ROOTS OF BLACK MUSIC IN AMERICA

Some Correspondences between the Music of the Slave Areas of West Africa and the Music of the United States and the Caribbean

Compiled and Edited by Samuel Charters

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FA 2694
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FOLKWAYS RECORDS FA 2694
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NOTES BY SAMUEL CHARTERS

AN INTRODUCTION

Three hundred years is a long time in the human experience. Two hundred years - even one hundred years. So much is forgotten, left behind, misplaced. What do you remember of what you were doing last summer or even five years ago? Do you remember the songs you learned in school when you were nine years old? For the black man and the black woman in America the African past is now that long ago, with so little remembered and so little kept from that life and that culture and that distant continent. And yet, in the long measuring of human time, three hundred years is not so long - one hundred years only a moment.

There was slave trading until the last years before the Civil War - the 1850's - only one hundred ten years ago, less than three generations. Any black American in his sixties could have had a grandfather, a grandson who had been born in Africa. The mother of the New Orleans clarinet player, George Lewis, lived until she was in her nineties and he is in his sixties. She had been born and spent her childhood in Africa, and spoke a little of her own language. The break between the African past and the American present is no more than thirty or forty years - and so much is remembered, and takes but a moment of time, even if it isn't understood - or even clearly recognized.

But like the things you remember of your grandfather, nothing is very distinct in the memory. There are only impressions, half-forgotten stories, odd lines of a song. Unless the grandfather talked about his own childhood - or the grandmother about her childhood - that life is cleared. One day the music will come down through a father and mother - their memories of these old people, when they were not old. If that older generation has passed what it knew on to them then it can go on to their children, and the link to the past is complete - still living, and forty years, or one hundred and forty years, is only a blurring of time, and not a breaking of it. I don't think we will ever be able to trace African music through every change and shaping it has undergone in the Americas. Musical styles, particularly those that are transmitted orally, are continually shifting, continually changing. I once tried for a year and a half in New Orleans to find out what the first jazz band had sounded like - and I found many people who had heard it. I even had musicians who had played in the band sing their old instrumental parts for me. At the end I put it together, and I just couldn't describe the whole that I had of the band. This had been only fifty years before. Already there had been so many changes in the music that it was almost impossible for the ear to remember back to the old sound without hearing newer music in the way. That music is more than a hundred years in the past, and change has gone on both Africa and in the American. So much so that some points of connection have been almost completely lost.

I am conscious that generalizations like this apply most directly to the United States, since the African culture here has been almost completely obliterated. For a Jamaican, a member of a Rumba Cult, a dancer in a "curralao" from the coast of Western Columbia, a drummer from an isolated settlement in the Bahamas, a story teller from the mangrove forests of British Honduras, their culture is African. What has been lost is the tribal identity, and when I use the term "African" it has to have a tribal identity behind it, by music, is the musical culture of the tribes living on the north central coast of West Africa, in the areas stripped by the slavers. It is possible that in some centers of culture, in the villages, in the towns, there is a sense of tribal identity, but the tribes, in America, were generally dispersed. For their own protection the slave holders mixed the population groups so there could be no sense of identity except as slave. This couldn't entirely destroy the cultural base, but it could stifle it, and leave it little more than a small spark, a small point of remembered warmth.

The tribe is so important in any consideration of African music that it is misleading to talk about something as general as African music. If you are going to talk about any area, then the concept can be of some use. Music from this area has a wide range of expression - from the drum orchestras of the coastal forests playing the slit drums of the northern savannah - and all of it - or almost all of it - has found its way into some area, some kind of music somewhere in North or South America. If we have not recognized this, if we haven't been aware of it, it's only because we have known so little about the music of Africa.

In the United States it has always been difficult to trace the origins of Africa because of the richness and vitality of the Afro-American musical expression. Black music in the United States has taken from every source, to make a brilliant new music that transcends, as much of the music does, the limitations it has of rain forest drumming. But the elements are there. Even the structure of jazz drumming - the steady rhythm on the metal cymbal, strong rhythm in a heavy floor drum, shifting central rhythms on smaller drums and accents on wooden or metal cymbals - is an elaboration of the structure of the drum orchestra, with complicated pedals and stands to make it possible for a single man to catch some of the sound of drummers of the tribal orchestra.

As Africa has emerged from colonialism and the techniques of field recording have developed a marked increase in the knowledge we have of this African musical background - but we still have only glimpses. We don't know enough yet to make direct connections - or to make anything more than interferences. I'm not trying to do it with these examples of music from the slave areas of Africa and the black cultures of the Americas. I don't feel we know enough yet to make definite associations. What I have done is find examples of music from one world that correspond - in style, sound technique - to music from the other world. I have built these examples into a larger perspective on the selection. I have used some unissued field material from my own collection - blues pieces by J.D. Short and George Montgomery recorded in the early 1960's - I hope that they will be issued sometime and it will be possible to hear their music in its own context.

A number of people have been doing valuable work in this area for many years, and I have found a number of insights in their work. I include in this the musicologist Melville Herskovits, Curt Sachs, and Harold Courlander. The blues historian Paul Oliver has recently published a very important study Savannah Symposium, centering on African retentions in the blues, and it is particularly useful for its covering together of so much scattered material relating to the subject. He has also shown some interesting parallels between blues instrumental techniques and the playing of the griots of Niger in the recording released in France with the book. Ten years ago my wife, Ann Charters, did considerable research into travelers documents and other background materials for a projected study of the contemporary relationship between black music in the United States, and have taken the early documents from some of her materials.

Side A: Drum and Drum Styles

Band 1: Nigeria, Hausa - Simpa

Recorded in Ghana by Ivan Aragon, from Folkways FW 8559

The Hausa people are centered in northern Nigeria, north of the Yoruba tribal groups who center along the coastline. Of all the peoples in this area the Hausa were the most strongly influenced by the Muslim Arabs who ruled them for centuries, and since the scattering of the tribes that is going on in West Africa they retain their dialect and costume wherever they settle. In the coastal areas, however, their drumming is in the style of the coastal music, an Ima Lewis, has recorded this example, notes in his introduction. They also describe the polyrhythmic steady rhythms and melodies of the coastal folk's own dialects. This example, "Simpa," is widely popular throughout Ghana, well as in their own area of Nigeria. This group has many of the characteristics of the West African drum orchestra. It is a complex texturing of three main percussion rhythms. As in many other areas and styles there is a steady rhythm pattern, on small scrapers or shakers - often this is played on metal strikers or bells. Deeper toned drums play in a slower rhythm below the scraper or shaker, the third in a constant rhythmic pulse. The third percussion unit is over lighter toned drums whose accents shift and cross in a complex interplay. Paul Oliver has quoted and discussed J.H. Kwabena Nketia's paper on the History and Organization of Music in West Africa, in his study Melodic Conversations, and this gives some of the elements in the music's structure. "Professor
M. Kettis has pointed out that the rhythms are conceived either unilinearly with the patterns assigned to one drum or a pair of drums played by two men, or to many drums played by different men. In the latter case, the number of the same type of drum or different drums may be playing the particular set of rhythms together, or multilinearly, where 'a number of rhythm patterns are assigned to two or more drums, each drum or group of drums beating different patterns or adopting different sequences of patterns in such a way as to offset some beats of their respective patterns. Against these may be placed hand-claps, often by two or three individuals or groups of people, whose clap rhythms are played against each other, while the 'gongs' or clapperless bells establish a metronomic time signal. The suggestion that the motor that what he likes is rather misleading, for the length and character of the rhythm phrases is determined by the function, the nature of the dance and the piece that is being performed. Improvisation, in fact, is strictly controlled.'

"Synpah," with its strong surging rhythm, and its dramatic bursts of sound, has this same multi-leveled texturing. There is the regular rhythm of the shakers or scrapers, the deeper drum generally accentuating what would be the European third and fourth beats of the phrase, counting the beats of the scrapers as 4/4. The middle drums have a shifting, crossing pattern. One drum is playing shorter beats, a

another is accenting,

\[ \text{a short pattern} \]

another in a different accent,

\[ \text{a long pattern} \]

And within these patterns there is continual shift and emphasis.

Band 2. Bahamas Islands - Jumping Dance

Recorded on New Providence Island, Bahamas, by Marshall W. Stearns, from Folkways FE 4502 C/D

In his note to this example of Bahamas drumming Harold Courlander has commented that in the Bahamas patterns are to be largely influenced by African traditions, though the rhythms frequently have a New World character and appear to be related to general West Indian traditional forms in which the "drumming belongs to a vigorous rhythmic tradition that extends through the Antilles to the South American mainland. In this piece three drums are used, accompanied by claves (known locally as 'cleavers') and a saw. The saw is plucked by scraping a knife along the teeth, and tone changes are effected by flexing. The drums are made of pigs, with goatskin heads. They are played by hand.

The "New World character" is generally a more clearly defined rhythmic pulse. African drumming could almost be said to "float," as the accents change their point of stress within the larger framework of the song. The drumming of the Americas has been influenced by the marching music and the religious music of the white culture, and although much of the sound and the drum texture has remained clearly intact there is a more definite stress, around which the rest of the rhythm centers. It doesn't float there isn't the sense of free movement that the African drumming has, despite its careful structuring. But it is almost incredible that there should be so clear a sense of the African roots in Bahaman drumming hundreds of years after any direct contact with the parent culture. There is the same grouping of rhythms into three levels - a regular rhythm of the saw scraper, the persistent off-beat pattern of the claves as the kind of metronomic beat that Professor Kettis described, a steady rhythm on a heavy drum, and the steady shifting of the middle voiced drums. Some point of definition has become blurred, there is a less definable sense of melodic function, but this is clearly related to the African roots in the other areas of West Africa.

Band 3. Ghana, Ewe - Atsigbekor

Recorded at Accra, Ghana, by Seth Kobla Ladzekpo, from Asch ARH 4222

Seth Kobla Ladzekpo has described the musical background of "Atsigbekor" in his notes on the music of the Ewe tribe. "The Ewe speaking people live in the southern part of the Republic of Togolope and the southern part of the Republic of Togo (in the Volta Region). Because of trade, marriage, agriculture, fishing, and the present day westernization which is spreading in Africa like a wild fire set on a dry grass, the Ewe-speaking people can be found almost all over the continent of Africa. But they are mostly centered around the coastal towns of West Africa."

The instruments most commonly used among the Ewe are gongs, drums and rattles. There are two kinds of gongs, the "gankonku" or double gong, which is played with a stick and keeps the tempo of the orchestra playing a constant pattern. The "atake" is a small boat-shaped gong that rests on one palm and is played with a mallet; there is a high-pitched and a low-pitched atake. The rattle is a large number of loose set of beads covering it; it is called "azasen." The drums, which are made on one end with antelope, sheep, or goat hide and made of wood, are usually four sizes from small to very large: "Kaganu," "Kidi," "Dogo" and "Atsigbekor," the 4-foot-high drum, which is played by a drummer there are talking drums and drums played on both ends. During the performance the dancer has a close relationship to the musicians, taking most of his cues from the drum."

He describes "Atsigbekor" as it is performed in this example. "It was originally a war dance, but it is no longer associated with war and it has become a social dance. The dance is led by a master drummer which is very tall in size and played by a standing drummer. The dancers listen very attentively to the rhythmic pulse the master drummer. The music is very lyrical, typically in the Atsigbekor from a slow section a fast (double time) one.

Instrument: 5 drums, 1 double gong, rattles ranging from 3-6, order of the drums: "Waga" (master drum), "Kroboto, Totozi, Kidi, Kaganu, Gahogu" (double gong), "Azasen" (rattle)."

This is faster, strongly rhythmic dance music. The pattern is more clearly related to the central beat, with a subtle shifting of the lighter drums around the steady pulsing of the master drum. The dancers accompany the music with handclapping, and there is a persistent, sharp stricking of the beat on the metal gong in a pattern that is almost a \[ \text{a long pattern} \]

in conventional notation.

Band 4. United States - New York Street Band

Recorded in New York City by Tony Schwartz, from Folkways FE 4502 C/D

In his note Harold Courlander writes, "This is a New York street band composed of boys in their early teens. Groups of this kind have become increasingly popular in recent years. A heavy immigration from Puerto Rico has intensified the impact of West Indian music, and the more traditional Negro street bands that performed with tambourines, washbaths, and handclaps have been submerged by the Rumba, Congo and Mambo groups. The significant things is that a preponderant number of these younger groups are composed not of Puerto Ricans or other West Indians, but of native New Yorkers who come from rural areas in the South. The usual instruments are drums (bongos or congas), claves (hardwood sticks beaten together), gongos (gourd rattles), and sometimes a kettle or bit of iron for percussion."

Again, in this richly ornamented drum texture, there is the same almost unbelievable persistence of the African drum orchestra after so many generations in the Americas, and as Courlander points out, it is even more interesting that these musicians come from the same South American tradition, that has been so persistently suppressed by the slave holders. In this example the influence has clearly come in through the West Indies, but there is some of this kind of drumming still remaining in many areas in the South. The New Orleans "indians" groups still carry on this style for their Mardi Gras Music. In this New York recording there is a clear relationship - between the use of the metal gong as a metronomic instrument here - keeping time - and the example from Ghana, "Atsigbekor," with its rhythm in the metal gong, the Gankonku. It is an accented rhythm in the New York example,

\[ \text{a short pattern} \]

but structurally it's use is similar.

Band 5. Gambia - Wolof - Kundal

Recorded in Gambia by David Ames, from Folkways 4642

From David Ames' introduction to the music of the Wolof, "The striking character of the Wolof music is its blending of aboriginal, West African Negro styles with those of Muslim North Africa. Many other aspects of Wolof culture, too, reflect these two traditions. Their homeland, Senegambia, is close to the southern end of the Sahara caravan routes, and these have been the highways of merchants, religious proselytizers, and conquerors for centuries. Mutual borrowing between Islamic North Africa and Negro South Africa has been traced back at least until the 11th century A.D. -- five centuries earlier than any African contact with European nations."

"The Wolof musical borrowings from the mohammedans were selective. The elements the Wolof took over, were re-shaped to fit their own cultural matrix. Many of their aboriginal musical styles were little affected by Mohammedan contact. For example, most of the drumming . . . . ."

The Wolof people live in the northern slave area, between the Senegal and the Gambia rivers. This example of Wolof singing and drumming is a "Secular praise song sung by four female slaves
on the porch of a chief's home at the naming ceremony for his firstborn son. The young women provide their own rhythmic accompaniment by handclapping and by using a large, over-turned gourd bowl, placed on a pole as a drum. One woman beats this drum with bare hands and another strikes it with a stick...

In this simple song the regular handclapping gives a more regular beat to the performance, although there is still the multi-texturing of rhythms, and the shift of accent between voices, handclapping and drum.

Band 6. Bahamas Islands - Everything The Monkey Do
Recorded at Fresh Creek Settlement, Andros Island, the Bahamas, by Samuel Charters, from Folkways FS 3516.

The black settlements on Andros Island were, at the time of this recording, among the most isolated communities of slave descendants in the Caribbean. The music in these settlements was somewhat different from the predominant African influence. The black settlers were at first forbidden to keep the slaves together. The Once-Born Orle Watkins, a noted tainhand, saw a gourd - which was returned to its role as the central pulse of the rhythm. Dudds' playing in this solo was not conceived as being that different from his basic ensemble style. Although this example is considerably more florid than he would have played with a band, and has no complexity of the African drumming because of its conception in terms of the single steady beat - but for a performance by a single drummer it's remarkable in its tonal coloration and its rhythmic inventiveness.

Band 10. Ivory Coast, Baoule - Anoogbe Festival
Recorded in Ivory Coast by Donald Thurrow, from Folkways FE 4476.

The Baoule peoples were driven into the area between the Bandama and the Moueti Rivers in the early eighteenth century, after numerous wars with the tribes of the Ivory Coast to the east of where they now live. As with almost all other tribes from this area music plays a dominant role in the ceremonial life of the Baoule villages. Donald Thurrow noted that "Music, song and dance are basic, not only to religious practice among the Baoule, but as a fundamental to recreation. A rhythmic beat and a vocal chorus are a part of every folk tale, and music without dancing is virtually non-existent. Although the music may be categorized as 'secular' and 'sacred', there is no sharp demarcation. All ceremonial music may also be used in a purely secular fashion. Except for cases where an isolated village is composed of women and children who are possessed exclusively by men, any villager of any age may be a spectator to, or dancer to, the music, regardless of the occasion for which it is performed. It is probably the most common among the Baoule. A variety of drums may be struck either by the hands or with sticks. Each type of drum bears a special name, while many are reserved only for certain dances. Metal instruments include the belled anklets, (called plgien), a bell shaped instrument struck with a stick held in the opposite hand (the cococo), and a variety of grooved and perforated metal objects which are usually struck with a stick to give a washboard-like sound."

The music of this example was performed at a festival of music and dance held yearly in the village of Sakasso. It is fast, brilliant drumming, with the middle drums in strong patterns that cross each other and yet, through their rhythmic warding against the regular pulse of the metal bell which is not directly tied to the drum rhythm moving around it. Unlike the Jazz drum solo from New Orleans/Chicago, this is true polyrhythm, with the multi-leveled texturing that is the basis of the drum orchestras.

Band 11. United States - New York Contemporary Jazz Drumming
Recorded in New York by Moses Asch.

There is still the centering around a single rhythmic pulse that was present in the drumming of baby Dudds, but here the accenting is more basic, and the basic pulse has shifted to the metal cymbal, which brings it closer in tonal structure to the African style. It is virtuoso drumming, consciously stylized within the framework of the commercial jazz music of the 1940's, which has drawn on musical influences from a wide range of instrumental and vocal sources.

Side B Vocals and Vocal Styles
Band 1. Liberia, Kelle - Work Songs
From Folkways FE 4466.

The Kelle people live to the northwest of the Gio tribe heard on A7, and they are one of the dominant cultural groups of central Liberia. Six men are cutting bush to clear the land for rice planting. They are cutting with long knives, called the outas, and the sounds of the cutting are heard as they sing. This is not a work song in the sense of a gang song used to coordinate work movements - like the pulling or
chopping songs of the American black prison gangs. As in the earlier example of music from the Liberian culture area there is a strong, strictly rhythmed chorus and more freely rhythmical vocal phrasing in the leader’s verses. It is mostly a song to pass the time as they’re working. The vocal tone is very hard and dark. The song form is not responsive — that is, there is no leader and answering chorus as was common in American gang work song.

Band 2. Cameroons, Mixed Culture — Work Song
Recorded in Cameroons by Robert and Pat Rittenenthal, from Folkways FE 4372

Cameroons is to the south east of Nigeria, at the eastern end of the long concave crescent of African coastline formed by the Gulf of Guinea. This example was recorded in the highland area of the Bafut people. Robert Rittenenthal wrote in his description of this example: "As the United Africa Corporation warehouse in Bamenda, they sing while they sift and bag the coffee beans. The rhythm is supplied by the coffee beans rattling in the sifting box as the coffee goes through it... In the background can be heard the thud of cow-hides as they are thrown from the weighting scales to a pail across the room. Since these men come from all over the Cameroons, some of the songs they sing have worked their way up from the coast."

Cameroons is to the east of the area which was drawn on most heavily for slaves, but the culture is not that different from other cultures to the west, and many of the characteristics of song and dance in a Cameroons example is unusual in its being of mixed tribal groups, but the responsive nature of the singing — a chanted chorus responding to the leader — could accommodate men unfamiliar with the form of the song. The corresponding chorus is in unison, beautifully phrased, again — as in Band 1 — not closely related to a work rhythm. The singing is with the throat fairly closed, the sound taut and hard.

Band 3. Jamaica — Work Song
Recorded in Jamaica by Edward Seaga, from Folkways FE 4453

Jamaica, despite its long isolation from Africa, and the mixing of Western European and East Indian elements in its culture, is still a rich storehouse of music with close correspondences to the music of Africa. There are still survivals of African languages, and Edward Seaga, who recorded this example submitted a sample list of forty-eight words which the Kumina followers made up as a song at the origin to the Institute of African and Oriental Studies in London. Forty-one of the forty-eight were identified as Congo, many of them basic vocabulary words. He described the recording of this example by: "These songs are rapidly fading from Jamaican life. This recording was actually taken while the foundation of a house was under construction next to the writer’s home. A diesel powered drill had been used to bore and crack obstructing rocks, but at a certain portion of the ground the rock formation proved too soft to be cracked by this machine, and consequently, laborers with pick axes were utilized. Operator of steel drill then initiated the singing and soon after the writer made his way across his fence with recording equipment and two bottles of rum... The leader of the chant sang part of the song at his machine and partly on the ground. He described this as the ‘usual practice’ and could give no other reason. Some of the other singers poured a little rum in the center of their heads and/or over their axes before drinking. Pouring it on the head is said to be good for health."

The rhythm is more closely related to the work than in the previous examples from Africa, but there is the use of repetitive lower voices in a strictly rhythmed phrase, and middle voices in a freer "talk" rhythm. Some of the melodic phrases have a suggestion of English sources, and the melody is more clearly defined within an African scale framework, but in the texture, and in the sound of the voices, there is a clear African background.

Band 4. Mali, Dogon — Men’s Wedding Song
Recorded in Mali by Betty and W. Ormee Dyer, from Folkways FE 4338

The area of the Dogon, inland on the Niger River, is far enough from the ocean that it was not stripped by the slavers, but there was considerable movement of people and the influence was very strong. This example shows the handclapping provides the regular pulse, and there is also an accented rhythm in a high song. The richness of this musical fabric is then set as the background of the rhythmed voices and this complete sound is remarkably textured in its fusion of voice and percussion.

In this music — from the area of the great drum orchestras — can be heard the full complexity of the multi-rhythmed West African drumming, but this movement to the slow tempo of the wedding song at Timbuktu, which W. Ormee Dyer describes as "the fabled, legendary city of Timbuktu which flourished over 600 years ago and on whose caravan trails passed much of the riches of the African kingdom. Its luxury was to become a center of learning famous throughout the Islamic world. Through the years, conquered and looted, Timbuktu became (except for a few survivals among its past) just another unremarkable assortment of mud houses which is its condition today."

It is this northern culture area which is of considerable interest in its background of vocal music which seems to be related to some of the oldest musical sources in the slave areas of North America, notably the Doyen people, but the Taureg people even further to the north east. This example has the same kind of high voice accents as the example in Band 3. The form of the song is responsive, in a heavy voiced unison choral. The northern influence can be heard in the melismatic embellishment in the phrasing — the wavering on pitch tones that is so characteristic in Arabic music.

Band 5. United States — Go Down Old Hannah
Recorded in Texas by Peter Seeger and John Lomax Jr., from Folkways FW 6399

It is in music like this that the two examples from Afro-American music, the African and the Anglo-European, can be heard clearly. "Old Hannah" is a rather rare example that is responsive in its being of mixed tribal groups, but it is the responsive style of white psalm singing — the leader giving the line of the song and the congregation following with their repetition of the line, an example of considerable use of European harmony, both in the structure of the song, and in the vocal parts themselves. There is a strong movement to the subdominant on the word "Hannah", then a clear resolution and the harmonic root chord, even though the melody at that point uses some melismatic development. But the sound of the voices, the tone of the singing is African, the sound produced at the back of the throat and using considerable chest resonance.

Band 6. Cameroons, Puff and United States — River Song and Alabama Children’s Song
Example from Cameroon recorded by Robert and Pat Rittenenthal, from Folkways FE 4372, example from Alabama recorded in Alabama by Harold Courlander, from Folkways FW 6836

The Bafut are a small tribe living in the highlands of Cameroon, and this first example is sung by the wives of the Fon, or divine king of the tribe. In these two examples, one from Africa and the other from the United States, can be heard many of the points of correspondence and — just as much points of difference between the two styles. The vocal sound is very similar, and there is the same structuring of voices over handclapping, but in the African children's song there is always the suggestion of European harmonic structure that is not present in the African women's song.

Band 7. Ghana, Akan — Aknoddey
Recorded in Ghana by Ivan Annan, from Folkways FW 8859

From Ivan Annan's note on the Aknoddey cult music:

"Adowa music plays a very important part in Akan society or for that matter the whole of Ghana excluding the northern part, who have a combination of Islamic influence and indigenous musical patterns. Aknoddey is a highly respected religious cult among the Akan speaking people. Although there has been little written about the cult, there are many mysterious deeds that have been associated with it, but the many mystical secrets associated with it. The customs and traditions of the Aknoddey speaking people have passed down from generation to generation and the entire population of the country have been influenced by Adowa music. This music is either associated with funeral rites or other memorable moments, and even durbar, where the great deeds of ancestors are included in the lyrics of the chants. The music is performed mostly by old women whose age and philosophical attitude contribute to the betterment of the society and its youth, maintaining the dignity and devotion these older people pass from one generation to the other. The concept of Aknoddey cannot be exposed because other religious sects have expressed similar communication with it in their environments, and the music also expresses such defiant attitudes in the hands of over a dozen women, playing various indigenous instruments like the bamboo joints in three different tones at different rhythmic or time signatures, various sizes of gourds with beads strung around them (Shakere) with only one male drummer punctuating as the changes are made by the movements of the dancer."

Band 8. Jamaica, Kumina — Country Song
From Folkways FE 4453, recorded in Jamaica by Edward Seaga

The Kumina cult is one of the most important non-Christian
instruments in Jamaica and is said by its followers to be of African origin. From Edward Blyden's introduction to their music, "The main instruments used in Kuma are two types of drums: the Kandu (Congo kandu), and the 'Playing Cast'. The former has a lower tone which is achieved by filling the drum a bit larger than the Playing Cast or by 'heeling' it during play, that is, resting the heel against the drum-head. These drums are made from small logs or certain varieties of wood, primarily coconut. They are headed on one or both sides. The skin is attached to the drum by nails driven through a band which goes around the drum-head.

Both the Kandu and Playing Cast are almost always less than one foot in diameter and two feet in length. The drummer sits astride the drum and plays it with a stick. The Kandu keeps a steady beat while the Playing Cast adopts the particular rhythm used to charm a specific spirit, since all spirits are not charmed by the same rhythm.

This song is in the country language - "Congo" - and could not be translated. In texture it has marked similarities to the music of the Akan but is often more complex, with a rhythm distinctly African. This is a performance by a single male singer accompanying himself on a djembe.

The accompaniment is not on a point of harmony. The voice is heavy, resonant - has the quality of the nasal vocal sound, and there is no harmony in the European sense of the term. The song's identity comes from the repetitive phrase in the voice.

The accent of the second point of rhythmic stress corresponds to the vocal rhythm. Like almost all African music from these areas the sound seems to "float".

The accompaniment is a bit more composed, and yet it still features the former English colonies, and many of these slaves were therefore conversant with the two main languages of Senegambia: Wolof and Mandinka. The Wolof professional performers in the former African instrument to be found North America, the banjo. In describing the instrument used on this recording David Asse wrote, "The five-stringed instrument, the banjo, has an oval-shaped resonator, hollowed out from a piece of wood, with a hide, from which issues a neck as on a guitar, over which horsetail strings are stretched to a bridge on the resonator. The neck is a rounded stick, two strings are attached by leather strings and the banjo is tuned by raising or lowering the leather thongs on the neck. The strings are plucked by the finger nail of the thumb, fingers of the right hand, and we vary their finger-nails long for this purpose. Occasionally all the fingers are used to strike the resonator, as in fleming guitar-playing. The lowest strings are stopped with fingers of the left hand near the aid of frets. The three shorter strings are not stopped but are left 'open' and are plucked in a constant pitch.

The banjo is a native instrument of the Wolof culture - corresponding to the griot of the Hausa areas of northern Nigeria. They have sometimes been considered as possible predecessors of the American blues singers, but their role as vocal historians and commentators on tribal lore and custom would seem most closely to correspond to the Scandinavian tribal skald or Irish bard.

In this example a jewel tells a folk story, accompanying himself on the balsa. It is very conversational in tone - most of it in a kind of half-sung chant. The Arabic influence is very clearly marked in the nasal vocal sound, and the welling quality in the sung sections. There is also a harmonic sound in some of the cadence embellishments. The instrument is clearly accompanying a voice, without an independent role of its own, and it is tuned to an open chord. There is a pungent sound to the tone of the hide and the strings, and in the slight harmonic change in the strumming under the vocal there is almost a basic triad in the three open shorter strings.

This is a blues song, as in the previous example, performed by a single male singer accompanying himself on a stringed instrument. The differences are clearly evident - the blues performance more regularly pulsed and with clear bar line and harmonic patterns. Although it is a unique song form, with strong affinities to African vocal style and rhythm, it is most generally defined by its European characteristics, the number of bars in the verse - often 12, though there are many variations - and the use of a consistent I-IV-V harmonic pattern in one of a number of patterns. This is a widely used narrative verse form - the singer is J.D. Short, from Mississippi, but at the time of this recording living in St. Louis - with a tonic harmony under the first line of the refrain, 'Just waiting my time'.

The voice - heavy, resonant - has the sound of the coastal accents of the central slave coast, and there are intonations and rhythmic subtleties that are clearly outside the European tradition, but it is a hybrid form in which African elements are subordinated to European.

Band 11. United States - Blues. Waiting My Time

Recorded in St. Louis by Samuel Charters, from unissued material in the author's collection.

This is a blues song, as in the previous example, performed by a single male singer accompanying himself on a stringed instrument. The differences are clearly evident - the blues performance is more regularly pulsed and with clear bar line and harmonic patterns. Although it is a unique song form, with strong affinities to African vocal style and rhythm, it is most generally defined by its European characteristics, the number of bars in the verse - often 12, though there are many variations - and the use of a consistent I-IV-V harmonic pattern in one of a number of patterns. This is a widely used narrative verse form - the singer is J.D. Short, from Mississippi, but at the time of this recording living in St. Louis - with a tonic harmony under the first line of the refrain, 'Just waiting my time'.

The voice - heavy, resonant - has the sound of the coastal accents of the central slave coast, and there are intonations and rhythmic subtleties that are clearly outside the European tradition, but it is a hybrid form in which African elements are subordinated to European.

This is a performance by two Wolof professional musicians - the Wolof people, playing a traditional song on two slaves. It could almost be considered a fusion of the Arabic and the African cultures, as much of this music from the northern areas has been considered. It is, however, a fusion that goes back before the period of the American slave trade, and some of this music in the Arabic style came into the slave areas in the 17th and 18th centuries. It is a finger plucked style, with a hint of Arabic movement back and forth between a sub-dominant and a tonic chord. The two instruments sometimes both accent the rhythm, then shift away from it, often crossing in a pattern that can be roughly notated as:

Side C - SOME OTHER INSTRUMENTS

The Banjo

Band 1. Senegal. Wolof - Tara

This is a performance by two Wolof professional musicians - the Wolof people, playing a traditional song on two slaves. It could almost be considered a fusion of the Arabic and the African cultures, as much of this music from the northern areas has been considered. It is, however, a fusion that goes back before the period of the American slave trade, and some of this music in the Arabic style came into the slave areas in the 17th and 18th centuries. It is a finger plucked style, with a hint of Arabic movement back and forth between a sub-dominant and a tonic chord. The two instruments sometimes both accent the rhythm, then shift away from it, often crossing in a pattern that can be roughly notated as:

The Banjo

Band 2. Mali. Taureg - Minstrele

This is a performance by two musicians at Timbuktu - there is some degree of uniformity of pattern, so that a steady pulse is felt as a stress point at the beginning of each twelve unit phrase, but by the end of the phrase the stress has shifted away. There is also a slight change that suggests a repeated harmonic pattern through the performance.
From John Cohen's notes on the banjo selections he recorded in this area of eastern Kentucky, almost all of it within twenty miles of the town of Hazard:

"Most of the banjo players on this record know each other and have played together at various times. They generally use a two finger style of picking - alternating between thumb and forefinger. Generally the thumb picks out the melody. The first and fifth fingers serve for rhythmic punctuations and syncopations - or act as drones - repeating the same notes over and over. There appears to be a long tradition here of tunes which were played for dances and banjo contests in earlier years. Ask any local banjo player to play 'Huck and Line' - it is generally the first piece he learns. A great variety of banjo tunings are used - often there is a special tuning for a specific tune. Generally there is something extremely percussive in the style used here . . ."".

The sound of the Kentucky five-string banjo may be one of the most unusual correspondences between the music of Africa and the music of the Americas - for the performers are white, and often thought of as the most important source of traditional Anglo-American song and instrumental music in the United States. But no one has as yet studied their banjo music for its possible link to Africa. The songs sung with banjo accompaniment are often English, or usually folk songs associated with the United States or England. But what about the banjo playing itself? There is nothing in the English or American white musical background even vaguely like the mountain banjo playing, which was so completely different from the "proper" banjo techniques taught in music schools in the 19th Century. The only answer is that the tradition is black - and that it is from Africa. It is now generally agreed that the instruments descended from the stringed instruments of the northern or the savannah slave areas. As was pointed out by Curt Sachs years ago a similar instrument from Senegal was called the bania, so the name itself has an African background.

As to the playing style itself - listening to the examples from these older Kentucky traditions it seems very clear that under the superimposed harmonic elements and the European song style the banjo playing was very much influenced by the characteristics of percussive playing, or the playing of other related instruments from West Africa, such as the kora or the bania. The strings are plucked, rather than strummed; there is affixed pick or drone string, and as John Cohen noted, "generally there is something extremely percussive in the style . . ." It is, now, a mixture of many elements, but the African characteristics remain strongly present in these older styles. In this example there is harmonic movement - the chords change - but the harmonies are almost overwhelmed in the complexities of the inner voiced rhythms, and the scale itself is not purely diatonic. For some sections the rhythm is marked with a single stress, but between the melodic sections there are sections of almost pure rhythmic shifting.

Since there seems to be a definite correspondence in the music itself the last two questions are, 1. Does the music of the plucked string instruments of Africa exist in the United States? 2. If so, which? The second question is, also, yes. Until the guitar replaced the banjo as the dominant accompaniment instrument for black music in the United States - which took place not so long before the development of the commercial record industry - the banjo and the black musician were considered to be synonymous. The first minstrel companies - the first instance of young whites forming small musical groups to imitate performing black banjo playing, and it was a feature of the minstrel theatre for nearly a century. More directly, many of the older banjo players in Kentucky or Virginia today remember that they learned their music from a black banjo player.

In its truest sense these Kentucky musicians could be said to be carrying on the older tradition of singing and instrumental music in the area where they made their homes. They have, simply, preserved everything - even the black music that was part of this past. Along with English folk songs and ballads, African colonial courting songs, and the sentimental songs of the minstrel stage - they have also kept alive a music from Africa which has - now - almost completely been lost by the black man in America.

The performer in this example, Wase Ward, learned this piece from his brother, but as Eric Davidson noted, "Wase suspects this tune to have been of local Negro origin, but has never heard it played except by his brother." This is less complex than the previous example, with a kind of jig rhythm repeating over and over in the piece, with its

The melody is not purely diatonic, and there is an interesting shift in rhythm pattern from first 8 then 7 beat melodic units. The melody is a simple phrase that repeats over and over, like the kind of melodic phrases that are characteristic of this style of music in Africa.

Again the inner rhythms are very pronounced, and though there is a strong pulse there is continual shifting in vocal stress points. There is almost a drumming sound to the performance at many points. The singer is an older man, Roscoe Holcomb, from Davie, Kentucky, and John Cohen, who discovered and recorded Holcomb, has found that he had some familiarity with the blues styles of the 1930's.

This is not an instrument of the banjo family, but it is a plucking instrument, and is of the same or similar sound in repetitive inner rhythms, and the percussive sound of the plucking. The voice is more conversational, without the nasal melismatic ornament of the northern areas - which were more influenced by Arabic music.

Until the entrance of the voice this has somewhat the sound of Kentucky mountain clogging. Packard Okie, who recorded this example, did much work with the different tribal groups in Liberia. This performance is by a Bassa musician, who is one of the Loop Assanta. He is known as "Jeffly, a partially blind Bassa man, working near Gbanga, Central Province, assisted by another Bassa man, Bo. Jeffly sang and played a little, and assisted in the singing, and beat lightly on a chair with sticks.

"The harp has a triangular frame made of sticks. Small pieces of tin on a nail at one corner give a rattling sound. Half a gourd lashed tightly to another corner gives the resonance. The gourd is held against the stomach, and occasionally taken away during the playing. The 'sound' sound, there are six strings made of thin vine, tied through holes at one end, and tied around the stick at the other."

There is the dry, hard drumming sound in the thin strings, the repetitive plucking, the stringed instruments of the West African coast as showing their strong affinity to the music of the drums.

This is another of the many kinds of African lyre harps. This is an instrument called, in Donald Stone's note, "gusou. "The five strings of this instrument are stretched across an eight inch wooden arch which is attached to a section of gourd which serves as a soundboard. This instrument is now rather rare among the Faoule, and is used only for the musician's own amusement or as an adjunct to courting." This is a simple melody, two sequential phrases following each other in flowing repetitions without a break, the two phrases a semi-tone apart.
Band 9. *Mexico - Vera Cruz-style Harp*

Recorded in Zona, Mexico by Samuel Charters, from Folkways FW 6615

Although the performer is a Yaqui Indian he is playing a wooden harp from Vera Cruz - on Mexico's east coast - in a style considered indigenous to the area. During the Mexican government's attempts to disperse the Yaquis during the 1930's he was taken to Vera Cruz where he learned the music there. This part of Mexico had a large black population and the music has a strong African influence. Here there is a definite harmonic pattern, but the melody is two repetitive phrases, with some of the feeling of Example 8. The two phrases again follow each other in a flowing pattern, but the interval between them is a whole tone apart. The instrument was a hand made folk version of the standing European harp, but it was tuned away from a European scale.

THE XYLOPHONE

Band 10. *Iberia, Mbandiwo - Balafon*

The xylophone is another instrument, like the balafon, which seems to have a direct connection to its West Africa counterparts, Packard Okie describes the Mbandiwo balafon as having **17** strips of wood between 11 and 16 inches long, between one inch and an inch and one third. The twice and middle are thinned from the bottom in varying amounts for tuning and tending. The range is, roughly, from C up two and a third octaves to F flat. Under each strip is a spherical gourd between 5 and 6 inches in diameter. The whole instrument is lashed together with native string on a flexible bamboo frame three feet long. The player puts his instrument on the ground in front of him and uses two sticks with rubber heads. In this example the voice chants against the rhythms of two balafons, the phrases repeating behind the simple melody.

Band 11. *Jivoy Coast - Boule*

Folkways FW 4476

In this example a melodic unit is expressed in a dry, hard tone over and over again, and there is the same texton alter­nation in the simple sequences. From Donald Thurro's note, "Xylophone music has gone to the Boule from the north. The Boule xylophone is a crude affair of six graduated bars of very hard wood laid across two pieces of split banana trunk. They are strung by hard wooden sticks. The instrument is used principally to amuse oneself while resting from arduous field work...".

Band 12. *Mexico - Harp*

Folkways FW 6615

This is the fully developed xylophone, played by several musicians, the music completely European in structure. The sound, however, is the same as the African instruments from which it is derived, and the playing technique is also similar.

THE MUSICAL BOW

Band 13. *Iberia, Bassa - Musical Bow*

The bow is played by many tribal groups throughout the world, and it would be difficult to say that African bow music influenced American bow music. It could have been another element passed on to the Indians from slaves, or escaped slaves, but it is more likely that American Indians were playing the bow at an earlier period. In this example the African inflected speech patterns make it possible for the performer to tell a story as he plays.

From Packard Okie's note, "The player is Son Wish, from the deep interior of the Bassa area, near the Manc tribe. He recorded this song while working at Bromley on the St. Paul River, saving money to get a gun for his father and a wife for himself. The instrument is a piece of rattan, 30 inches long, the player's left hand held one end of the instrument and a short stick which varied the pitch as he pressed it against the vine. His right hand struck the vine with his fist. His head surrounded one end of the string, varying the resonance, coloring the tone, and making the instrument "talk."

Side D Done Examples

Band 1. *United States - Gospel Song - I Have Two Wings*

From EP 7, compiled by Samuel Charters

In each of these examples can be heard some aspect of the African musical background, as well as the intermingling with the European music that shaped and changed slave music. In this example there is a strong use of some of the most basic harmonic devices. The music has the strong emphasis of the off beats and the marked bar line of the typical revival song, but there is the responsive singing, the rhythmic handclapping, the unison chorale, and the same sound of the voices. The stress is more on a polyrhythmic texturing - but the phrase length is irregular and the guitar is being used as another element in the rhythm.

This performance by the Two Winged Temple, a small religious group in New Orleans, led by Rev. UH Smith.

Band 2. *United States - Blues Song - Saddlevale Blues*

Recorded in St. Louis by Samuel Charters, unissued material.

This example of the American country blues was recorded by the singer George Montgomery, known as "Daddy Notecase." Although the blues style seems to have little relationship to African music there is some of the same syncopation and the blues form, vocal tone and irregular rhythmic phrasing in the voice. Montgomery was a spontaneous performer - making up each song as he went along, which accounts for some of the freedom. At different points the voice and the guitar are intertwined as monodic units - with a beautiful use of the entire range of blues effects - at other times the guitar played a simple chorded accompaniment. The modern blues seems to be one of the anomalies of black music - it is the most characteristically black style in the United States, but it seems to have little clear correspondence to any musical forms yet found in Africa. Elements of the blues can be found in the work of the griots. Paul Oliver has found similarities in the playing techniques of the griots - professional musicians in the northern areas - and the blues musicians, but there is a complete music - voice and instrument - are markedly different.

Band 3. *Bahamas Islands - Dance Song - When A Man Marries His Troubles Duty Be Ina*

Recorded on Andros Island, the Bahamas, by Samuel Charters, from Folkways FW 2645

This has a little of the texturing of drum and melodic line that is also found in Africa's modern dance music, the "high-life" music of the cities. The percussion instruments - trumpets played by sponge fishermen who play only for festivals - cross in quasi-harmonies that lead to a shifting of the beat while there is inventive and busy drummer playing a tall leg drum. The regular rhythm of the African drum orchestra is carried on by the mandolin, played by the singer, but there are no drums. Like the modern jive and jazz, with its elements of improvisation and structuring of the performance.

Band 4. *United States - New Orleans Brass Band - Just a Little While To Stay Here*

Recorded in New Orleans by Samuel Charters, from Folkways FW 2643

With groups like the Eureka Brass Band - at the time of this recording the most important of the traditional brass bands still playing in New Orleans - the music is almost a complete hybrid. The general form of the playing in the modern brass band style from France, where different instrumen­tal groups alternate playing the melody, but the basic snare drumming is closer to English marching band techniques. But there are still subtle changes - the sudden bursts of more complex rhythm from the bass drummer - the shifts of stress in the trumpets and saxophones - the entire multi-layering of the melody. All of this gives the music a uniqueness that ties it in part - to a distinctly glimpsed African heritage.

Band 5. *United States - Gospel Group - He's a Friend of Mine*

From EP 7

Here the singing style itself - the sound of the voice - the use of melismatic embellishment is the element most directly relating back to the past. But there are still persistent rhythmic subtleties, despite the literalness of the harmonies - still the richer texturing of the voices, which seems to be reminiscent of the complex interweaving of rhythms in the drum orchestra.

Band 6. *United States - Jazz At The Philharmonic - Blues Part 1*

From Arch AA 3/4

In this jazz performance from the 1940's the strongest element is the texturing, from the basic lower pulse of the bass drum and the bass, the shifting accents in the piano, and the repetitive sequence with muting of the guitar. On other hand, African concepts have been expanded and developed - in melody and instrumental voicings - and on others the concepts have been drastically simplified. The harmonic form forces the single basic pulse limits the range of rhythmic shifting. But there is a sound - a sense of something different - the feeling that there is a different past - the voices of a different people, that is the legacy of African survivals in American music today.
SOME EARLY DOCUMENTS - 1.

In 1600 and 1601, working with archive materials in the Scottish Library in Edinburgh, the British Museum, and the New York Public Library, Ann Charters found considerable material relating to early African music, as well as black music in the southern states. There is a wealth of material still to be uncovered in these sources, and as more work is done with early documents it will be possible to construct a much clearer picture of the interrelationships between African and Afro-American music. The travelers along the slave coast were not musicians, but they were generally careful observers, and their descriptions of instruments are often detailed and clear. By comparing different descriptions of the same instrument it is possible to get some idea of its form, as well as differences in methods of construction among neighboring tribes. It isn’t possible to get any more than the vaguest sense of the music played from the descriptions, but the vague glimpse does show that many of the styles and instruments have survived to the present, though there have undoubtedly been many changes in musical forms and idioms in the centuries that have passed. Despite the difficulties that these travelers accounts present they are the only contemporary descriptions we have of African music at the height of the slave trade, so any study of African music in the Americas has to begin here.

These descriptions of music in the slave areas in the 17th and 18th Centuries - the period of the most active slave commerce - are taken from some of the following sources:


Cpt. Thomas Phillips, Abstract of a Voyage along the Coast of Guinea to Whidah, the Isle of St. Thomas, and thence to Barbadoes in 1693, London, 1697.

Godfrey Layrer, Voyage to Insini on the Gold Coast in 1701, Paris, 1714.

John Atkins, A Voyage to Guinea, Brazil and the West Indies in the 'Swallow' and 'Weymouth' Men Of War, 1721, London, 1735.

Chevalier des Marchais, A Voyage to Guinea and the Adjacent Islands, in 1725, Amsterdam, 1731.


From Labat’s description of what is now called Sierra Leone, a meeting with Arab traders:

"Several men armed quickly arrived, some on camels, others on horseback, preceded by a trumpet and a drum ... During the dinner their female District, or Musician, sung and played on an instrument made of a Kalabash, covered with red Parchment and fitted with twelve Strings, some of Silver and some of Wire, the sound of which was not unlike a Harp. This District was young, handsome, and her head adorned with many trinkets of Gold, Silver, Coral, and Amber ... ."

The word грiustr would seem to be an earlier spelling of the word griot, used to describe these musicians today. From Layrer’s account of the Guinea Coast in 1701:"

... During the Combat the Drums, Trumpets, and other Instruments in their way continually sound; which joined to the Cries of the Negroes, made a Noise louder than Thunder. Their drums are made of a Piece of Wood, hollowed at one End only, and covered with the Skin of an Elephant, tightly bound over the Mouth. Their sticks are two Pieces of Wood shaped like a Hammer, covered with Goat’s Hair, which give a dull, hoarse Sound.

"Their Drums are made of Elephants Teeth, hollowed almost to the End, at the Side of which they bore a small Hole, by which the Trumpeter, who is generally a Boy of twelve of fifteen, blows.

These Trumpets give a clear Sound, but without varying the Tone, like Cowherds Horns. To this ... they add an Instrument as remarkable for the Simplicity of its Construction, as it is hard to be described. It is of Iron, shaped like two small concave Fire-Shovels, about a Foot long, soldered together, and which forms a sort of oval Belly, They hold this Instrument by the small end, and with a Stick of half a foot long strikes on it according to the Cadence of the Drums and Trumpets, who are always near the General, while the Fight lasts ... ."

From Labat, "Their drums are hollow trunks of trees, covered at one end with a Sheep or Goat-skin well stretched. Sometimes they beat only, but others are provided with two sticks of different thickness and round heads. They are made of a hard, heavy wood, or Pine, or Ebony. They have Drums of different diameters and Lengths, to give different tones. There are as many five feet long, as the morality indicates its diameter. (All give a dead, stinking sound). This is their favorite instrument, and a constant companion in all their Feasts."

"The Mandingo drums," according to Moore, "are about a yard long, and about a foot or twenty inches diameter at Top, but less at the Bottom; made out of a solid piece of wood, and covered only at the widest end with a kid's skin. They beat upon them only with one stick and their left hand." Johnson says, "They make use of a little drum, which being held under the left Arm, is played with the fingers of that Hand, and with a crooked stick managed by his right."

The most common of the three instruments which Johnson saw among the Gambia Negroes was made with a great Goord for a Belly, at the Bottom of a long neck without Frets, having six strings and sets to wind them into Tune. This was the only instrument played on with their fingers. This instrument was often accompanied with the little drum above described. From Labat, "On the Coast, they have another Sort, fit for the Chamber of a sick person. It is a kind of Lute, made of a piece of hollow wood covered with leather, with two or three hair strings, and adorned with Iron plates and rings, like a Tambour de Basque."

There are many descriptions of the instrument known in Europe and America as the xylophone, generally with a name close to Xylophone, its present name in West Africa. Xylophone was welcomed with some music on this instrument, which at about one hundred yards distance sounded something like an organ. "It is composed of about twenty pipes of very hard wood, finely polished; gradually diminishing both in length and breadth, and tied together with thongs of very fine, thin leather. These thongs are twisted about small round wands and put between every pipe to make a small space. Underneath the pipes are fastened twelve or fourteen calabashes of different sizes, which have the same effect as organ-pipes."

Two voyagers to the Guinea Coast, Artus and Villaut, Villaut’s account titled, Voyage to the Coast of Africa and Guinea in 1666, both mention instruments like a guitar, or gittern. This could be one of the type of halam from the north, but it is probably a derivation of the Portuguese small gittern which was found in many parts of the coast. In this form called a Guitar, or a related word. A third traveler, Barbot, speaks of Basons, drums, blowing horns, snappers, such as boys use instead of castanets, and the six-stringed instrument, which he calls a Guitare. Villaut took notice only of three instruments, a kind of drum or tabor, a cane with several holes in it, like a flute, and the six stringed instrument, according to him, something like a Gittern.

Of the role of the musician in the society there seems to be considerable agreement, although there are differences in the name. "Those who play on the instruments are persons of a very singular character, and seem to be their poets as well as musicians, not unlike the Bards among the Irish and the ancient Britons. All the French authors, who describe the countries of the Johns and Fulls, call them Quirouts, but Johnson gives them the name of Audiges, which he interprets fiddlers. Perhaps the former is the Jaloif and Full name, the latter, the Mandingo."

The traveler Barbot says the Quirout, in the language of the Negroes toward the Sangahe, signifies Buffoon, and they are a sort of syncopist. The Kings and great men in the country keep each of them two, three, or more of these Quirouts to divert them, and entertain foreigners on occasion."

From Barbot. "The Guirots have the sole privilege of carrying the Clangue, or great long Drum-Royal, made of a fine goat-skin, whose sound is comparable to a Thunder, hangs about his neck and beats with small sticks, or with hands ... at other times, to divert their Masters, they have Timbrel after the Mandingo Fashion, made like flat ball-ballets, tied with strings of several small strings which they totter on one hand, or grasp with their fingers and beat upon it with the other ... . This drum is called Lomalne." From Jenkins, again on the Quirouts. "The Negroes are transported with the Elogies of the Quirouts and largely rec-
composing them... When they miss of their expected fees they fall a railing, and publish in the Villages as many base things as they invent against the person, contradicting whatever they had said good of him; which is locked upon to be the greatest Affectment imaginable."

From Johnson. "The fiddlers (pilgrims) are reckoned rich, and their wives have more crystal, blue stones, and beads about them than the king's wives... and it is remarkable that after all this fondness of yours, you lose upon the musician, the musician is held in great contempt and is denied their common Rite of Burial, instead of which the Corps is set upright in a hollow tree, and left there to rot. The reason they give for this treatment is, that these strangers came into their city with their devil, and the devil was a stranger to them."

"Labat agrees almost in everything with Johnson: He says that the greater part of the Negroes, especially the politer section of the society, considered the musicians as the most remarkable character, not only because, although being necessary Tools for their Pleasure, they do not show it while living: But as soon as they are dead, their contempt appears more serious, since they do not suffer the dead wives or children to put the corpses into the ground... the Drummers relations are forced to stick the carcass up in some hollow tree, there to remain till it be devoured by the wolves, or some other ravenous beasts."

(From Green's Collection)

SOME EARLY DOCUMENTS - 2

In the 19th Century, when there were still large numbers of African born slaves in the American South, there was considerable interest in black music. Again, as in the period of African exploration, almost all of the work of collecting and describing was done by non-musicians, usually travel writers or magazine writers. Some of the work done, however, is of considerable historical value. One of the best known of these articles is George Washington Cable's "An Early Summer in Congo," describing a dance in an open square in New Orleans before the Civil War. From his careful description of the instruments it is clear that at this point the link with Africa was very close. Even more remarkable is his familiarity with the tribes of the slave coast, and his ability to identify tribal characteristics among the dancers. Of all the things the black man and the black woman has lost in the process of the negroisation, perhaps the most tragic, since in Africa the tribe is the source of a man's identity, Cable's article is one of the most detailed from the period published in Cervantes' "Creole Slave Songs," both published in Century Magazine in 1866, gives us perhaps the best insight into the strength of the African culture still surviving in the South at this time.

Jeannette Robinson Murphy's article "The Survival of Africa Music in America," printed in Appleton's Popular Science Monthly, September, 1895, is less well known, but it was certainly the result of years of observation and some understanding of what she was hearing. Her sympathy for the religious aspect of some of the music, as well as her sensitivity to the beauty of the music, are felt in all of it, and she was one of the few people at this time to try to discuss the problem with a native African, a man from the Congo tribes living in New Orleans. In other articles and travelers' descriptions there is usually not much detail, but sometimes a paragraph or a short section will catch some spirit of the music. This selection is not intended to be comprehensive, but only to give some feeling of what the music of the African in America sounded like at this point when it was beginning to take on new styles and new forms in a hostile new world.

Slavery On Louisiana Sugar Plantations

V. Alton Moody

from Journal of the Louisiana Historical Society, 1924

Negro balls in general were spectacles worth beholding. Those of Louisiana Negroes when their customs were more pure and when superstition was more powerful were strange and weird. Dancing to the music of a drum made of cowhide stretched over the end of a barrel, they circled and swung each other in the spectacular dances until they were almost frenzied. When one set was exhausted others took their places and the dance went on. In dancing the "carousel" the man took his "danceuse" by the hand and whirled her rapidly and almost interminably while she waved her red handkerchief on high and sang over and over again some strange strain of a tribal song. While the object of his affections had become sufficiently enchanted she became excited and sang and waved her red handkerchief in company. She concluded by obligingly drying the perspiration from the face of her "danceuse" and, finally, from the faces of the musicians.

"(The custom of making a gala occasion out of the last sugar cane to be cut in a field)... when the hands reached the last rows left standing, the foreman, "commandeur," chose the tallest cane, and the bedder, "milleur," wound the last cane in triumph, waving colored handkerchiefs in the air, and singing as loud as they could. The procession went to the house of the negro, the milleur coinng to the canoe chosen, which was the only one left in the field uncult. Then the whole gang congregated around the spot, with the over-seer and the foreman, sang a blue song, tied it to the canoe, and, branching the knife in the air, sang to the canoe as if it were a person, and danced around it several times before cutting it. When this was done, all the laborers, men, women and children went to their empty cars, and the last cane in triumph, waving colored handkerchiefs in the air, and singing as loud as they could."

The phrase "milleur" is a corruption of the French miller, milleur, a miller, which is translated to mean "miller" or "mill worker," the same meaning as in English. The "milleur" is the master or overseer of the mill, and the last cane in triumph was brought to the mill, where it was cut, and the millers would then have a grand celebration, singing and dancing, while the millers would cut the cane and dance around it, singing as loud as they could.
trigitate channels which lead from Bull River to Beaufort. For the first hour the stroke oar was silenced, and the rest of the crew chattered. There was an evident embarrassment on account of the presence of a stranger white man. Seeing this, I guessed sleep, not a difficult task under the influence of the warm sun and monotonous clank of the oars in the row-locks. At length, after a moment's pause, which showed a spontaneous impulse, one of the men began a sort of high-girl chant upon the wooden sides of the vessel, which the others joined in a sort of continuous accompaniment of four or five words, ending with a cry mournful enough to have been of the expression of great pain. I have forgotten the words of the song; it was something about going to Jesus, I believe, but every time my thoughts go back to the Sea Islands, I see the intense, rapt face of my crew, the edges of their heads swaying, their whole bodies swaying to the time of the music, until the boat, which before had only crawled against the tide, swept along by the successive leaps which their strong arms gave to the oars, and the singers found their way back to the spiritual Africa through their song."

"Later I heard the responsive cry which came from some solitary black paddling slowly along with the tide."


The drums were very long, hollowed, often from a single piece of wood, open at one end and closed at the other, and of a goat skin, one is stretched across the other. One was large, the other much smaller. The tight skin heads were not held up to be struck; the drums were laid along on the turfs and the drummers beat them, and beat them on the head madly and fast, with slow vehemence on the great drum, and fiercely and rapidly on the small one. Sometimes an extra performer sat on the ground behind the larger drum, at its center, and beat upon the wooden sides of it with two sticks. The smaller drum was often made from a joint or two of very large bamboo, in the West Indies where such congo drums are so fine, and the wood used to be the origin of its name; for it was called the bamboula.

In stolen hours of night or the basking-hour of noon the black man contributed to fashion these rude instruments and others. The drummers, I say, beat the drums; the other musicians sat about them in an arc, cross-legged on the ground. One important instrument was a gourd proudly filled with pebbles or sand. A single strand of wire ran lengthwise of a bit of wooden board, sometimes a shallow box of thin wood, some eight inches long by four or five in width. The wire, were several joints of reed about a quarter of an inch in diameter and of graduated lengths. The performer, sitting cross-legged, held the board in both hands and plucked the ends of the reeds with his thumb-nails. The result was called music.

But the grand instrument at last, the first violin, as one might say, was the banjo. It had but four strings, not six; beware of the dictionary. It is not the "favorite musical instrument of the Negroes of the Southern States of America." Uncle Remus says truly that that is the fiddle; but for the true African dance, a dance not so much of legs and feet as of the upper half of the body, a sensuous, devilish thing tolerated only by Latin-American masters, there was wanted the dark inspiration of African drums and the banjo's thump and strum.

And then there was that long-drawn human cry of tremendous volume, richness, and resound, to which no instrument within their reach could make the faintest approach:

"En! pou la belle Layotte ma mourri nocent, Ouf nocent ma mourri!"

all the instruments silent while it rises and swells with mighty energy and dies away distantly, "Pou-la-ris-a!"—then the crash of savage drums, horns, and rattles —

"For the fair Layotte I must cry die! Yes, crazy I must die!"

To all this there was sometimes added a pant-pipe of but three reeds, made from single joints of the common brake cane, and called by English-speaking Negroes "the quills." One may even at this day hear the black lad, sauntering home at sunset behind a few cows that he has found near the edge of the cane-brake wherein he has cut his three quills, blowing and hoisting, over and over,

"Yes, goodly, very fine!" the cows respond.

But to show how far the art of playing the "quills" could be carried, I was shown, even as the West Indies, whence Congo was called the Congo, and the name was given by Mr. Krehbiel, musical critic of the New York Tribune, and got by him from a gentleman who heard it in Alabama.

Such was a full band. All the values of contrast that discords furnish must have been present. With whatever the conceit of ecstasy in maddening repetition, for of this the African can never have too much.

And yet there was entertaining variety. Where? In the dance! There was constant, exhilarating novelty — endless invention — in the turning, bowing, arm-swinging, posturing and leaping of the dancers. Here, there, everywhere, the music was changed to mere monotone. Monotone became subordinate to many striking qualities. The strain was wild. Its contact with French taste gave it often great tenderness of sentiment. It grew in fervor, and rose and sank, and rose again, with the play of emotion in the singers and dancers.

The Gathering

It was a weird one. The Negro of colonial Louisiana was a most grotesque figure. He was nearly naked. Often his neck and arms, thighs, shanks, and splay feet were shrunken, tough, sinewy like a monkey's. Sometimes it was scant diet and cruel labor that had made them so. Even the requirement of law was only that he should have not less than a barrel of corn — nothing else, -- a month, nor get more than thirty lashes to the twenty-four hours. The whole world was crueler those times than now; we must not judge them by our own.

Often the slave's attire was only a cotton shirt, or a pair of pantaloons hanging in indecent tatters to his naked hips. The houseman was well clad who had on as much as a coarse chemise and petticoat. To add a licone — a Madras handkerchief twisted into a turban — was high gentility, and the number of kercheses borne by one was the measure of absolute wealth. Some were rich in licones, especially those who served within the house, and pleased the mistress, or even the master — there were Bagars in those days. However, Congo Congos did not gather the house-servants so much as the "field-hands."

These came in troops. See them; wilder than gypsies; wilder than the Moors and Arabs whose strong blood and features one sees at a glance in so many of them; gangs — as they were called; gangs and gangs of them, from this and that and yonder; tall, quick-smart Negroes from Cape Verde, black as ebony, with intelligent, kindly eyes and long, straight, shapely noses; Mandingoos, from the Gambie River, lighter of color, of cruder form, and an expression that shows direct contemptuousness; shorter, swarmer, with eyes specially a shame, their nation the "merchants of Africa," dwelling in towns, industrious, thrifty, skilled in commerce and husbandry, and expert in the working of metals, even to silver and gold; and Poulards, playfully placid as "Poulards," — fat chickens, — of goodly stature, and with a perceptible rose tint in the cheeks; and Sosos, famous warriors, dexterous with the Ashkenzie, and in contrast to these, with small ears, thick eyebrows, bright eyes, flat, upturned noses, shining skin, wide mouths and white teeth, the Negroses of Guinea, true and unmixed, from the Cold Coast, the Slave Coast; and the Cape of Palm — not from the Grain Coast; the English had that trade. See them come! Popeos, Cotococles, Fidas, Secosos, Agwas, short, copper-colored Mires — what havoc the slavers did make! — and from inferior Africa others equally proud and warlike; fierce Nagoes and Fonds; tawny Assasses; Ibos, so light-colored that one could not tell them from mulattos but for their national tattooing; and the half-civilized and quick-witted but ferocious Arada, the original Voodoo worshipper. And how many more! For here come, also men and women from all that great Congo coast,

"Yes, goodly, very fine!" the cows respond.

"For the fair Layotte I must cry die! Yes, crazy I must die!"

To all this there was sometimes added a pant-pipe of but three reeds, made from single joints of the common brake cane, and called by English-speaking Negroes "the quills." One may even at this day hear the black lad, sauntering home at sunset behind a few cows that he has found near the edge of the cane-brake wherein he has cut his three quills, blowing and hoisting, over and over, —
Angola, Malagasy, Ambric, etc. -- small, good-natured, sprightly "boys," and gay galorous "gals," thick-lipped but not tattooed, chattering, chattering, gurgling, and guffawing as they go. And these are they for whom the dance and the place are named, the most numerous sort of Negro in the colonies, the Congos and Franz-Congos, and though servent-worn and drear, yet out the gentest and kindlest natures that came from Africa. Such was the company.

Among these Rosinals -- that is, native Africans -- there was, of course, an ever-growing number of Negroes who proudly called themselves Creole Negroes, born in America; (This brokerr use of the term is very common. The Creole "dialecut" is the broken English of the Creoles, while the Creole patois is the corrupt French, not of the Creoles, but rather of the former slave race in the country of the Creoles. So of Creole Negroes and Creole dances and songs.) And at the present time there is only here and there an old native African to be met with, vain of his singularity and truthfulness on his staff.

The Survival of African Music in America

Jeanette Robinson Murphy

Architects Popular Science Monthly, 1929

Fifty years from now, when every vestige of slavery has disappeared, and even its existence has become a fading memory, America, and probably Europe, will suddenly awake to the sad fact that we have irretrievably lost a veritable mine of wealth through our failure to appreciate and study from a musician's standpoint the beautiful African music, whose rich store will then have gone forever from our grasp.

During my childhood my observations were centered upon a few very old negroes who came directly from Africa, and upon many others whose parents were Africans born, and I early came to the conclusion, based on their authority, that the greater part of their music, their methods, their scale, their type of thought, their dancing, their patting of feet, their clapping of hands, their grappes and pantomime, and their gross superstitions came straight from Africa.

Some of their later songs, it is true, we must technically call "modified African," but how far the original African song elements have been altered, and why, or by whom, can only be settled by a careful comparison of the songs as sung among the natives of Africa, and the songs among which their modified ones are found today in the South. It must be determined in each case, and cannot be settled by any general theory or formula.

This question of the classification of African music has given rise to more or less discussion. It seems hardly just to call the genuine Negro songs "the folk songs of America." We are a conglomerate people, and no one race can claim a monopoly in this matter. English, Scotch, German, French, Italians, and others have brought their own music and their own folklore, and in each case it must be considered distinctly along with the nationalities that imported it. Why should not the same be true of the genuine Negro music? The stock is African, the ideas are African, the parent music is all African. The nature of civilization and religious fervor and Bible truth is entirely superficial. The African is under it all, and those who study him and his weird music at short range have no difficulty in recalling the savage conditions that caused it.

Were I to begin now the story of all the innumerable and tortured quavers of this beautiful music, I fear I should be able to do little toward imitating it; for it was only possible to catch the spirit of it and the reason of it all while my voice had the flexibility of childhood, and the influences of slavery were still potent factors in the daily life of the Negroes. I followed these old ex-slaves, who had passed away, in their tasks, listened to their crooning in their cabins, in the fields, and especially in their meeting houses, and again and again they assured me the tunes they sang came from Africa.

Possibly I have an unusual predilection for this imported African music, but to me some of the strange, weird, unnameable, barbaric melodies have a rude beauty and a charm beside which, as Cooper says -- "Italian trills are tame."

It is indeed hard to account for the strange misconceptions which prevail as to what really constitutes genuine African music. The "coon songs" which are so generally sung are base imitations. The white man does not live who can write a genuine Negro song. At home there used to be a rare old singer, an old Kentucky mammy, whom everybody loved. She once said: "Us ole heads use ter make 'em up on de spur of de moment, arter we wraise wid de Spirit an' done some workin' in Africa by our granddaddies. Dew was juv 'lliar songs."

These days days call 'em ballots, but in the ole days dew call 'em spirituals, and de Holy Spirit always called 'em tooden. Some say Moses Jesus taught 'em, and I'se 'seed 'em in start in meetin'. We all be at the "prayer house" de Lord's Day, and de white preacher he'd eplains de word and read whar Ezekiel done say -- "Dry bones gwin ter liv ergin"

And honey, de Lord would come a-shinin' thon de pages and revive dis ole nigger's heart, an' I'd jump up dar and den and holler and shout and sing an' pat, and dew would all cotch de words and dew 'd sing it to some old sistah song I'd heard 'em sing from Africa, and dey'd all take it up an' keep at it, an' keep a-saddin' to it, an' den it would be a spiritual. Dese spirituals an de best moans' music in de world, case day in de whole Bible sung out and out. Notes is good enough for you people, but us likes a mistery. Dese houngh heads ain't wuth killin', fur dew don't hear bout de bible nor de old hymns. Dew's completely spilled wit' a much white Bible. "Easy" was de big organ and de edication has done took all de Holy Spirit out en 'em, till day ain't no better wid de dances an' cuttin' up dan de white folks.

The Negru usually sang religious music at his work. He was often turned out of church for crossing his feet or singing a "coonsie song," which is a secular song, but he could steal all the chicken he wanted and never feel a grace. One of the most persistent families that the old slaves cherished was that they were the oppressed Israelites, that the Southerners were the cruel Egyptians, and the Canaan was freedom. Benvage was of course their slavery. They believed that some day the Red Sea would come in a sea of blood, which was verified in the civil war. In many of their songs they appropriate Bible prophecies and ideas to themselves. The song given is a characteristic one, illustrating many peculiarities; and if it did not come from Africa, where did it come from . . .

In regard to one song, at least, I have irrefragable proof of its African origin. Mrs. Jefferson Davis tells me her old nurse was a full-blooded African named Aunt Dinah. She would lovingly put her little charge to sleep with the doggerel "Paddin', Giddin."

Aunt Dinah would also sing it pleasingly when begging for a present. She would begin the supplication with hands clinched tight, and open them quickly at the last line. She declared that she always sang it in her younger days. In her home whenever she was asking a favor, but she was never able to tell the meaning of any part of it except the last line, the African of whites, and in her home, and it meant that all black races are born with wide-open pales ready and waiting for other peoples to pour rich gifts into them. This she translated in her epi, crude way: "Eber since I'm brown, my hand stands still!"

After a diligent search for a real live African, I have found an educated convert to Christianity, who has been absent only two years from the wilds of the west coast of Africa. In broken English he sang for me several songs sung by the savages of the native Mendi tribe. The tunes sounded much like songs I know, but I could not take them down during this interview. All the songs I sang he said seemed very familiar -- in certain portions especially so.

I was especially interested in the description he gave of a peculiar ceremony common among the wilder Bushmen and the Yellows tribe. My informant grew up and played with them a great deal when a child. He was among the dead before a young boy, they should consider an affront to the living -- an affront which they never forgive.

It is singular that among some of our Indian tribes a similar notion prevails. The friends meet around the corpse and exclaim, while they chant and sing and dance, in a high-pitched woe: "Why did you die? Were you too proud to stay with us? You thought yourself too good to stay with us. To what do you leave all your things? We don't want them! Take them with you if you are so stuck up; we'll bury them with you!"

They work themselves into a perfect fury, and one gets a whip and flogs the corpse until it is horribly mutilated. Then the few who have really been friends to the child in their crude way draw near and begin to sing:

"Anasa yi, Anasa papa," which this native African assured me sounded -- nearly as nearly as he could render it --

"Find out how mother is. Find out how father is."

The curious identity of the name for father in this African dialect and our own he could not explain.

Even while the relatives were thus speaking kindly to the departed child, others would come up with whips, and with blows spitefully exclaim: "Tell my father's sister I am happy. Speak to her for me."

They said, mocking the relatives for sending messages.

What better proof is required of the origin of the peculiar custom of the Negroes in our own Southland of sending communications by the dead? He also gave me new stories of Brother Conch,
and a tale of a rabbit and a pitch-man.

He says he has heard a savage tribe often sing to the beat of a peculiar drum, as they started to pillage and destroy a neighboring tribe, these words, which he could not translate:

"Zo, whine, whine,
Zo, bottom balleh.
Zo, whine, whine,
Zo, bottom balleh."

Some of the tribes are followers of Mohammed. After they have broken their fast, they sing this hymn to their God:

"Li li, o li li,
Moo moo dooc, zoo moo li."

I then sang for him a part of "Gawd bless dem Yankees, dey'll set me free," and when I came to the humming, which we all know is the marked peculiarity of the Negro singing, he stopped me and said, "Whenever you hum that way it means 'hush!' and among the tribes I have known it always comes in baby songs." He then sang this one, which a heathen woman used to sing to his little sister "Amber."

"Amber in a wa,
Kenny wah fenny ma,
Amber in a bamboo carr,
Amber eka wallow.
Us, um, um."

A rough translation of this means: "Amber, be quiet and I'll give you something. I'm not going to scold you. You be quiet, and so thank you. Hush, hush, hush!"


DONE FOUND DAT NEW HIDIN' PLACE

1. Who dat... yon-der dressed in white?...
   Must be de chillun ob de Is-ra-el-ite...
   Done found dat new hid-in' place!
   Who dat... yon-der dressed in red?
   Must be de chillun ob a Mos-ee led...
   Done found dat new hid-in' place!
   (Refrain)
   Done found dat new hid-in' place!
   Ise so gla-ad im done found dat new hid-in' place!

2. Who dat... yon-der dressed in black?
   Must be de neg'fers a-turn-in' back!
   Done found dat new hid-in' place!
   God don't talk like a nat-er-al man ----
   Talk so a sin-ner can a-un-ders-stand --
   Done found dat new hid-in' place!
   (Refrain)

3. Jes on-ly see lee-tle ba-by to-day...
   An-gel done drug her thoo de twelve pearly gates
   Done found dat new hid-in' place!
   Put-tin' ting what eb-ber I done...
   Was to git religion when I was young ---
   Done found dat new hid-in' place!
   (Refrain)

4. When I was down in E-gypt's land...
   Heard a sightly talkin' bout de promised land ----
   Done found dat new hid-in' place!
   And when we get on Ca-naan's shore...
   We'll shout and sing for eb-ber more ---
   Done found dat new hid-in' place!
   (Refrain)

MARY AND MARTHA HAD A CHAIN

1. Mary and Marthy had a chain
   Walk Jeru-s'lem jis like Job!
   An' a ev'-ry link was a Je-sus Na-ame!
   Walk Jeru-s'lem jis like Job!
   When I come ter die...
   (Refrain)
   I want ter be... read y';
   When I come ter die...
   Ownin' ter walk Jeru-s'lem jis like Job!

2. I tell you brederin', fur a fac! --
   Walk Jeru-s'lem jis like Job!
   If you eber leab de debbil you musn't turn back!
   Walk Jeru-s'lem jis like Job!
   (Refrain)

3. Some says Pe-ter and some says Paul --
   Walk Jeru-s'lem jis like Job!
   But dey ain't but one God saves us all --
   Walk Jeru-s'lem jis like Job!
   (Refrain)