23. Thomas Skidmore, "Fact and Myth: Discovering a Racial Problem in Brazil," working paper, Universidade de São Paulo: Instituto de Estudios Avançados, 1992.
24. María Milagros López, "Post-Work Selves and Entitlement 'Attitudes' in Peripheral Postindustrial Puerto Rico," in *Social Text*, no. 38 (Spring 1994): 111–134.
25. José Luis González (1926–86) is a central figure in twentieth-century Puerto Rican cultural intellectual history, as the controversial legacy of his scholarship has made evident. On his life and life's work, see his memoir, *La luna no era de queso: Memorias de infancia* (Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Editorial Cultural, 1989 [1988]). On González' literary legacy in Puerto Rico seeCésar Salgado, "El entierro de González: Con(tra) figuraciones del 98 en la narrativa ochentista puertorriqueña," *Revista Iberoamericana* (special issue: "1898–1998: Balance de un siglo") (July–Dec. 1998): vol. 54, 184–185, 413–439.
26. José Luis González, *Puerto Rico: The Four-Storeyed Country*, trans. Gerald Guiness (Princeton, N.J.: Markus Wiener Publishing, 1980).
27. For a detailed exploration of González's significance for contemporary ethnography and historiography in insular Puerto Rican studies, see Arlene Torres, "La gran familia Puertorriqueña 'ej prieta de beldá" (The Great Puerto Rican Family Is Really Really Black)," in *Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean: Social Dynamics and Cultural Transformations*, eds. Arlene Torres and Norman E. Whitten, Jr. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 285–306.
28. González, *The Four-Storeyed Country*, 24.
29. Near the end of his life, living in exile in Mexico City, González wrote that he was convinced that indeed the African Diasporic community in Puerto Rico (who, in his analysis, are the definitive community of Puerto Rican cultural history) had voiced its own understanding of "*patria*" ("fatherland," or national belonging) *extra-discursively* in popular music and dance: González, *The Four-Storeyed Country*, 102.
30. Pedro Albizu Campos (1891–1965) was a central figure in the Puerto Rican nationalist movement after 1930. For an assessment of his role in this movement, see Luis Angel Ferrao, *Pedro Albizu Campos y el nacionalismo puertorriqueño* (Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Editorial Cultural, 1990).
31. Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1956).
32. Edouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais* (Paris: Les Editions du Seuil, 1981).
33. Arturo Schomburg, "Prince Hall Masons of the State of New York," in *Fraternal Review* 2, no. 12 (December 1923): 1–2.
34. There are various pieces of this manuscript, "Negroes in the Discovery and Development of America," in his collected papers (Schomburg Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library). One of the most complete texts includes an enthusiastic handwritten preface contributed by a lifelong friend, James Boddy, who comments at the end of his correspondence: "Such a colored man has never yet been born; to do what you have done."
35. "José Campeche 1752–1809: A Puerto Rican Negro Painter," in Piñeiro de Rivera, *Schomburg: A Puerto Rican Quest*, 201 (essay originally published in April 1934).
36. Piñeiro de Rivera, *Schomburg: A Puerto Rican Quest*, 32.
37. Piñeiro de Rivera, *Schomburg: A Puerto Rican Quest*, 207.
38. Piñeiro de Rivera, *Schomburg: A Puerto Rican Quest*, 204.
39. Arturo A. Schomburg, "The Negro Digs Up His Past," in *Survey Graphic* 6, no. 6 (March 1925): 670–672.
40. In "Plácido: An Epoch in Cuba's Struggle for Liberty," in Piñeiro de Rivera, *Schomburg: A Puerto Rican Quest*, 60 (essay originally published in *1909* [emphasis added]).
41. Piñeiro de Rivera, *Schomburg: A Puerto Rican Quest*, 139 (essay originally published in July 1927).

8

"It Don't Mean a Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing": The Relationship Between African and African American Music

Olly Wilson

African American music developed as a unique musical tradition reflecting the experiences of people of African descent within the Western Hemisphere; this musical tradition has been influenced, however, by African cultural patterns in profound as well as subtle ways. This is because in its seminal stages it was a music of Africans in America, as well as of African Americans. Any study of the history of African American music must take this basic fact into serious consideration.

For several years I have been interested in exploring the nature of the relationship between West African music and African American music of the United States. My quest was stimulated by what appeared to my ears to be an obvious similarity between certain aspects of West African and African American musical genres, although both musical traditions are clearly distinct. Moreover, the significant role of sub-Saharan cosmology, coupled with the obvious historical-cultural relationship of peoples of African descent throughout the Diaspora, suggested that West Africans and African Americans may share some common modes of musical practice—that there may be a set of common basic elements that help define each tradition and establish their relationship.

The effort to define the peculiar qualities of African American music is made difficult by the fact that music of African Americans, like that of all ethnic groups within the United States, exists within a larger multicultural social context. Thus, African American music has both influenced, and been influenced by, several non-African musical traditions, thereby making it difficult to pinpoint precisely the essential aspects of the music that make it a part of a larger African music tradition. In spite of this fact,

> [T]he empirical evidence overwhelmingly supports the notion that there is indeed a distinct set of musical qualities that are an expression of the collective cultural values of peoples of African descent. This musical tradition has many branches that reflect variations in basic cultural patterns over time, as well as diversity within a specific time frame. However, all of

> these branches share, to a greater or lesser extent, a group of qualities that, taken together, comprise the essence of the Black musical traditions, share a "critical mass" of these common qualities. It is this common sharing of qualities that comprises and defines the musical tradition.[1]

In an article published in *Black Perspectives in Music*, I proposed a theoretical approach to the problem of definition of that broader musical tradition. The substance of that approach is that the essence of the relationship between African and African American musical traditions consists of

> the common sharing of a core of conceptual approaches to the process of music-making, and hence is not basically quantitative but qualitative. The particular forms of Black music that evolved in America are specific realizations of this shared conceptual framework, which reflect the peculiarities of the Black American experience. As such, the essence of their Africanness is not a static body of something that can be depleted, but rather a conceptual approach, the manifestations of which are infinite. The common core of this Africanness consists of a way of doing something, not simply something that is done.[2]

My approach to this question is based in large part on the model Melville Herskovits put forward in his monumental study, *The Myth of the Negro Past*.[3] His notions of "cultural reinterpretation," "syncretism," and African "cultural areas" are central to my formulation of "shared conceptual approaches to the process of music-making." The weakest part of Herskovits's model was his attempt to quantify specific cultural patterns. A closer reading of Herskovits by subsequent scholars has, however, focused on his formulation of the notion of "cultural heritage" as opposed to a quantification of cultural practices.

As Sidney Mintz and Richard Price indicate in their 1976 book, *The Birth of African American Culture:*

> An African cultural heritage, widely shared by the people imported into a new colony, will have to be defined in less concrete terms by focusing more on values, and less on socio-cultural forms, and even by attempting to identify unconscious "grammatical" principles, which may underlie and shape behavioral response. To begin with, we would call for an examination of "cognitive orientations" on the one hand, basic assumptions about social relations (what values motivate individuals, how one deals with others in social situations, and matters of interpersonal style), and on the other, basic assumptions and expectations about the way the world functions phenomenologically (for instance, beliefs about causality, and how particular causes are revealed). We would argue that certain common orientations to reality may tend to focus the attention of individuals from West and Central African cultures upon similar kinds of events that may seem quite diverse in formal terms.[4]

And later, Mintz and Price state quite explicitly:

> In considering African American cultural continuities, it may well be that the more formal elements stressed by Herskovits exerted less influence on the nascent institutions of newly enslaved and transported Africans than did their basic assumptions about social relations or the workings of the universe.[5]

Other scholars of African American culture have also come to similar conclusions:

> It is obvious that Black Americans were prevented from maintaining in North America the large numbers of African cultural institutions and traditional customs which have survived in the Caribbean and South America. It has been less obvious to outside observers, however, that Black Americans have succeeded in preserving a high degree of their African "character" on the much deeper and more fundamental level of interpersonal relationships and expressive behavior.[6]

The thrust of this scholarship is to underscore the significance of basic "underlying principles" that define social behavior—to focus in on the fundamental "concepts" of collective cultural orientation. Such an approach to the study of culture is obviously influenced by conceptions of cultural "deep structures" though not necessarily adhering to a strict structuralist view of reality. My hypothesis of fundamental conceptual approaches to the process of music-making is consistent with the basic notion of "deep structural" cognitive assumptions in cultures.

It is important to note that the scholars of the past twenty years who have studied the relationship between West African and African American religion, art, vernacular traditions, and literature—Albert Raboteau, Robert Farris Thompson, Houston Baker, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.—have all focused independently on the pivotal role of West African "cognitive assumptions" in exploring the various aspects of culture that comprise the respective areas of inquiry.[7]

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., for example, begins the second paragraph of his seminal study of African American literature, *The Signifying Monkey*, with the following observation:

> Common sense, in retrospect, argues that these retained elements of cultures should have survived, that their complete annihilation would have been far more remarkable than their preservation. The African, after all, was a traveler, albeit an abrupt, ironic traveler, through space and time; and like every traveler, the African "read" a new environment within a received framework of meaning and belief. The notion that the Middle Passage was so traumatic that it functioned to create in the African a tabula rasa of consciousness is as odd as it is a fiction, a fiction that has served several economic orders and their attendant ideologies. The full erasure of traces of cultures as splendid, as ancient, and as shared by the slave traveler as the classic cultures of traditional West Africa would have been extraordinarily difficult. Slavery in the New World, a veritable seething cauldron of cross-cultural contact, however, did serve to create a dynamic of exchange and revision among numerous previously isolated Black African cultures on a scale unprecedented in African history. Inadvertently, African slavery in the New World satisfied the preconditions for the emergence of a new African culture, a truly Pan-African culture fashioned as a colorful weave of linguistic, institutional, metaphysical, and formal threads. What survived this fascinating process was the most useful and the most compelling of the fragments at hand. Afro-American culture is an African culture with a difference as signified by the catalysts of English, Dutch, French, Portuguese, or Spanish languages and cultures, which formed the precise structures that each discrete New World Pan-African culture assumed.[8]

African American music, then, from this perspective, exists as a code of patterned sound and behavior by which human beings exchange experiences in a specific cultural context. This particular "code," although formed by the basic "cognitive assumptions" or conceptual approaches to music-making that are African in origin, is fundamentally shaped by experiences in the American reality. The music thus reflects, in a profound way, the duality of which W. E. B. Du Bois speaks so eloquently in *The Souls of Black Folk*, which is a fundamental theme of African American experience.[9] It is precisely this "duality" or "double consciousness" that gives the music its distinctive position, its ability to be part of the broader fabric of shared American culture, and simultaneously to be rooted in aspects of culture that are fundamentally African. It is also this feature that creates important differences of perspective toward that experience.

Earlier, I mentioned conceptual predispositions in African American music. These predispositions also reflect basic values in the culture. It is the reaffirmation of these values that forms the basis of "aesthetics" in African American music. I define "aesthetics" broadly, by which I mean the full range of attitudes, values, and assumptions about the fundamental nature of the musical experience; the criteria by which a culture assesses quality and assigns meaning to music, and the relationship of the musical experience to the overall system of reality.

The exploration of aesthetics in African American music is necessarily multidimensional. In the first instance, consideration must be given to the determination of what constitutes the musical experience. Ethnomusicology, influenced by developments in anthropology, semiotics, and philosophy, has developed an approach that views meaning in music in a broad cultural context. As John Blacking indicates in describing the goal of ethnomusicology:

> The central problem is to describe all the factors which generate the pattern of sound produced by a single composer or society; to explain music as signs and symbols of human experience in culture and to relate form to its social and cultural content.[10]

If one accepts this definition, the musical experience would include structural aspects of the musical event as well as a wide range of encoded meanings of social and cultural significance. Music as an aspect of culture proceeds from what postmodern scholars such as Roland Barthes and others have called an ideological basis.[11] A meaningful study of music must take both these factors into consideration. It may be convenient to view the musical experience as one of a system of interactive concentric circles in which each sphere represents a layer of meaning radiating in and out of one another.

The African influence on African American music has been reflected historically in shared and similar conceptions regarding (1) the fundamental nature of musical experience; (2) specific approaches to musical form, patterns of continuity, and syntax; and (3) performance practices, the processes involved in actively making music.

The term "African music" is much too broad to have meaningful significance, given the size of the African continent and its extraordinary cultural diversity. Most scholars divide the continent into at least two large major parts: North Africa, that part north of the Sahara where most inhabitants speak Semitic and Afro-Asiatic languages and have cultures that manifest the impact of Arab culture and Islamic religion; and sub-Saharan Africa, the area south of the Sahara that encompasses the large Niger-Congo language family (West Sudan, Bantu, and Kordofanian). Studies of the slave trade have demonstrated that the majority of Africans were taken from sub-Saharan Africa, primarily from the Guinea Coast or West Sudan and Congo Basin regions. The music of Africa that has the greatest influence on African American music has been from these regions.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In addition to the African origin of African Americans, there are several historical factors that contributed to the influence of African music on African American music. First, during the slave trade, African music and dance were often encouraged on slave ships. This practice existed because slave traders believed their human cargoes were better able to survive the horrible, inhumane conditions of the Middle Passage if they were permitted to dance aboard the ships. The concomitant effects of this practice were to provide opportunities for Africans of diverse ethnic groups to learn one another's music, and also to literally bring African musical practices to the New World every time a new cargo of Africans arrived. Because the African slave trade existed for almost four hundred years and involved an estimated twelve to fifteen million people, depending on how one counts, the developing eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century African American community was continually exposed to new Africans who brought fresh knowledge of traditional African music.

A second historical factor that contributed to the influence of African music on African American music in the United States was the performance of African music in colonial America. From the seventeenth century through part of the nineteenth, various "African Festivals," or mass public gatherings of enslaved and free African Americans, where traditional African music was performed, were held in the colonies. Musical scholar Eileen Southern has pointed out that among these were the Pinkster Day festival in Albany, Manhattan, and other parts of New York; Lection Day in Hartford; Jubilees at Potter's Field in Philadelphia; and the John Connu Christmas festival in North Carolina and Virginia. The most famous of these gatherings, cited by several contemporary chroniclers, was in New Orleans at Place Congo. Here, every week from as early as 1786 until well into the nineteenth century, large numbers of African and African Americans assembled, organized themselves into "nations," and performed music that had all of the characteristics of African music.[12]

The significance of both historical factors cited above is that during the formative period of African American culture, Africans who thought of themselves as exiles and African Americans at various degrees of acculturation to the new nation were brought into contact with traditional African music and thereby increased its possible influence on the new music of African Americans.

INFLUENCE OF AFRICAN CONCEPTS OF THE NATURE OF MUSIC

African conceptions of the fundamental nature of music are among the most important influences on African American music. Although there are important differences between

musical practices of various sub-Saharan African people, a basic conception that music is an essential, obligatory aspect of life is commonly held. Music is used with almost every human activity and has had a persistent central role in African culture. Moreover, it is generally believed that music has an affective power and functions as a force or causal agent. This is reflected most vividly in the role music plays in African views of the cosmos.

"The Gods will not descend without song" is a common aphorism in West African cultures. It is extremely significant because this phrase embodies a fundamental conception concerning the role of music in sub-Saharan African cultures. It is critical that we understand this in order to grasp fully the nature of the musical experience in Africa, and by extension, the African American musical experience.

Although there are differences in the cosmological concepts of the various sub-Saharan peoples, numerous scholars have noted that the universe is conceived of as containing a dynamic flux of forces that are constantly interacting with one another. Everything has a certain degree of force, and hegemony is determined by the relative strength of a force in relationship to other forces. Also, most sub-Saharan cultures conceive the universe as consisting of at least three tiers reflecting relative power and authority. At the top is the supreme being or supreme force, the omnipotent, omniscient, begetter of all things and ultimate source of all force. This supreme deity is called various names by various cultures—Onyame, the shining one, or Odomankoma, the boundless one, by the Akan people of Ghana, or Olodumare by the Yoruba of Nigeria, or the dualistic male-female deity Mawu-Lisa, by the Fon people of Benin. This supreme force is generally uninterested in the day-to-day affairs of humans and, having created the world, maintains a distance from it.

A second tier or middle level of deities, by contrast, represents various forces of nature and presides over various activities, constantly interacting with humankind, which is the third level of the cosmos. These deities, such as the Yoruba Eshu-Elegbara, the god of the crossroads, the source of divination, the interpreter of the other gods; Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron and war; or the Otu gods of war of the Ga people of Ghana, all have specific domains over which they exercise power and authority. Humankind must implore and appease them in order to achieve its goals. Hence, the humans who are particularly knowledgeable about a specific deity (perhaps priests or devotees of that deity) are approached for guidance about how to seek the support of that deity. The central most important act that occurs during this process is the communion between a devotee of a deity and that deity—a process that is generally known in scholarly literature, if not by most practitioners, as "possession."[13] This occurs at the height of the musical performance when the drumming, dancing, and singing are most intense and the participants become completely absorbed with the music.

During this act it is believed that the deity actually possesses the body of the devotee, who then takes on the character of that deity. This process strengthens the devotee and empowers her or him with greater force. Of critical importance is the fact that the deities will not descend to possess the devotees unless implored. The means of calling forth the deities is the playing of specific music associated with each deity.

"The Gods will not descend without song." The Gods will not descend without the proper song. Music, then, plays a powerful role in African cosmology. It is absolutely essential, or indispensable, in order for the cosmos to function properly. Musicians, because they are the reservoirs of knowledge of the specific music associated with a specific deity, are therefore extremely important to the culture. That is perhaps why many cultures state that "a musician in the art of making music must not be disturbed." Musicians facilitate the vital communion between human and god.

What I have described is common in sub-Saharan African cultures and in the African Diaspora in those places where the conditions of slavery enabled much of the original African culture to be retained or syncretized in large degrees. Hence, Vodun in Haiti, Candomblé in Brazil, and Santería in Cuba all reflect the overall cultural patterns just described. The situation in the United States was/is different. The patterns of slavery and the conscious attempts to obliterate vestiges of African culture—including outlawing the usage of the drums—made it impossible to retain the specificity of musical practices that occurred in the Caribbean and South American regions. What persisted, however, were the general concepts and values of the old culture, devoid of the specificity of its predecessors.

In attempting to understand the various levels of meaning that occur in the experience of African American music, it is important to take cognizance of the critical role of music in African cultures, including in "possession," or, in general terms, in transcending normal states of consciousness. It is important because this process, which is so critical in African cosmological terms, also shapes the African American musical experience. Although devoid of the specificity associated with African culture, the underlying concept of music as "ritual" is extremely important in many African American musical genres. The notion that music is a vehicle for the inducement of an altered state of consciousness is very important to its understanding. It is, if you will, an important "extra-musical text" to be read when experiencing performances of certain African American music genres.

It is perhaps this factor that contributed to the adoption of the form of Christianity that most African Americans accepted in eighteenth-century colonial America. The Methodist and Baptist denominations were the most successful in converting African exiles and African Americans to Christianity. I believe this was true, in large measure, because the religious practices of the then evangelical movements of John and Charles Wesley openly embraced ecstatic expressions of religious fervor. Consequently, "speaking in tongues," fainting, moving with the "shakes," uncontrollably going into trance-like states were all practices in which white Methodist and Baptist religious celebrants engaged. In other words, religious behavior of eighteenth-century evangelical Methodists and Baptists was very consistent with religious behavior of eighteenth-century West Africans, although the religious ideology was not. This congruence of religious behavior was what anthropologist Melville Herskovits suggests was fertile ground for cultural syncretism to occur.

Although the adoption of Christianity by African Americans indelibly altered their traditional view of the cosmos, the reinterpretation of African concepts of religion to conform with the realities of the American experience resulted in a new or syncretic religious practice in which fundamental African concepts were retained, but manifested in ways that were consistent with preexisting similar Euro-American religious practices.

Hence, although specific music used to call specific deities was rarely practiced in the continental United States (there are exceptions, such as New Orleans), the concept of music functioning as a vital part of the religious service in which members become possessed by the Christian Holy Ghost became well established. The idea of possession and the role of the music in inducing possession was retained, though the specific nature of the possession was new. The African American notion of music as a causal agent that fosters religious ecstasy is a clear example of a reinterpreted African cultural concept.

It is easy to observe the "ritual" function of the music in the realm of African American religious practice. From the eighteenth-century adoption of Christianity and Richard Allen's subsequent establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal Church as an independent institution in 1794 up to the present, music has remained a powerful and pivotal force in religious practice. The genre of the "spiritual" of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and its twentieth-century successor, gospel music, represent a continuing legacy of sacred liturgical music. But in addition to their role as carriers of the ritual, they function as affective forces to induce altered states of consciousness.

Observers of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century African American religious practices, from the camp meetings and prayer house revivals to the religious dance known as the "ring shout," consistently refer to a climactic point or points in the service in which an emotional pinnacle of religious ecstasy is reached among the celebrants.[14] This high point is usually occasioned by the music in conjunction with the minister's sermon. And it is well known that contemporary gospel music has certainly functioned as a catalyst for similar expressions of religious fervor.

The role of music in inducing states of emotional fervor exists outside of the religious practice as well. Charles Keil in his book *Urban Blues* describes the ritual-like practice obtained in a B. B. King blues concert, and cites the similarity between the oratory of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the blues playing of B. B. King:

> I was struck by the stylistic common denominator that binds the sacred and the secular realms of the two Kings into one cultural unit. The preacher used two phrases over and over again as he improvised the conclusion of his address, "Let freedom ring from . . ." followed each time by a different range of American mountains, and then, "I have a dream . . . that someday . . ." used to introduce each item on the list of promises to the Negro that have yet to be kept. This relentless repetition of phrases, the listing of the American landmarks, and the long enumeration of Negro goals, gradually moved the audience to an emotional peak, a fitting climax to a stirring demonstration. Employing a standard twelve-bar blues form, repeated over and over again in song after song, turning out well-known phrases in every chorus yet always introducing novel combinations and subtle new twists in each performance—in short, using the same patterns—B. B. King rarely fails to give his listeners much the same kind of emotional lift.[15]

And Albert Murray in his insightful book *Stomping the Blues* describes the role of the blues performance, in contra-distinction to those feelings of sadness and melancholy that he characterized as the "Blues as such":

> [T]he fundamental function of the blues musicians (also known as the jazz musicians), the most programmatic mission of whose performance is not only to drive the blues away and hold them at bay at least for the time being, but also to evoke an ambiance of Dionysian revelry in the process.
>
> Which is to say, even as such blues (or jazz) performers as the appropriately legendary Buddy Bolden, the improbable but undeniable Jelly Roll Morton, the primordially regal Bessie Smith, played their usual engagements as dance-hall, night-club, and vaudeville entertainers, they were at the same time fulfilling a central role in a ceremony that was at once a purification rite and a celebration the festive earthiness of which was tantamount to a fertility ritual.[16]

As the above quotes illustrate, Murray and Keil recognize an extramusical level of meaning that exists in performances of blues and jazz. The performance is viewed as a group ritual designed to drive away a sense of melancholy and to celebrate life in the present moment, or, as Murray puts it, "the downright exhilaration, the rapturous delight of sheer physical existence."[17] The point I wish to make here is that this dimension of musical performance that is shared in both sacred and secular music-making is derived from concepts that are vestiges of African cosmological beliefs. It is a subtext that is expected to exist in a performance, but how it is manifested is up to the ingenuity of the particular performers. We know that repetitive cyclical structures will be used to achieve the moment of catharsis. But the skill, imagination, and ingenuity displayed in their usage will determine the quality of the performance.

A second African musical conception that influenced African American music is the view that music is a communal activity. Music is an interactive human activity in which everyone is expected to participate: there are no detached listeners, but rather a communion of participants. The social structure of music-making thus involves a hierarchy of participants whose responsibilities are variable over a continuum from the highly complex to the very simple. Nevertheless, the basic conception of music entails the notion of inclusion, of participatory, integrative engagement of the entire community. This ideal is also a fundamental principle of traditional African American folk music, and is reflected in all genres of traditional African American religious and secular music of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The notion of "inclusion" in the music-making process becomes another "extramusical" dimension of the performance process in both African and African American music. That is, given the cultural bias toward privileging participation, the society tends to place a higher value on those performers who are able to engage the entire community in actively participating in the performance. The performance itself is structured in ways designed to provoke a dynamic interaction between the principal performers and everyone else; and the listeners sing, clap, dance, and most importantly, respond to the "call" of the principal performers.

The performers who by their striking musical imagination elicit the most response from the audience are generally the most highly regarded. Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, Duke Ellington, Mahalia Jackson, Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin, and Charlie Parker all possess(ed) this quality in abundance. They are valued because they were/are able to bring about the highest degree of communal participation in which everyone is working toward the same focused musical goal. In a broad sense, a successful performance is a musical realization of the traditional communal social values that place great value on the entire group functioning as an interdependent single entity.

One thing to "read" in traditional African or African American music is the degree to which the music actively engages the audience. When teenagers listen to their favorite rap performer, a measure of the success of that performer is the degree to which the listeners move in synchrony with the rapper. The establishment of a communal bond is a significant goal of the musical experience.

A third basic conception underlying the practice of African music is the assumption that music is integrally related to language. Within most sub-Saharan African cultures, a special relationship exists between language and music, and this relationship has had an important impact on determining the nature of African American music. At the root of the relationship is the fact that language and music are both modes of communication that use sound and exist in time, and hence may share some general principles, although there are important differences between them. Moreover, many African languages are tonal, using tonal or pitch level as a means of defining a specific word. Two words with the same syllables and rhythm may have entirely different meanings if they have different tones. The simulation of the rhythm and tonal levels of speech enables uniquely constructed drums to imitate some speech and develop a repertoire of musical speech. These drums are generally referred to as talking drums. One well-known example is the Yoruba *dun dun* drum.

In his classic study *Drumming in Akan Communities of Ghana*, musicologist Kwabena Nketia has demonstrated that much of Akan drumming has a verbal basis.[18] He shows that Akan drum and metallic bell patterns are, literally, musical simulations of verbal proverbs, poems, common exhortations, and other statements. Hence, music is inextricably related to language, or put most directly, instrumental performers often involve literal musical statements of poetic phrases. Therefore, music often exists as a multi-leveled form of communication. It is literally as well as figuratively "saying something."

In addition, African musicians characteristically use nonsemantic or onomatopoetic syllables to reproduce an aural pattern analogous to the pitch contour and rhythm of a drum pattern that they wish to convey to another person. This verbalization of drum patterns is commonly used in recalling musical patterns or teaching music to novices. This verbal-musical interaction is doubtlessly enhanced by the fact that many African languages are tonal languages and use tonal levels as a means of defining specific words.

The basic conception of music as a multidimensional verbal-music experience profoundly influences African American music, as is reflected in the frequently used continuum from speech to song. The most vivid expressions of this continuum are the "sing-performance sermons" of African American preaching; the "talking, shouting" blues tradition; the speech and dialogue simulations common in jazz instrumental improvisations (especially by muted brass instruments); the phenomenon of jazz poetry performances of the 1920s, 1940s, and 1960s; and the hip hop and rap of contemporary African American popular music since the 1980s.

In *The Signifying Monkey*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., traces the relationship of the Yoruba deity Eshu-Elegbara to the African American figure the "Signifying Monkey," and shows how "signifying"—the vernacular verbal practice of engaging "in rhetorical games through the free play of associated rhetorical and semantic relations," and "troping"—reinterpreting, revisiting, or "repeating previous existing texts with a difference" and, hence, reinventing and transforming them, describes processes that are fundamental to African American literature.[19] Other scholars have pointed out how these same processes are fundamental to traditional African and African American music.[20]

I concur with this observation and note that the common sharing of similar rhetorical strategies in verbal and musical exposition underscores or recalls the special relationship between language and music in traditional African societies. The usage of cyclical structures, significant repetition, improvised variations within an established framework, and call-and-response structures on many architectonic levels, abounds in and defines the character of both language and musical play. It also explains why musicians so often regale in obliterating the boundaries between speech and music as in the practices of "scat singing," or simulating speech by playing with mutes. African American music history is full of such examples in blues, jazz, and gospel music as well as in the various genres of popular music. This interesting notion of music as language and language as music represents another level of meaning that can be read in performances of African American music.

INFLUENCE OF AFRICAN CONCEPTS OF MUSICAL ORGANIZATION AND SYNTAX

Much of the scholarship devoted to a consideration of the relationship of African music to African American music has focused on comparative analyses of the formal aspects of the two musical traditions. The predilection in African music for cyclical musical structures that also employ antiphonal or call-and-response forms on multiple structural levels has been well documented as a common organizational principle by many observers. This basic principle has profoundly influenced African American music. The earliest documented genres of distinctly African American music, the spirituals, work songs, and fiddle and banjo secular music, all demonstrate the pervasiveness of this principle. Each genre, however, utilizes this formal principle in a manner unique to its musical and social function.

The adaptation of similar formal techniques for different musical types is one of the factors that makes various genres of the music sound similar. In addition, each musical type evolves its own genre-specific techniques of exploiting common formal devices. For example, the twelve-measure, three-poetic-line blues structure, with its intrinsic responsorial structure determined by the statement relationship of the first two lines to the answering third line of the form, also developed the convention of a call-and-response relationship between the singer and his or her instrument within the four-measure stanzas.

The blues developed as a post–Civil War musical genre that evolved in part from the wordless "hollers, cries, and moans" that preceded it, and contained the musical outpourings of an individual expressing his or her reactions to the world. Although it continued to develop as a distinct genre that found its most characteristic and exquisite forms in the twentieth century, its formal principles were reinterpretations of concepts associated with earlier African American music and influenced by African music.

African conceptions of rhythm have had an important impact on African American rhythmic ideas. The fundamental principle governing African rhythm cited by Nketia,

Alan Merriam, and other researchers is what A. M. Jones has referred to as "the clash of rhythm," or what might be referred to as the principle of rhythmic contrast.[21] The basic notion is that such music will evince a disagreement of rhythmic accents, cross-rhythm, and/or implied metrical contrast as an ideal. Syncopation, off-beat accents, and anticipation and retardation of foreground accents that clash with the prevailing metrical framework are the expected norm. The terms polyrhythm and multimeter have been used by some ethnomusicologists to describe specific subsets of this rhythmic quality. Others have chosen to use the broader, more inclusive concept of rhythmic contrast.

African American music reflects its usage of the basic principle of rhythmic contrast in many ways. Although complex examples of extended multilayered texture are not as common in African American music, rhythmic contrast in some form is found as an intrinsic quality within all genres of African American music. It is the imposition of techniques of rhythmic contrast on previously existing music of European American origin that is one of the major factors that transforms that music into styles that are distinctly African American.

One common means of creating contrast in African and African American music is to establish musical textures in which there is a built-in dichotomy between a repetitive rhythmic pattern that exists on one level, and simultaneously occurring variable rhythmic patterns that exist on other levels. This interaction between fixed and variable rhythmic strata that exists within an interlocked rhythmic-metrical framework is a means of establishing rhythmic contrast. In African music one finds expression of this practice in ensembles in which a group often consisting of a metal bell, a gourd rattle, hand claps, and sometimes high-pitched drums or instruments performs a fixed rhythmic pattern that has a metronomic function. This "time line" is used in contrast to other drums, instruments, and voices that perform variable rhythms.

In African American music the same basic rhythmic structure is apparent in instrumental genres from the fiddle and banjo music associated with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to the complex instrumental ensembles of jazz and popular music that evolved in the twentieth century. In all of these genres, the organization of instruments into the "rhythm section" that plays recurring fixed rhythmic patterns, and the "front line" or lead instruments that play changing rhythmic patterns, is characteristic.

Within African and African American music, the dynamic relationship between the fixed and variable rhythmic strata is a process that determines one aspect of the syntax of both musical traditions. The organizational structure of both African and African American music is shaped on a large scale as well as on a foreground level in important ways by the interaction of fixed and variable rhythmic strata in conjunction with the usage of antiphony. This operates in different ways and is affected by other musical parameters to varying degrees in the two musical traditions. But the fundamental concept is present in both.

INFLUENCE OF AFRICAN CONCEPTS OF PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

Of great importance to the development of African American music is the retention in some instances, and adaptation in others, of performance practices associated with

African music. Among these practices is the approach to singing or playing any instrument in a percussive manner, a manner in which the greatest volume level occurs at the beginning of a sound, the attack phase, and the subsequent duration of the sound has a rapid decay of volume. The result is music that is characterized by qualitative stress accents. Performances of African and African American music tend to use instruments that are percussive in nature, and performance on all instruments is usually approached in a percussive manner.

Another common performance practice idiomatic of African American music clearly derived from African music is the incorporation of body motion as an integral part of the music-making process. In sub-Saharan cultures, body motion and music are viewed as interrelated components of the same process. Hence, singing or playing musical instruments is characteristically associated with elaborate body movements. These movements are not extraneous gestures, but are actions necessary to produce a desired effect in the musical performance; they are an intrinsic part of the music process. The most obvious example of this is the African usage of various arm, waist, and ankle rattles that adorn the bodies of dancers and produce a characteristic buzzy timbre when they move. The sounds produced by this movement are important components of the music. The dance becomes the music, and the music is the dance. A similar situation occurs in the work songs in both cultures when the physical action of work produces a sound that becomes an integral part of the music.

The common usage of body percussion (hand claps and slapping of hands against the body) and the history of African American dances that produce sounds created by the feet, from the shuffling sounds of the nineteenth-century religious dance called "ring shout" to twentieth-century tap dancing, are examples of the association of body motion with music. The approach to African and African American music assumes that body motion will be an integral part of the musical experience.

Another African practice that shaped African American musical performance practice is the predilection to create various ensembles comprised of contrasting timbres (sound colors). African instrumental ensembles characteristically consist of combinations of instruments whose individual colors are distinct—bells, drums, horns—and vocal ensembles in which the vocal qualities of individual performers may be discerned. I call this performance practice predilection the "heterogenous sound ideal."[22] African American music utilizes the same practices. The fact that individual singers are identified by distinct vocal timbres that contrast with others, such as Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, and Aretha Franklin, and that most performers use a wide range of vocal timbral nuances is a reflection of this ideal. This common practice is most notable in the performance of blues and gospel music. Thus, in ways that are both obvious and subtle, African American music owes a considerable debt to African performance styles.

Kofi Agawu, in his recent book, *African Rhythm: A Northern Ewe Perspective,* demonstrates through a careful study of northern Ewe music that the concept of rhythm is multidimensional. That is, "rhythm refers to a binding together of different dimensional processes, a joining rather than a separating, an across-the-dimensions instead of within-the-dimension phenomenon." [23] He also presents a conceptual model of the "domain of rhythmic expression" that is inclusive of "gesture-spoken word-vocal music-instrumental

music and dance."[24] The point here is that the notion of rhythm, like the notion of music in many African cultures, consists not simply of an abstraction of a single dimension of music, as is the case in Western thought, but rather is inclusive of several dimensions of inextricably related human activities. For example: "the Ewe word 'vu' refers simultaneously to dance, music, and drumming." The context determines which of those dimensions is being signified in a particular instance.[25]

In an important sense, though Agawu wisely limits himself to a discussion of the specifics of northern Ewe musical culture, I, in an admittedly more speculative mode, would assert that the "conceptual approaches to the music-making process" cited above are all interrelated and generally shared by many West African cultures; further, that these concepts also collectively form the basis of a "critical core" of qualities associated with African American music; and finally, that they are important factors in the development of African American music.

Analysis of African American music must take cognizance of the above underlying conceptual approaches. To fail to do so shifts the focus away from those qualities that are the most significant in the musical experience to those that are of lesser significance. For example, in much African American music the parameters of music that are most important in shaping moments of rhythmic contrast are the heterogeneous sound ideal and the structural principles of antiphony, among other factors, the interaction among these qualities establishing the processes of greatest importance.

Specifically, among these processes is the propensity to create musical situations in which dynamic tension is developed between a fixed and usually cyclical metrical background framework and a variable musical foreground that inevitably contrasts or clashes with that framework in terms of rhythm, phrase structure, timbre, texture, melodic contour, and/or harmony. This exists on a number of different architectonic levels, sometimes in the form of simple syncopation or off-beat accents, but also at larger levels in the form of shifts of an entire motive, phrase, or section of a piece. This basic process, which perhaps also explains the presence of the unique quality of "swing" that is so pervasive in African and African American music, is fundamental to this tradition. From the point of view of aesthetics, what is important about this observation is that value appears to be accorded to certain kinds of musical processes—specifically musical processes that reaffirm, usually in ingenious ways, fundamental conceptual assumptions about the music process. High value is placed on those musical events that bring fundamental underlying conceptions into sharp relief by means of a fresh or novel musical approach.

It has been well documented that the traditional African and African American musical experience is an inclusive one in which the ideal is one of involvement of everyone who experiences the event as well as the principal performers. Part of this participation involves spontaneous reaction in the form of applause, verbal interjections, physical movement, or other outward responses to specific events in the music. It thus becomes possible to monitor moments of particular musical significance in a performance as judged by the collective response of a particular communion of participants by noting when they occur. It would then be possible to determine if there are musical qualities that these moments share.

Although a systematic exploration of "significant musical moments" remains to be undertaken, I have made some general observations of this phenomenon that I think are relevant to the present discussion. First, as is the case with most musical traditions, instances in a performance that reveal extraordinary technical virtuosity often elicit an immediate response from the audience-participants. This is perhaps akin to the reactions of a circus crowd when a trapeze artist performs a triple somersault, or the reactions of a nineteenth-century Italian opera audience when the soprano sang a series of reiterated florid passages around high "C."

But there are other moments in traditional African American performances that commonly elicit audience reaction. These are those moments when the artist performs a particularly unique phrase in which rhythmic, timbral, melodic, or harmonic displacement is ingenious. It is these moments that reveal the quality of the artist's musical imagination. An analysis of the musical performance must take these moments into consideration because often they reflect the high point of a particular improvised performance. These moments, which I call "soul focal points," often involve the combination of an ingenious rhythmic and timbral modification.

In summary, I have attempted to show that African American music is related to African music by a common sharing of a basic core of conceptual approaches to the process of music-making. As stated earlier, African American music reflects the duality of the African American experience. The aesthetics of this situation, though grounded in concepts that are essentially African, are also clearly influenced by non-African cultural traditions. The English language, functional tonality, European instruments, European socioeconomic structures, and Western concepts of time and space have all influenced the African American music tradition and impacted its aesthetics and historical development in varying degrees, in different genres, and in different historical periods. The central defining qualities of this musical tradition, however, are rooted in African concepts of music mediated by the American experience of its creators. Careful consideration of this basic fact enables one to gain greater insight into the nature of the music and a clearer understanding of the dynamics of its historical development.

NOTES

Title drawn from Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington and Irving Mills, "It Don't Mean a Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing" (Brunswick Records #6265, 1932).

1. Olly W. Wilson, "Black Music as an Art Form," *Black Music Research Journal* 3, no. 2 (1983), 1–22.
2. Olly W. Wilson, "The Significance of the Relationship Between Afro-American and West African Music," *Black Perspectives in Music* 2, no. 1 (1974): 2, 3–22. See also Alan P. Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964).
3. Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990 [1941]).
4. Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African American Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 9–10.
5. Mintz and Price, *The Birth of African American Culture*, 11.

6. David Dalby, "The African Element in American English," in *Rappin' and Stylin' Out*, ed. Thomas Kochman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 173.

7. See Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Robert Farris Thompson, *African Art in Motion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); Houston Baker, *Blues Ideology and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); and *"Race," Writing and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

8. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 4.

9. W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Souls of Black Folk," in *Three Negro Classics* (New York: Avon Books, 1965 [1903]).

10. John Blacking, *How Musical Is Man?* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973), 69.

11. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976 [1973]).

12. Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983 [1971]).

13. Sheila S. Walker, *Ceremonial Spirit Possession in Africa and Afro-America* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1972).

14. Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

15. Charles Keil, *Urban Blues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 97.

16. Albert Murray, *Stomping the Blues* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), 17.

17. Murray, *Stomping the Blues*, 20.

18. J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *Drumming in Akan Communities in Ghana* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1963), 32–50.

19. Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, 4.

20. Samuel A. Floyd, "Ring Shout! Literary Studies, Historical Studies, and Black Music Inquiry," *Black Music Research Journal* (1991).

21. A. M. Jones, *Studies in African Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).

22. Olly W. Wilson, "The Heterogeneous Sound Ideal in African American Music," in *New Perspectives on Music: Essays in Honor of Eileen Southern*, ed. Josephine Wright (Warren, Mich.: Harmonie Park Press, 1992).

23. Kofi Agawu, *African Rhythm: A Northern Ewe Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 7.

24. Agawu, *African Rhythm*, 28.

25. Agawu, *African Rhythm*, 7.

9

Same Boat, Different Stops: An African Atlantic Culinary Journey

Jessica B. Harris

Malian scholar Amadou Hampâté Bâ once said, "*Chaque viellard qui meurt en Afrique, est comme une bibliothèque qui brule*" (Each old person who dies in Africa is like a library that is burned).[1] Nita Villapol, at a UNESCO conference on Africa in Latin America, put it in more culinary terms: "*en todo pais de América Latina donde hay influencia negra, cada vez que muere una cocinera vieja, se pierde todo un mundo de tradición oral y popular*" (in all Latin American countries where there is a Black influence, each time an old cook dies, a whole world of oral and popular tradition is lost).[2]

It has become popular to say that you are what you eat. In the case of Africans in the Diaspora, this saying takes on new meaning. For despite unspeakable treatment and privations, we have kept many of our foodways in this so-called New World. Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén in the poem "Mi Apellido" ("My Last Name") reminds us that "*sin conocernos nos reconoceremos en . . . los fragmentos de cadenas adheridos todavia a la piel*" ("without knowing each other we will know each other by the fragments of chains still stuck to our skin").[3] I would like to add "and by the okra on our plates." Indeed this African native—okra—and other foods and cooking techniques from the mother continent remain uniquely African American in hemispheric generality. Our food defines us, and because of our position in the kitchen, at the bottom of the culinary pecking order, our food has subtly defined the taste of the Americas.

Archaeologists now feel certain that eastern and southern Africa provide the world's earliest and most continuous record of human evolution. This history includes what is arguably some of humankind's earliest food production. In *Africans: The History of a Continent*, John Iliffe reminds us that "there is evidence as early as 20,000 to 19,000 years ago of intensive exploitation of tubers and fish at waterside settlements in southern Egypt near the First Cataract, soon followed by the collecting of wild grain."[4] One of these early grains was millet, which is still widely used throughout the African continent. Highland Ethiopia was another area of early plant domestication. In the grassy northern highlands