

RICHARD ALLEN of Philadelphia (1760-1831), who is chiefly noted for organizing and heading the first congregation of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion church was acutely aware of this. He collected hymns that he felt would appeal to his Black congregation. Printed by John Ormrod in 1801, it was entitled: *A Collection of Spiritual Songs and Hymns Selected from Various Authors by Richard Allen, African Minister.*

Because Allen's counterpart in the South at that time had little or no access to a hymnal for his "congregation," it may be assumed that he or his lead singer was the composer of many religious songs.

It should be noted that long before the white man entered Africa as slavers, explorers, or missionaries, there was a widespread belief in a Supreme Being, and each village had its "minister" or priest. This allowed for an easier transference in the New Land, not the admonitions or forces of the white master. Here, in the States, ministers enjoyed the same leadership role as did those priests in Africa. This helps to explain why many insurrections were instigated or led by religious men. Two of the more famous were Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey.

Thus, out of the meger of the slaves' songs from Africa and their experience in the New Land, came a form of music about which much has been written: The Spiritual. Recognized as a form of communal communication, this music has served to bind a people as does all folk music; for folk music is a music that reflects the tastes and feelings of a community rather than individual emotions.

The spiritual's close relationship between the singer (slave) and Jesus might be explained by their commonality: both had been "buked (rebuked) and scorned, tortured in some manner, and forced to accept unjust, heavy punishment. This is why he is the diety most often mentioned in the spiritual: He was deemed most sympathetic to their plight.

JOHN LOVELL, JR., in his definitive book on Afro-American spirituals, *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame* wrote that music "...blended the experiences and poetic imaginations of one folk group and created songs for the human heart." He further states that the "purpose" of the spiritual are:

1. To give the community a true, valid and useful song.
1. To keep the Community invigorated.
3. To inspire the uninspired individual.
4. To enable the group to face its problems.
5. To stir each member to personal solutions and to a sense of belonging in the midst of a confusing and terrifying world.
6. To provide a code language for emergency use.

Recognizing the inherent danger for foment that the slaves' religious services (or any form of assemblage) and the singing of spirituals presented, they were banned in some areas of the South as early as the 1830s. Most particularly did the Black Methodists come under fire, for they had acquired considerable strength and were thought to be behind the Vesey plot. So too were drums prohibited due to the fear that they would be used as a means of communicating information. To circumvent this, meetings had to be held in the woods at night, or in a secure building with guards posted. Singing was done into a glass or pot filled with water to absorb the sound. Whatever the inconveniences were, they were not enough to prevent the need from being fulfilled.

As has been observed throughout this paper, music had been one of the primary forces in a slave's life. As a century progressed, more documentation became available.

In the South during the earlier decades, entertainment for slaves on the plantation was chiefly offered by individual instrumentalists (mostly fiddlers or banjoists) with the group joining in with singing, dancing, or "pating." The latter was a method where the feet were tapped, as well as the thighs and shoulders, by the hands in an intricate and precise syncopated rhythm. (More recently, it is known as "hamboning").

However, in New Orleans, there was a section of the City called Congo Square (since renamed Beaugard Square). Here, on Sundays or holy days, whites, who were tourists or locals, came to watch the "wildest dancing". The slaves would congregate by tribes to form circles where they would perform a dance or "shuffle" that was peculiar to West Africa.

Hours would go by, with any who fell from

exhaustion quickly replaced by another. Of course, the chief instrument, similar to the *Banjar* or *Banjo* was made from a calabash. The instrumentalists were within the ring. "Incessant chanting and the exciting music..." according to an 1808 report, created a state of frenzy within the participants. This same report stated that, at sundown "...the city partols show themselves with their cutlasses, and the crowds immediately dispersed." "Accordingly," Langston Hughes mused, "some musicologists believed that jazz was born before sunset in Congo Square. Certainly the basic beat was there all day long."


Such entertainment for slaves was chiefly limited to the exotic city of New Orleans, with its largest Black population in any American city; for one-third of its inhabitants, about 12,000 were Black. It also had a peculiar caste system based upon color and status: free or slave.

The free people (creoles of color as they were known) and free Blacks of unmixed parentage, indulged in more sophisticated or genteel pursuits. Perhaps to clearly delineate their status, they eschewed the more African inspired music for the European variety. In almost every household there was a piano, and some member was able to acquit him/herself well enough to entertain family and friends. Voice lessons were also taken to indulge the petted young ladies of these middle-class creoles.

At the white ball, opera houses and thratres, sections were often set aside for the Blacks, and they were almost always filled to capacity.

So seriously did many music lovers and accomplished instrumentalists view their music, that the Negro Philharmonic Society was formed with over 100 members. It served a double purpose; the one just stated, and

it prevented those who truly found racial discrimination distasteful from having to attend segregated performances at the white theaters. In addition to performing at concerts in their own building, the Society acted as booking agents for visiting performers.



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