedom of expression and group participation. The use and performance of Black music, therefore, are determined by these two factors.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 146-157.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 157-167

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 167-169.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

Conclusion

Although performances of gospel and spirituals employ musical styles and other features found in non-Black musical traditions, they are used in a way that reflects the musical criteria and meets the cultural expectations of Black Americans. Musical performance in the Black Church incorporates a variety of techniques that mirror Black cultural values and accommodate Black cultural customs and behavior. This conceptual approach to music-making gave rise to a body of religious music that differed in style and presentation from other religious musical traditions. Black spirituals and gospel music are unique components of the Afro-American religious tradition; their incorporation into the Black worship service represents one of the overriding features which distinguish the Black church from all others.

The hydrolytic enzymes are a group of enzymes which are concerned with the breakdown of complex carbohydrates into simple sugars. These enzymes are found in various parts of the body, particularly in the digestive tract, where they play a crucial role in the digestion of food. The most common hydrolytic enzymes are amylase, maltase, and sucrase. Amylase is responsible for the breakdown of starch into maltose, maltase for the breakdown of maltose into glucose, and sucrase for the breakdown of sucrose into glucose and fructose. Other hydrolytic enzymes include cellulase, which breaks down cellulose into glucose, and lactase, which breaks down lactose into glucose and galactose. The activity of these enzymes is regulated by various factors, including pH, temperature, and the presence of cofactors. Deficiencies in these enzymes can lead to various forms of carbohydrate intolerance, such as lactose intolerance and sucrose intolerance.

The hydrolytic enzymes are also found in various microorganisms, including bacteria and fungi. These enzymes are often used in the food industry for the production of various products, such as bread, beer, and cheese. For example, amylase is used in the production of malted grains, and cellulase is used in the production of paper and textiles. In the laboratory, hydrolytic enzymes are used to study the structure and function of carbohydrates and to develop new methods for the synthesis of complex carbohydrates. The study of hydrolytic enzymes is also important in the field of medicine, as it helps to understand the underlying mechanisms of various diseases, such as diabetes and obesity. The development of new hydrolytic enzymes with improved properties is a major area of research in the field of biotechnology.

The hydrolytic enzymes are also found in various plants and animals. For example, amylase is found in the saliva of many mammals, and cellulase is found in the digestive tract of ruminants. The study of hydrolytic enzymes in plants and animals is important for understanding the evolution of these enzymes and their role in the metabolism of carbohydrates. The development of new hydrolytic enzymes with improved properties is a major area of research in the field of biotechnology. The study of hydrolytic enzymes is also important in the field of medicine, as it helps to understand the underlying mechanisms of various diseases, such as diabetes and obesity. The development of new hydrolytic enzymes with improved properties is a major area of research in the field of biotechnology.

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