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THE ANALYSIS OF GOSPEL DRUMMING:
ITS INFLUENCE ON LIVE PERFORMANCES OF SECULAR MUSIC

By
BRANDON PRIGG


A RECITAL PAPER

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Music in Commercial Percussion Performance
in the School of Music
of the College of Music and Performing Arts
Belmont University

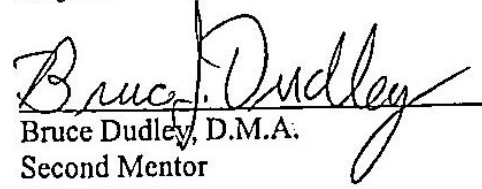
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

NOVEMBER 2021


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Recital Program

1. “Hold to God’s Unchanging Hand” Wilson
Composed in 1906
2. “When the Battle Is Over” Hawkins
Recorded in 1993 featuring drummer Joel Smith
3. “The Blood Will Never Lose Its Power” Crouch
Recorded in 1962 featuring drummer Bill Maxwell
4. “This Is the Day” Hammond
Recorded in 2006 featuring drummer Calvin Rodgers
5. “Bless the Lord” Tribbett
Recorded in 2006 featuring drummer George “Spanky” McCurdy
6. “Rock Your Body/Can’t Stop the Feeling Medley” Timberlake
Performed in 2016 featuring drummer Brian Fraiser- Moore
7. “Caught Up” Usher
Performed in 2012 featuring drummer Aaron Spears
8. “Just Dance” Gaga
Performed in 2017 featuring drummer Chris Johnson
9. “Never Be the Same” Cabello
Performed in 2019 featuring drummer Chris Johnson
10. “Not the End of the World” Perry
Arrangement by Nick Huff featuring drummer Brandon Prigg

Acknowledgements

My journey as a musician and a student could not have been possible without the support of my family, friends, and mentors along the way. I would first like to thank God for giving me the gift of music and allowing me to affect so many people in a positive way through my playing. I would also like to thank Him for covering me and keeping me in my right mind through the difficult seasons of my musical and educational career.

I would like to thank my family for always supporting my pursuit of being a professional musician. All the shows and recitals they have attended is greatly appreciated. I especially want to thank my father, Dr. Benson Prigg, for helping me through the process of writing this paper and pushing me to produce thorough work.

Thank you to Dr. Lamon Lawhorn for his willingness to give me advice on how I should go about my research pertaining to this topic. I also want to thank my committee team: Mr. Todd London, Dr. Bruce Dudley, and Dr. Peter Lamothe. Thank you for your guidance and wisdom through this writing process. I am grateful for your ability to challenge my thinking and perspective on certain concepts in the paper, which has given me a deeper understanding and appreciation for gospel drumming.

Introduction

On May 19, 2015, I was driving with some musician friends to Nashville to attend a concert. During the car ride, I was asked what my thesis topic would be if I pursued a master's degree in drumming. I answered that it would be about gospel drumming. As a drummer, gospel music has played a vital role in my journey as a musician. The hands-on training that I was afforded at my local churches allowed me to hone my craft as a drummer at an early age.

For years, gospel music is essential to the fabric of American music. The soulful harmony, energetic experience, and spontaneity of the genre have been admired and replicated in other genres. The purpose of this analysis was to explore the development of gospel drumming and how it has influenced drumming in American secular genres. This paper will explore the historical timeline of gospel drumming starting from its Western African roots. The role of the drums in Africa were differentiated depending on the situation in which they were used. In some contexts, the drums were used as a communicative tool to relay certain messages. In other instances, the drums were used for accompaniment during tribal rituals. The drums, and music in general, were embedded in the daily activities of African culture and their function was to make the rhythm of daily living more manageable.

Next, this paper will discuss how gospel music was formed during the slave era in the early 1700s in the United States. Gospel music was the result of the intertwining of African culture and Western European culture. While drums were stripped away from

enslaved Africans, the way music was used still transferred over when being enslaved. Music like work songs, spirituals, and ring shouts were used as tools to get through very hard times. The journey of African American slaves trying to find their collective voice musically and spiritually, despite the oppression they experienced, is what birthed the sound of gospel.

The historical development of the Black church will be discussed in this paper. The focus will be on how Black Christians tried to find spiritual truth beyond the oppressive narrative that was given to them by White missionaries and slave owners. In light of the fact that Black Christians were taught a purely Eurocentric perspective of how a church service should be conducted, churches struggled for many years to debunk the learned perspective that drums were devilish and should not have been permitted in houses of worship. This paper will also talk about how gospel composers and artists such as Thomas Dorsey, Edwin and Walter Hawkins helped the progression of gospel music, making it more innovative and relatable to people outside the church. These innovative efforts helped drummers such as Joel Smith set up the building blocks for contemporary gospel drumming.

An analysis of gospel drumming will be through examples of transcriptions and interviews. This paper will show how the progression of gospel drumming developed from a simple approach to virtuosic through music concepts such as linear drumming. Certain songs that were performed in my recital show the evolution within gospel drumming.

Finally, I will discuss how gospel drumming has played a prominent role in the live performances of secular music. Based on information gathered from interviews with

well-known gospel- influenced drummers, their transition from playing gospel to playing secular music will be discussed. I will talk about how being brought up in church prepared them for a larger platform in the secular music industry. The transcriptions used in this paper will display their use of linear fills and how they influenced their playing when performing for secular artists.

In the academic world, there are a plethora of scholarly sources that touch on the topic of gospel music at large. However, in my research, I have only been able to find two scholarly sources that talk about gospel drumming specifically. Considering the importance of this topic as one that is worthy of further discussion in academia, it is the author's hope that this paper will expand the available literature by contributing significant insight into gospel drumming.

Chapter One: The Origin

The style of gospel drumming has become an admired art form within music, specifically in the drumming community. The aggressiveness, virtuosity, and creativity in gospel drumming are key elements that have made gospel drumming attractive to the secular music industry. The term *gospel chops* has been used within the drumming community to label drummers who have a gospel-influenced drumming style. The main question circulated among drummers that has yet to be answered is this: what elements make up the sound or rhythm of gospel drumming? In order to answer this question, one must trace the origins of gospel music and gospel drumming back to Africa, specifically West Africa.

During the early 1800s, some of the first European visitors to the continent discovered something unique throughout sub-Saharan Africa (Darden 2004, 13). They found that even though cultural elements such as food and architecture differed from one African ethnic group to another, different groups were connected by the elements of music and dance. Author Robert Darden explains how music and religious practices were intertwined. The biggest difference between African and Western European music is the functionality of African music. The music in the African culture was more related to everyday living than its European counterpart. Music was used to make the work of the day better (Darden 2004, 18). It was for this reason that music was embedded within the culture of Africa. There was no segregation of religious and secular arenas, so music was purposeful and aesthetic in Western Africa. In contrast to Western Africa, in Western

European culture, music functioned more often as a sonic aesthetic to appease the listener.

Another main difference in Western European music and African music was the rhythmic melodic structure. The backbone of African music was rhythmic tension. Darden sheds light on how within Western European music, the accents of the melody go along with the metronomic time. In African music, that is not the case. The melody is rhythmically free and is not submitted to the metronomic time (Darden 2004, 23). When breaking down the structure of African rhythms, there is some sort of percussion that plays the role of establishing a consistent metronomic pulse while the other musical elements have rhythmic freedom.

An example of African rhythmic structure is Agbekor. Agbekor is a war dance that comes from the Ewe tribe located on the coast of West Africa (Agawu 2006, 1). Example 1.1 shows how this dance is accompanied by a percussion ensemble. On the top of Example 1.1, the pattern played by the *gankogui* (double cowbell) is considered the standard rhythmic pattern in West African rhythms. In this example, the *gankogui* is playing the role of the consistent pulse while the other instruments have rhythmic freedom.

Example 1.1 Agbekor West African War Dance Rhythm (Agawu 2006, 2).

$\text{♩} = 104$

Gakogui (Bell)

Axatse (Rattle)

Kagan (Drum)

Totodzi (Drum)

Kroboto (Drum)

Kidi (Drum)

Atsimevu (Lead drum)

3

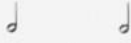
The music of Africa has been known for its complex rhythms. The core of the musical framework is rhythmic. The song structure of African music can lack melodic


sophistication as long as there is sophistication within the rhythms, because African people gravitate toward rhythmic rather than melodic complexity (Nketia 1974, 125). Although there is an admiration of complex rhythms within African culture, not all rhythms within African music are complex. Depending on the function of the music, instrumental rhythms can be orchestrated to a strict time. Ethnomusicologist and composer J. H. Kwabena Nketia expounds on the idea of rhythmic variations within a strict time frame. He created two tables that show the different subdivisions when dividing the rhythmic patterns to be equal numbers within each pulse density (Nketia 1974, 126).


Figure 1.1 Pulse Density Table (Nketia 1974, 126).


A. *Two and multiples of two: two, four, eight, or sixteen pulses, as shown below.*

Example XII-1

a. 2 pulses 


b. 4 pulses 

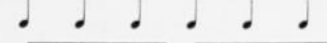
c. 8 pulses 


d. 16 pulses 


B. *Three and multiples of three: three, six, twelve, or twenty-four pulses, as shown below.*

Example XII-2

a. 3 pulses 

b. 6 pulses 

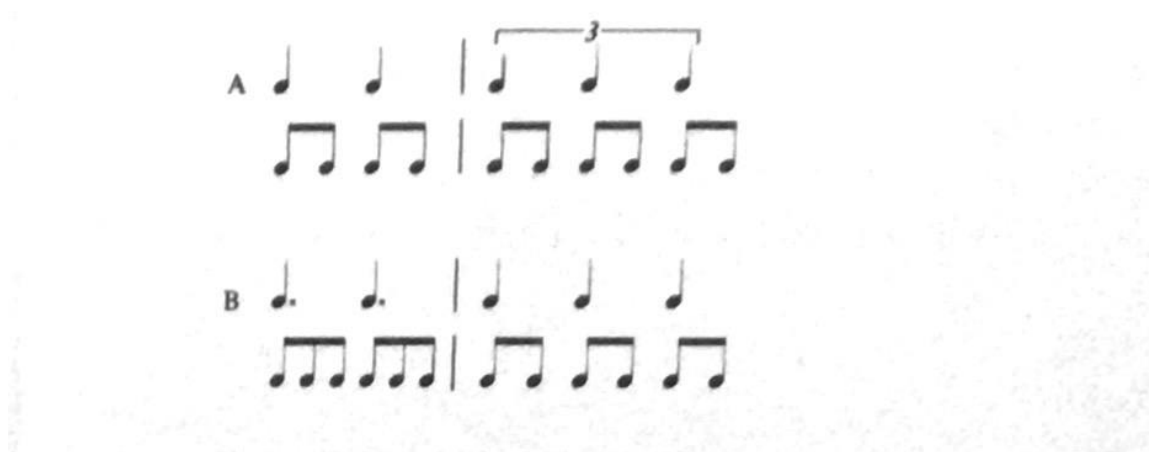
c. 12 pulses 

d. 24 pulses 

As shown in Figure 1.2, there is a pulse hierarchy in which the greater the subdivision, the faster the rhythmic motion. The slower pulses (pulses a. and b. in both tables) would usually function to help guide performers when dancing and singing to the

instrumental rhythms. Additionally, the slower pulses were played through body movements such as hand clapping (Nketia 1974, 126). The pulses that have more subdivisions are considered the framework for melodic and percussive rhythms (Nketia 1974, 127). The subdivisions in Figure 1.2 that deal with two and multiples of two as well as three and multiples of three can also be called duple and triple rhythm. In most cases, these subdivisions stay true in aligning rhythmically to the overall rhythmic framework of duple and triple rhythm; however, this is not always the case. In some instances, the subdivisions combine duple and triple rhythm where the two pulse structures alternate from section to section (Nketia 1974, 127). Nketia refers to this pulse structure as a hemiola as shown in Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.2. Hemiola (Nketia 1974, 128).



The formation of rhythmic patterns can be described in two types: divisive rhythms and additive rhythms. Divisive rhythms are those that function within the pulse structure by emphasizing the big beats of a particular structure (duple, triple, or hemiola) (Nketia 1974, 128). They also are constructed through the combination of the various pulse structures as shown in Figure 1.4.

Figure 1.3. Divisive Rhythms (Nketia 1974, 129).



Additive rhythms are not limited to the duple, triple, and hemiola structures. The note value of these rhythms allows them to transcend the rhythmic framework of these different structures. For example, if there was subdivision within one of the structures that equaled twelve beats in total, normally the rhythmic pattern would be divided evenly as 6+6. Unlike divisive rhythms, additive rhythms divide unequally such as 7+5 or 5+7. The implementation of additive rhythms forms the core of African music.

Figure 1.4 Additive Rhythms (Nketia 1974, 129)



The most common trait apparent in both African American spirituals and African music is rhythm. The role played by music in the daily lives of West African slaves in the Americas was much the same as it was in their native land. The concept of additive rhythms still played an important role in how music was used to accompany religious practices, such as a ring shout. A ring shout was defined by faster-paced music that was accompanied by various body percussion sounds such as hand claps and foot stomps (Gates 2021, 28:46). As slaves worked to become acclimated to the English language, how they sung certain words also contributed to the polyrhythmic nature that was present in the Negro spirituals (Trice 1994, 17). The language barrier led to them stressing certain lyric syllables on the weaker beats rather than the strong beats of the rhythmic framework. Dr. Patricia Trice gives an example of this framework. If the spiritual “Nobody Knows de Trouble I See” is sung in a 2/4 meter, the second syllable of no-BOD-y would be stressed (17).

Studies have shown how African music has been a launching pad for not only gospel in particular but also for African American music in general. There was a study in

which two musicologists, Alan Lomax and Victor Grauer, created an analytical system called cantometrics. Cantometrics allowed someone who was trained in music analysis to study scores and find cultural similarities and origins of the music based on musical characteristics (Darden 2004, 14). This system of cantometrics led Lomax to the conclusion that “Africa, centering around the style of Equatorial Africa, is seen to be the most homogeneous song style area in the world” (Darden 2004, 14). When studying the musical characteristics of gospel music, specifically gospel drumming, the strong relationship between rhythmic structure of African music and African American gospel music is undeniable. According to Lomax and cantometrics, “the main traditions of Afro-American song, especially of the old-time congregational spirit, are derived from the main African song style model” (Darden 2004, 14).

Chapter Two: The Birth of Gospel Music

During the Atlantic slave trade, primarily West African ethnic groups were traded to Europeans for goods, which were usually guns. The Atlantic slave trade covered territories from modern Senegal through southern Angola (Darden 2004, 21). Although far from their native land, many West Africans brought their spiritual and musical culture to America. Although there were many different ethnic groups within West Africa, they were unified by many musical similarities, such as the polyrhythmic elements explained in the previous chapter. They also brought a collective, cultural rhythm that was separate from the rhythm in the music. A cultural rhythm can be defined as one made up of the rhythms of a people to create a single rhythm associated with that group by those outside the group. This cultural rhythm is played out in the rhythms of the actual music. Drums played a major role in expressing the cultural rhythm. When the drums were taken from the enslaved Africans, they found other means to release their rhythm: hands, feet, and voice. In the early days of slavery, slave owners recognized the importance of the use of drums within African culture. They realized that drums were used as a communicative tool. Out of dominance and fear of rebellion, slave owners stripped away the drums along with the rest of the enslaved Africans' cultural identity (Dunn and Marsh 1997, 6:00-14:50).

Spirituals began to play a prominent role in the worship style of African American slaves between 1750 and 1777 (Wise 2002, 11). Spirituals were the genesis of the integration of African musical culture and the aesthetics of European music

(Mohammed 2020, 1). While the African American church was evolving, there was an agenda among White missionaries and slave owners to convert African slaves to Westernized Christianity as a device to make slaves more submissive to their owners (Gates 2021, 16:20). This fusion between the two groups created a unique dichotomy between White American and African American cultures. The result of the blending of these two cultures became evident as the African American church evolved musically, with the Western Eurocentric view of appropriate worship styles becoming entrenched in the African American church experience.

Between 1780 and 1830, enslaved Africans were introduced to the art of singing European hymns. While the intention of some White Christians to require only hymns may have been well-meaning, the actual impact on African Americans was that it made them submissive to a more Westernized way of worship (Wise 2002, 12). This caused African American Christians to shun African-oriented forms of music and worship. Shortly after the American Revolution, approximately one hundred thousand enslaved African Americans gained their freedom in the North (Darden 2004, 35). Despite the large number of African Americans, European Americans still expressed racial distain for African Americans that spilled over into the religious world (Darden 2004, 36). Various Christian denominations did not recognize African Americans as full members of their church. The integration of African Americans in predominantly White congregations was very limited. They would seat African Americans in back corners and balconies of the church (Darden 2004, 37). As more African Americans started to accept the Christian faith, a preacher named Richard Allen made it his mission to integrate African American Christians within churches.

Richard Allen was the first African American ordained minister in the United States. In 1786, he was asked to pastor the congregation at St. George's Methodist Episcopal, which was an interracial church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Darden 2004, 37). His primary goal was to increase African American membership, which he successfully increased from two members to forty-two members (Darden 2004, 37). Although membership grew, Allen realized that African Americans were still being treated poorly within the predominantly White Methodist Episcopal congregation. To solve this issue, Allen wanted to start a separate church that catered to his demographic. While there was a great deal of push back from white officials, Allen was eventually successful in founding the first African Episcopal church, St. Thomas African Church of Philadelphia. This church was dedicated on July 17, 1794 (Darden 2004, 37).

With St. Thomas Church being affiliated with its white sister church, the St. George Methodist Episcopal Church, Allen noticed how the church's religious rituals were packaged in Eurocentric fashion. From the lyrical content to the musical style, the religious music did not reflect the culture of Allen's congregation. With this realization, Allen went on to develop the first African American hymnal in 1801, called *A Collection of Spiritual Songs and Hymns Selected from Various Authors by Richard Allen, African Minister* (Darden 2004, 40). This hymnal did not have musical notation in it; additionally, the lyrics were inspired through other hymns written by composers within the Baptist denomination (Darden 2004, 40). Musical characteristics such as call and response, chants, moaning, and improvising present in this hymnal seem to be a direct reflection of West African music (Darden 2004, 41).

As stated in the previous chapter, music was used for functionality within the life of enslaved African Americans. Outside of spirituals, they also sang work songs and ring shouts. Musically, these practices may have sounded similar, but their functions were different. According to Robert Darden, work songs were musical customs that derived directly from Africa. They were also the essential to the rise of spirituals (Darden 2004, 43). While African American slaves were doing strenuous tasks in the field, work songs served to make the work more tolerable. Some of the work songs were aligned rhythmically to how their bodies would move to complete their various tasks. The rhythm of the music seemed to align with the cultural rhythm of the enslaved. It did not matter if the music was for secular or religious purposes. The typical format of work songs was call and response; a format used in spirituals. Work songs were not always religious songs, but they were at times (Darden 2004, 44). Ring shouts were another musical custom that came directly from Africa. They were the combination of singing, dancing, and being filled with the Holy Spirit (Gates 2021, 13:23). Ring shouts often took place in the praise house where the slaves would dance and sing in a circle formation (Darden 2004, 45). The ring shout would become one of the most essential elements of the worship experience within the African American church.

Rhythmically, spirituals were usually in a duple meter counted in either two or four. Similar to the Ewe war dance, there was dancing (holy dancing) during the performance of spirituals. The dancing was accompanied by polyrhythmic layering of foot stomping and hand clapping as well as other percussion (bones, washboard) that displayed rhythmic freedom (Graham 2018, 10-11). This is where the aesthetics of West African rhythms began to show up within the fusion of African culture and Western

European music. The main musical trait of spirituals was syncopation (Stewart 1998, 23). The lyrics would be sung in a way in which the weak pulse would be emphasized over the strong pulse (Stewart 1998, 9). One spiritual that exemplifies this syncopation is “Go Down Moses.” In the Figure 2.1, “down” and the second syllable of “Mo-ses” both noticeably emphasize weaker beats (Stewart 1998, 23).

Figure 2.1. “Go Down Moses” (Stewart 1998, 24).

The musical score for "Go Down Moses" is presented in three staves. The first staff begins with the tempo marking "Slowly (with majestic impulses)" and a dynamic marking of *f*. The melody starts with a whole rest, followed by a half note on G4, a dotted half note on F4, and a half note on E4. The lyrics "Go down Mos - es" are aligned with these notes. The second staff starts at measure 5 with a melisma over the word "down" and continues with "in E - gypt land, Tell ole". The third staff starts at measure 8 with a melisma over "Pha - raoh," and continues with "To let my peo-ple go." The tempo marking *rit.* is placed above the first measure of the third staff, and *a tempo* is placed above the second measure.

Spirituals paved the pathway for gospel music to take root. Gospel music reflected African American Christians trying to find their voice within various Protestant denominations. At first, African American slaves rejected the Christian faith because of the oppressive narrative that came from the White slave masters in their efforts to subjugate African Americans to Eurocentric ideas of Christianity. The slave masters would omit certain stories from the Bible such as Moses freeing the people of Israel from Egyptian captivity. The reason for omitting the stories was so the African American

would not feel liberated by these stories and plan to revolt against them. Even in their attempts to hide truth from the enslaved, the slaves had an awakening to Biblical truth. Spirituals were the product of the reconciliation between African Americans and the Christian faith.

Chapter 3: Gospel Chops

While the African American church was evolving, White missionaries and slave owners worked an agenda to convert African slaves to Westernized Christianity as a device to make slaves more submissive to their owners (Gates 2021, 16:20). The Papal Bulls were edicts which served as the religious sanction to colonize, convert and enslave indigenous people in “discovered” land by colonizers (Pope Nicholas 1452, 194-196, 1454 71-75; Pope Callistus 1456, 33-34). If conversion to Western Christianity was impossible, the indigenous people could be conquered, enslaved, killed and the colonizers would have absolution, or the “formal release from guilt, obligation, or punishment” (Pope Nicholas 1452, 194-196, 1454 71-75; Pope Callistus 1456, 33-34). Hence, the merger of Western Christianity and indigenous religion was indeed tenuous at best. However, when indigenous people became part of a legally sanctioned human trafficking scheme known as the Atlantic Slave Trade, enslaved Africans had to adapt to their new environment in order to survive. This called for the creation of a new cultural rhythm.

The result of the blending of European American and African American cultures became evident as the African American church evolved musically with the Western Eurocentric view of appropriate worship styles becoming entrenched in the African American church experience. Between 1780 and 1830, there was a Christian revival (The Second Great Awakening) that resulted in African Americans being introduced to the art of singing European hymns, also known as hymnody (Wise 2002, 12)

It was not until the early 1900s that gospel music started to embrace its African roots within the African American church (Lawhorn 2015, 1).

There were various ways in which gospel music started to take shape. Two of those styles were solo and quartet gospel (Stewart 1998, 70). Quartet gospel became popular in the 1920s and 1930s. During that time, quartet groups consisted of mainly male a cappella groups with four male vocalists (Stewart 1998, 71). The music consisted of hymns and jubilee songs. Jubilee songs were Negro folk songs of celebration which were accompanied by percussive effects such as hand clapping (Stewart 1998, 71). The solo gospel style was based on African vocality such as moans and hollers, as well as blues idioms that were introduced through Thomas Dorsey (Stewart 1998, 70). Thomas Dorsey, who was considered the father of gospel music, arrived on the gospel scene and began to change the sound of gospel music. Since Dorsey was a new convert to the Christian faith, he incorporated blues heavily into his gospel compositions (Darden 2004, 168). Lyrically, Dorsey appealed to not only people in the church but also people outside of the church. His music was authentic, evident through the depiction of the difficulties he was going through in his spiritual walk (Darden, 168). Dorsey's efforts to change a hymn-like narrative of a distant God to God as a more loving Father changed the trajectory of the creation and reception of gospel music. Solo gospel singing became popular in the 1930s and 1940s through gospel artists like Mahalia Jackson and Rosetta Tharpe (Stewart 1998, 71).

Another important shift took place in terms of percussion. The drum set and other electric instruments emerged in the African American worship service between the 1960s and 1970s (Lawhorn 2015, 14). Although the African American worship style was

evolving, drums were demonized in the church prior to the 1970s. Secular music was viewed as worldly and ungodly, providing a negative view of the drum in Eurocentric forms of worship. The negative view of the use of drums in the African American church was a residual effect of the Westernized perspective of Christian worship. While the drums and other electric instruments (bass and guitar) were not being used in the church, these instruments were being used in secular music venues.

Edwin Hawkins, along with Thomas Dorsey, was known for bridging the gap between gospel and secular music. Hawkins music, which was accomplished by the incorporation of soul jazz and R&B elements into gospel, made choir music more accessible for the secular world of America to hear through different platforms like radio stations. In 1967, Hawkins, along with his friend Betty Wright, co-founded a choir in Oakland, California called the Northern California State Youth Choir (Darden 2004, 274). Later, in 1969, they recorded an album called *Let Us Go into the House of the Lord*. Surprisingly, the popularity of this album did not come from the church but through secular radio stations. Their music began to be played in clubs which raised an uproar within the church, resulting in the church shunning this body of work (Darden 2004, 275). The music had rhythmic elements that resembled the Brazilian style such as bossa in certain songs such as “Oh Happy Day” and “Jesus, Lover of my Soul” (Darden 2004, 275). Walter Hawkins, Edwin’s brother, later took his choir, Love Alive, and recorded their first album *Love Alive* which featured his wife Tremaine Hawkins and his brother Edwin (Darden 2004, 276). The success that this album achieved helped make gospel choir music (and thus gospel music in general) popular in the secular music industry. The

efforts of the Hawkins family to make gospel music popular helped drummer Joel Smith pave the way for contemporary gospel drumming.

In the 1970s during the early stages of the emergence of the drum set in gospel music, Joel Smith was one of the first drummers to emerge on the gospel scene (Lawhorn 2015, 14). Smith played on most of the music by the Hawkins family and was considered one of the pioneers of contemporary gospel drumming. With the help of the Hawkins family, his incorporation of jazz drumming elements within his playing changed the rhythmic texture of gospel music (Lawhorn 2015, 14). Another drummer that paved the way for contemporary gospel drumming was Bill Maxwell. Maxwell played drums for Andrae Crouch. Crouch was also considered a prolific gospel artist in the 1970s. Some of his music, like his first single “Christian People,” was released on a secular label called Liberty Records (Cusic 2012, 249). Maxwell helped mold the sound of Andrae Crouch not only through his work as a drummer but as a producer as well (Lawhorn 2015, 15). He was one of the first gospel drummers to gain producer credits (Lawhorn 2015, 15). As a drummer, Maxwell was known for his simplicity in holding down the pocket, or rhythmic foundation, of the song. During the 1960s and 1970s, gospel music was written in such a way that the lyrics of the music were the focal point rather than the band. This made the band, especially the drummer, play a supporting role as accompanists rather than letting their musical abilities become the center of attention.

During the late 1980s, drummers started to add more flair around the drum set. Drummers such as Calvin Rodgers and Gerald Heyward were influenced by fusion drummers Dave Weckl and Vinnie Colaiuta (Lawhorn 2015, 18). Fusion music is the blending of multiple genres to create a unique fusion sound; common fusion genres

include jazz fusion, funk fusion, rock fusion. Rodger's and Heyward's ability to intertwine their gospel roots with fusion drumming styles formed the genesis of the sounds of contemporary gospel drumming. Drum rudiments are the combination of different rhythmic patterns that serve as the foundation of the language of drumming. In the drumming community, gospel drummers were becoming acknowledged for their incorporation of various drum rudiments. Rodgers was known for his use of the drum rudiment called the paradiddle diddle, which was a paradiddle with an extra diddle at the end (right hand, left hand, right hand, right hand, left hand, left hand).

Figure 7. Paradiddle diddle



Rodgers discovered the application of this rudiment by listening to Dave Weckl. The way Rodgers tailored the rudiment to his sound was by adding an extra diddle on the kick drum right before playing the rudiment with his hands (Sweetwater 2021, 2:49). This specific application is called linear drumming. Linear drumming is when the sticking of a rudiment is separated between the hands and feet with no two limbs playing simultaneously. Linear drumming became very popular in the gospel industry as well as the local African American church.

In 2005, Gerald Forrest developed a website called Gospelchops.com. The platform was created to showcase gospel drummers and mainstream drummers that had a gospel background (Lawhorn 2015, 2). Most of the videos on Gospelchops.com showcased drummers in shed sessions. Shed sessions were musical events where musicians in the community would congregate together and trade fours (soloing every

four bars between two or more musicians), sharing different musical ideas. Shed sessions were designed to help push drummers to think creatively on the spot and to build their improvisational skills. In a shed session, someone in the drumming circle plays the role of the timekeeper, which allows the other drummers the freedom to venture out rhythmically. However, the Gospelchops.com videos gave non-gospel musicians a limited perspective on gospel drumming. The label of “gospel chops” began to be applied whenever very fast sixteenth, or thirty-second note groupings could be heard played around the drum set. Over time, “gospel chops” became a term used to label gospel drummers or African American drummers in general who displayed speed around the drums. While the intentions of Gospelchops.com were good, some would say that it pigeonholed gospel drummers because of the limited perspective of gospel drumming that it offered to non-gospel drummers.

The narrative that gospel drummers are known for their aggressiveness and speed has poorly represented the diversity of their playing. While aggressiveness and speed are parts of the sound of a gospel drummer, they form only the tip of the iceberg. The sound of the gospel drummer is deeply rooted in supporting choirs, praise teams, soloists, and church services overall (Stadnicki 2012, 17). According to Daniel Stadnicki, two important traits of a gospel drummer are to be spiritually aware and to have a great sense of musical intuition. What governed drummer’s decision-making regarding what to play in a service was their ability to become vulnerable to the energy and soulfulness indicative of Western African culture spilling into their playing. If the flow of the service called for speed and aggressiveness, the drummer would provide that; if the service called for something more subtle and reflective, the drummers would lead in that direction. As

the sound of gospel drumming developed and changed, it never left its roots of being an aid to special moments, whether in gospel music or secular music.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Contemporary Gospel Drumming

As stated in the previous chapter, the sound of gospel drumming stretches beyond just the technical chops. Along with chops, gospel drumming has also exemplified some unique approaches to the grooves in gospel music. In this chapter, some of the transcriptions were created by me as well as Dr. Lamon Lawhorn. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 are drum keys to help identify what each note represents on the drum set instruments in transcriptions created by both Dr. Lawhorn and myself.

Figure 4.1. Brandon Prigg Drum Set Key.



Figure 4.2. Dr. Lawhorn Drum Set Key (Lawhorn 2015, 55)

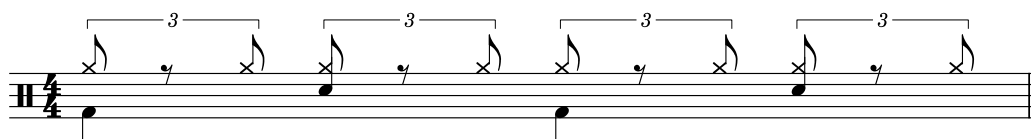
Drum Set

Two musical staves in 4/4 time. The first staff shows eight notes: a quarter note on the first space with an 'X' below it (HiHat), a quarter note on the bottom line (Kick), a quarter note on the first space (LowTom), a quarter note on the second space (Snare), a quarter note on the second space with an 'X' inside a circle (CrossStick), a quarter note on the second space with an 'X' above it (RimShot), a quarter note on the second space with a dot above it (GhostNote), and a quarter note on the third space (High~Mid~Tom). The second staff shows eight notes: a quarter note on the bottom line with a '3' above it (High~Tom), a quarter note on the first space with an 'X' below it (HiHat~Closed), a quarter note on the first space with a diamond below it (HiHat~Open), a quarter note on the second space with an 'X' inside a circle (Ride), a quarter note on the second space with a dot above it and an 'X' inside a circle (RideBell), a quarter note on the second space with an 'X' above it (Crash), a quarter note on the second space with an 'X' above it and a dot above it (Splash), and a quarter note on the third space with an 'X' above it and a dot above it (China).

The songs chosen for my recital were a small reflection of the diversity in certain gospel grooves. “Hold to God’s Unchanging Hand” has been a staple hymn within the African American church. It was written by Jennie B. Wilson in 1906. The popularity of this

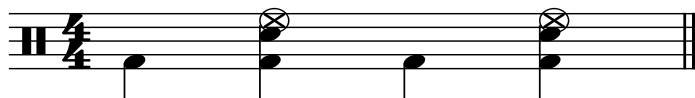
hymn led to its publication in eighty-two hymnals (Country Thang Daily 2018). This hymn was chosen for my recital to highlight the quartet gospel drumming style. In gospel quartet music, the drummer's job was to keep solid time, playing One and three on the kick drum and two and four on the snare and swung eighth notes on the hi-hat cymbals as shown in the following figure.

Figure 4.3. Quartet Gospel Groove.



Usually during congregational songs such as this, the music and the lyrics tend to evoke more emotion and adoration from the congregation attending a service. As the intensity of the emotions increases, so does the intensity of the music. The way a gospel drummer would match that intensity is by driving the song. The term driving means to over emphasize the pulse of the song. In figure 4.4, the pulse is emphasized by the quarter notes in the kick drum part. The back beat is also emphasized by the hi-hat and snare drum notes on beats two and four.

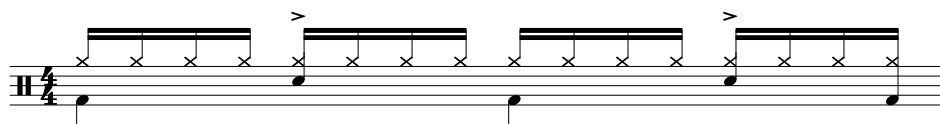
Figure 4.4. Quartet Driving Gospel Groove.



Throughout the evolution of gospel drumming, one genre that has consistently influenced gospel grooves is funk. From older artists like Walter Hawkins and Thomas Whitfield to newer artists like John P. Kee and Fred Hammond, funk has been heavily influential in the writing styles and the groove progressions of gospel music. Figure 4.5 shows a standard gospel funk groove that is often played with funk-influenced gospel

songs. The groove consists of sixteenth notes on the hi hat accenting beats two and four, kick drum one and three, and the snare drum on two and four.

Figure 4.5. Funk Gospel Groove.



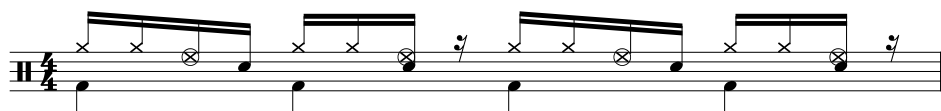
“When the Battle is Over” was written by Walter Hawkins and released on his 1993 album, *Love Alive III*. The drummer featured on this song was Hawkins’ nephew, Joel Smith. Smith’s musical approach within the song was very much influenced by funk. The groove shown in figure 4.6 consists of the same standard funk gospel groove. The differences are the variation of accents played on the hi-hat that outline a common bossa nova/samba rhythm, as well as a kick drum note added on the last sixteenth note subdivision of beat two.

Figure 4.6. “When the Battle is Over” Groove.



During the 1960s, there was an undercurrent of Afro-Cuban, Brazilian, and other world rhythms that were as evident in the music of artists such as Edwin and Walter Hawkins. During the early 2000s, these world rhythms became more prominent in gospel music. Artists like Judith McCallister, Martha Munizzi, Fred Hammond, and Tye Tribbett created gospel songs that relied heavily on these various world rhythms. One common gospel groove is the Caribbean gospel groove, which is a gospel rendition of a soca groove. Figure 4.7 is a template of a Caribbean gospel groove.

Figure 4.7. Caribbean Gospel Groove.



The song entitled “This is the Day” was arranged and performed by Fred Hammond. It was on his album *Free to Worship*, which was released in 2006. The drummer featured on this song was Calvin Rodgers. Figure 4.8 shows the groove that Rodger played in this song. The groove that he utilized stems from a common Caribbean gospel groove.

Figure 4.8. “This is the Day” Groove.



The reshaping of the rhythmic structure of gospel drumming impacted one of the musical rituals in the African American church: shout music, also known as praise breaks. Shout music has always played a vital role in worship services of the Black church. Black churches have been known for their charismatic style of worship, which encourages congregants to feel the Holy Spirit through shouting and dancing (Stadnicki 2012, 18). This feeling produced an energy and soulfulness that could be manipulated; however, when spontaneous, this feeling reveals itself to be authentic. This authentic spontaneity can also be found within a drummer and can spill out into the rhythm of drumming. During the time of slavery, shout music was called jubilee music. As previously noted, the music of the time included fast-paced spirituals which were accompanied by holy dancing and percussive playing that utilized the body and anything

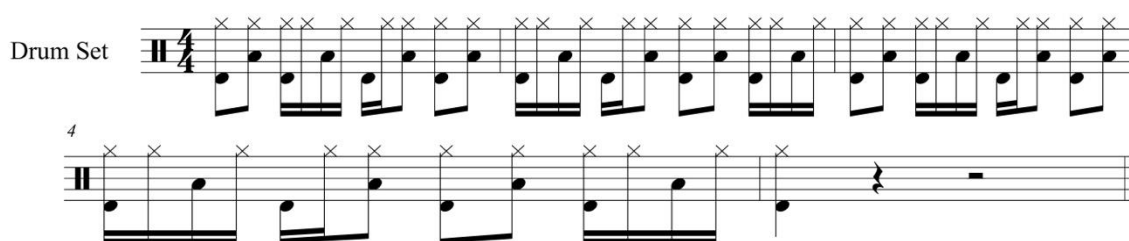
else slaves could find that would produce percussive sounds. When drums were used in worship services, the drums would emulate the percussive elements that took place in the performance of jubilee spirituals. Figure 4.9 is a transcription created by Lawhorn (2015) that shows the traditional shout pattern as played on the drums. The percussive aesthetics of foot stomping and hand clapping were imitated between the snare and kick drum while the hi-hat cymbal played an eighth-note pulse.

Figure 4.9. Traditional Shout Pattern (Lawhorn 2015, 80).



As the Black worship style progressed, so did shout music. Shout music during the early 2000s became much more complex. The hi-hat pattern became more syncopated. Lawhorn's transcription in figure 4.10 showing a modern approach to shout music. In this transcription, there are also some hints of West African rhythmic concepts with the snare and kick drum providing a consistent pulse and the hi-hat cymbal having rhythmic freedom.

Figure 4.10. Modern Shout Pattern (Lawhorn 2015, 80).



While there were a plethora of African American Christian denominations, the improvisation and loud dynamics of gospel drumming can be attributed to the emergence of the African American Pentecostal church (Stadnicki 2012, 19). The charismatic

worship style of the Pentecostal church can assist in explaining the emotional and spiritual aspects behind gospel drumming. The Black Pentecostal church is known for inviting musical improvisation and spontaneity within their services, elements that are reminiscent of shout music. As stated in the previous chapter, the drummer's duty was to reflect the spiritual trajectory of the service through their playing. Shout music mirrored highly intense spiritual moments. One of the main goals of a Pentecostal service was for congregants to leave feeling the Holy Spirit. The role of the drummer, as well as the rest of the band, was to help the worship service complete that mission through soulful spontaneity and musical embellishments (Stadnicki 2012, 20).

The aesthetics of gospel began to change when the construct of gospel songs were designed to highlight the drummer. One gospel song in particular became the staple song for drummers, which was "Rain on Us" by The New Life Community Choir featuring gospel artist John P. Kee. "Rain on Us" was released on The New Life Community Choir's album *Not Guilty* in October 2000. The drummer featured on this song was Calvin Rodgers. Many gospel musicians might say that this song could be described as a "drummer's song." In the song, there is an interlude where the drummer trades fours with the band and singers. Figure 4.11 shows the musical ideas that Rodgers executed during that section of the song. Lawhorn's transcription of this excerpt shows how he played sextuplet fills throughout the solo. From measures 10-18 he also played thirty-second note patterns. This solo happens from 2:59-3:45 of the recording.

Figure 4.11. “Rain on Us” drum solo (Lawhorn 2015, 97).

Drums Performed By Calvin Rodgers

♩ = 100

Drum Set

The score is written for a drum set in 4/4 time with a tempo of 100 beats per minute. It consists of eight staves of music, numbered 1 through 18. The notation uses standard drum set symbols: 'x' for cymbals, 'o' for snare, and '•' for bass drum. The piece features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including triplets (marked '3') and sixteenth-note runs (marked '6'). A section starting at measure 13 is labeled 'Groove performed' and features a 4/4 time signature. The solo concludes at measure 18 with a final triplet and a cymbal crash.

Rodgers’s incorporation of rudiments and linear drumming formed the standard for the contemporary gospel drum sound. This standard is evident in the playing of drummer George “Spanky” McCurdy, who emerged onto the gospel scene in 2006. Spanky was known for manipulating time through metric modulations as well as for his

love of playing in unconventional meters. The transcription shown in Figure 4.12, showcases Spanky's ability to incorporate a linear fill in a compound meter within a gospel song called "Everything Will Be Alright" by Tye Tribbett. "Everything Will Be Alright" was on Tribbett's album *Victory Live* which was released in May 2006. Traditionally, most gospel songs were composed in a 4/4 time signature or in duple meter. What made Spanky's playing peculiar in this song was his rhythmic approach in which he utilized a 12/8 time signature. Lawhorn's transcription of this excerpt, shows how Spanky played a 12/8 fill that was orchestrated between the snare and the toms with a double stroke on his kick drum. The excerpt happens between 3:02-3:10 of the recording.

Figure 4.12. "Everything Will Be Alright" drum excerpt (Lawhorn 2015, 78)

♩ = 126 Drums Performed By George "Spanky"McCurdy

Drum Set

The transcription consists of three staves. The first staff is labeled 'Drum Set' and has a 12/8 time signature. It shows a sequence of notes: a quarter note on the snare, a quarter note on the tom, a quarter note on the snare, a quarter note on the tom, a quarter note on the snare, a quarter note on the tom, a quarter note on the snare, a quarter note on the tom, a quarter note on the snare, a quarter note on the tom, a quarter note on the snare, and a quarter note on the tom. The second staff starts at measure 3 and shows a complex rhythmic pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes, including a double stroke on the kick drum. The third staff starts at measure 5 and shows a snare and tom pattern with a double stroke on the kick drum.

The sound of contemporary gospel drumming continues to evolve as new drummers push the envelope of what has been considered typical in this style. There is a distinct sound that comes from gospel drumming that resurfaces with each new musical era. That distinct sound is rooted within the West African traditions of rhythm. Historically, the intertwining of other musical aesthetics has been a prominent trait within the progression of the gospel sound. The mission of gospel music has been to minister to

the people in the church as well as people outside the church. With that mission in mind, it is essential for the sound of gospel music to adapt to its surroundings so that it can continue to be relatable and relevant.

Chapter 5: Gospel Drumming Meets the World

As gospel drumming began to gain more popularity, various drum companies started to capitalize on this success. From Zildjian's Praise and Worship cymbal pack to Vater's Gospel Series drumstick, gospel drumming was becoming a phenomenon within the mainstream music industry (Stadnicki 2012, 14). Various music companies such as Hudson Music and Drum Workshop started publishing instructional videos that highlighted drummers including Gerald Heyward, Aaron Spears who played for major secular artists such as Chris Brown, Usher, Mary J Blige but also had a gospel background.

As the sound of gospel drumming was expanding, it evolved into a fusion style of drumming. Gospel drumming began to incorporate more styles and genres along with the traditional gospel sound. One of the main reasons behind the blending of different genres, especially R&B and hip hop, can be attributed to the location of the African American church. Usually, Black churches were located in the urban areas of certain cities. As a result of the urban culture present in those cities, gospel drummers were exposed to styles beyond gospel music such as hip-hop and R&B. Subconsciously, the merging of these three predominantly African American genres was already embedded in their playing. This integration allowed gospel drumming to smoothly transition from the church to the mainstream music industry.

One of the first drummers to make the transition from gospel to secular music was Gerald Heyward. Heyward explains in an interview with Modern Drummer Podcast how

his upbringing in the environment of Brooklyn, New York, affected his playing in the gospel, R&B, and hip-hop industry: “I’ll be totally honest with you man; I never had no schooling on the drums. I don’t know how to read, but my life experiences kind of helped me” (Modern Drummer Official 2021, at 30:09). In that interview, he goes on to explain that the demographics of his neighborhood consisted of African Americans and Latino people. Being around those cultures inevitably exposed to him to various Black musical genres as well as Afro-Cuban and Brazilian genres that shaped how he incorporated rhythms on the drum set.

As stated in Chapter Three, one of the main techniques for which gospel drumming is known for is the use of linear drumming. The gospel approach to linear drumming has been the most noticeable trait that crossed over into secular shows. Linear drumming was used not only for soloing but also to add more presence to a groove as well as to set up a transition to the next phrase of a song. The figures 5.1- 5.4, show different basic sixteenth-note linear patterns that are common in gospel drumming.

Figure 5.1. One over Two Fill.



Figure 5.2. Two over One Fill.



Figure 5.3. Four over Two Fill.

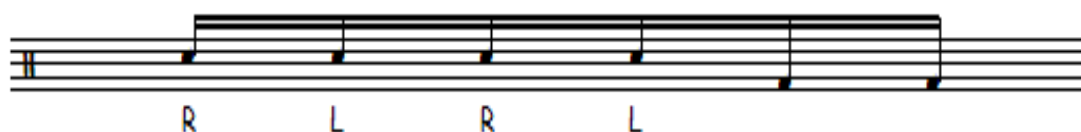


Figure 5.4. Five over One Fill.



Aaron Spears, a native of Washington D.C., is a well-acclaimed drummer within the mainstream music industry. He has played for artists such as Usher, Lady Gaga, Ariana Grande, Carrie Underwood, The Backstreet Boys, and many more. Since Spears grew up in a Pentecostal church, he credits his church upbringing as the main source that prepared him for the big stage in the secular industry. In his instructional DVD *Beyond the Chops*, he was asked how much his gospel roots play a factor in who he is as a drummer today. Spears replied:

I feel like my gospel roots and my gospel foundation have actually opened up the window for me to play other styles of music. In church you find yourself playing a little bit of everything, so I'm fortunate to have that. Also, in addition to that, church allows you to play with that emotion. You really play from your heart. For me, growing up in church, I really played from my heart because it was an expression of gratitude to tell God thank you for allowing to play with this gift, and allowing me to give this gift back to Him. For me, that's where it all stems from. (Spears 2009, at 7:34)

Spears's signature style revolves around his personal approach to basic linear patterns as seen in the previous examples. In his DVD *Beyond the Chops*, he

demonstrates some hand and foot combinations that implement some of these rudimentary linear concepts, as shown in figure 5.5

Figure 5.5. Hand and Foot Combinations (Spears 2009, 2:13).



The complexity in Aaron's approach to fills, whether to setup a hit or solo, comes from his ability to disguise beat one. Many of his fills carry over the bar line and do not conventionally end on beat one. The example below is a transcription of Spears demonstrating his over-the-bar-line concept in his DVD. The concept starts in the fourth bar of the transcription with Aaron playing sixteenth-note triplets.

Figure 5.6. Syncopated Fill Demonstration (Spears 2009, 3:11).



Aaron Spears is mostly known for being the drummer for R&B artist Usher.

Usher’s song “Caught Up” allowed Aaron to showcase his playing and his incorporation of linear patterns. Figure 5.7 displays Aaron’s linear drumming in the song “Caught Up.” This transcription is an excerpt of a particular performance of this song that Aaron played at the 2006 Modern Drummer Festival. The fill shown below happens forty-eight seconds into the performance.

Figure 5.7. Aaron Spears “Caught Up” Fill (DrummerWorld 2017, at 0:09).



Another drummer who is popular in the mainstream music industry is Chris Johnson. Johnson is a native of Los Angeles, California. He credits his musical skills to his church upbringing. In various interviews, Johnson often tells the story of how his first outing when he was a newborn was to church, from the hospital to home to church (Chong 2021, at 5:23). Telling this story was Johnson’s way of insinuating how much gospel music and culture runs deep within his playing. Johnson has performed with artists such as Lady Gaga, Camila Cabello, Cee Lo Green, and Rihanna, along with gospel artists including Kurt Carr, Donnie McClurkin, Dorinda Clark Cole, and Norman Hutchins. In an interview, Johnson was asked about the transition from gospel to secular gigs. Johnson explained how there were few differences crossing over into secular music (Chong 2021, at 11:25). Although Johnson had a strict musical upbringing in which he was only allowed to play gospel music, the fusion of different genres within gospel

arrangements prepared him for that crossover. He attributes the building blocks of that fusion style in gospel music to gospel songwriters including Andrae Crouch and Edwin and Walter Hawkins. In that same interview, he alluded to how Andrae Crouch’s music almost sounded like an Earth, Wind, and Fire record.

In 2021, Johnson recently published his first instructional book called *Pop, R&B, and Gospel Drumming*. In his book, he talks about his ability to use linear patterns to give the groove more presence and depth. Figure 5.8 displays that concept in his performance of a song entitled “Umbrella” by R&B artist Rihanna. Bars three and four show Johnson’s use of linear patterns whether to add presence to grooves or to set up a band hit within the song.

Figure 5.8. “Umbrella” Drum Excerpt (Johnson 2021, 8).

Another song that displays Johnson’s use of linear patterns is “Just Dance” by Lady Gaga. In Johnson’s book, *Pop, R&B, and Gospel Drumming*, he describes this song as “pop music at its finest” (Johnson 2021, 48). The song has a rock influence, regarding the musical approach. While his playing is tailored towards being authentic to the style of classic rock and pop music, his ability to incorporate gospel-like linear patterns in his

playing helps breathe a certain energy into the performance. In figure 5.9, the fifteenth bar of section C and the twenty-fourth bar of the transcription (the eighth bar of section D) are examples of how he tastefully adds his gospel fills within the song in such a way that it does not take away from the rock style.

Figure 5.9. “Just Dance” Drum Excerpt (Johnson 2021, 45).

The image displays a musical score for a drum excerpt from the song "Just Dance". The score is organized into two main sections, C and D, each consisting of four staves of music.

Section C: This section begins with a dynamic marking of *p* (piano) and a *mf* (mezzo-forte) dynamic marking. It features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. A circled 'C' is placed above the first staff. The notation includes various drum symbols such as asterisks, plus signs, and circled plus signs, indicating specific drum sounds or techniques.

Section D: This section starts with a dynamic marking of *f* (forte) and later transitions to *mf*. It continues with complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth-note runs. A circled 'D' is placed above the first staff of this section. The notation uses the same drum symbols as Section C to denote specific sounds.

The score is written on a grand staff (two staves per system) and includes various musical notations such as stems, beams, and rests to represent the drum's rhythmic output.

In regard to music tours and live performances of various secular artists in the pop, R&B, and hip-hop industry, the common goal for artists is to consistently create an unforgettable experience for the audience. Although drummers like Aaron Spears and Chris Johnson are heavily influenced by gospel music, they can also be authentic to the various genres that they play. Another aspect of what makes these gospel drummers sought after is the emotion and energy they implement in their playing. Their gospel upbringing allows drummers of their caliber to play not only from a place of musical accuracy but also from an emotional and spiritual place that is transferable from their playing to the audience.

Conclusion

Since the early 2000s, the popularity of gospel drumming has allowed the art form to be analyzed through a variety of media including, magazines, DVD, podcast, and instructional books. Based on the various platforms, there has been a consistent theme emerge when analyzing or discussing gospel drumming. This concept are the intangibles of gospel drumming. The intangibles are the elements that make up the feel behind the playing. Those elements include a certain energy and a soulfulness that is evident within the player or perhaps a transparency of the emotion behind their playing.

The intangible elements are not about the music; it is about the uniqueness of the player. Like a thumb print, every drummer's playing has a unique rhythm. When rhythms meet each other, they tend to intertwine, creating a collective or cultural rhythm. This results in regional rhythms; regional rhythms can be found in East African, South African, North African, and West African. In addition, there are Spanish rhythms, Latin rhythms, English rhythms, Russian rhythms, and many others. Gospel drumming in America stems from Western Africa. From ritual dances to daily activities, everything in West Africa was done in rhythm. Looking at the natural inclusion of cultural rhythm in the West African experience provides a better understanding of how rhythm and rhythmic feel transcend some of the technical aspects of gospel drumming. As stated in Chapter Four, the basis of the rhythm of gospel music is the blending of other rhythms. This blending was noticeable when enslaved Africans combined their African rhythms with

Western European rhythms to make Negro spiritual rhythms. The cultural rhythm of the player may be modified, but it cannot be extinguished.

The cultural rhythm of the drummer becomes evident in the rhythm of the music. It is apparent when artists like Edwin and Walter Hawkins combined Afro-Cuban and Brazilian rhythms with traditional gospel rhythms. Furthermore, the blending of rhythms can also be discovered through the fusion of hip-hop and R&B with the gospel rhythms of the urban church. While gospel has a history of intertwining various interpretations of rhythm, it notably does not sound exactly like any of the incorporated genres. This is part of the mystery that makes gospel drumming what it is; the cultural rhythm of the drummer spills into the rhythm of the drumming itself.

In the DVD *Beyond the Chops* by Aaron Spears, certain questions were asked by the audience as well as host and drummer Jojo Mayer pertaining to Spears's technical skills as a drummer. One of the audience members asked about the method behind his incorporations of fills. Aaron's response was "It's all in where you start it. There's no particular method to it, it's kind of just a feeling thing" (Spears 2009, 3:42). Spear's response to the audience member emphasizes the inability to quantify the cultural rhythm or feel of the drummer.

Later in the DVD, Mayer analyzed Spears's fill orchestration. As he attempts to break down what he believes Spears is processing mentally, Mayer reverts to his response of how Spear's playing is just a feeling. The same concept appears during an interview on *The Drummer's Resource Podcast*, Gerald Heyward explained that his playing was not based on learning drum rudiments but simply based on how things felt to him. Heyward said, "My thing has not ever been a school gift. I just sat down, I played it, and it was

good. It's never been that I worked on my paradiddles this week, and so when I go to church, I'm going to play the hell out of some paradiddles" (Ruffini 2015, 13:04). In Heyward's explanation he implies how his playing is not based off of drum rudiments, rhythms of drumming itself, but through his upbringing which is the cultural rhythm of Heyward.

The more interviews I listened to, the more I kept hearing the saying that "it's just feeling." In my own experience playing gospel, I realized that what makes gospel drumming unique is that it is rooted within the energy and soulfulness of West African rhythm.

While there are various platforms that analyze certain aspects of gospel drumming, there are only a few sources that capture the gospel rhythm in the drummers themselves. Even in this research and in my experience, capturing the gospel drummer's rhythm in its totality has been challenging. Recognizing the cultural rhythm of the drummer and the rhythm of the drumming itself provides an awareness of how gospel drumming can transcend notations and definitions because it is hard to notate and define matters of the soul. In contrast with this idea is the importance of attempting to notate and define such matters within musical academia. These attempts allow for deeper understanding and perspective for musicians who do not have backgrounds in gospel music. Transcriptions, drum clinics, DVDs, interviews, and academic papers have made gospel drumming more accessible and easier to implement in the playing of non-gospel drummers. Although it can be challenging to analyze gospel drumming, the combination of the technical and intangible aspects of the art form makes it a beautiful thing to witness whether one is in a church service or a secular concert in an arena.

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