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# Music in the Maranatha Pentecostal Church : observations of choir rehearsals and worship services

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**MUSIC IN THE MARANATHA PENTECOSTAL CHURCH:  
OBSERVATIONS OF CHOIR REHEARSALS AND WORSHIP SERVICES**

**A Supplementary Document To Accompany A Vocal Recital  
Presented to  
The School of Music  
San Jose State University**

**In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts**

**by  
Laura Ley Va  
August 1995**

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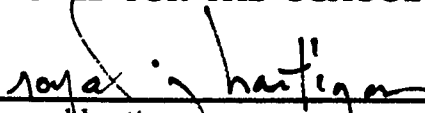
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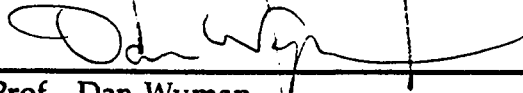
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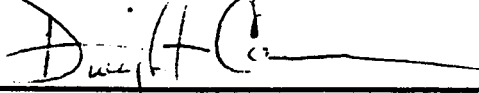
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## ABSTRACT

### MUSIC IN THE MARANATHA PENTECOSTAL CHURCH: OBSERVATIONS OF CHOIR REHEARSALS AND WORSHIP SERVICES

by Laura Ley Va

This document addresses the musical and social elements that were observed in the performance practice of the music and worship services at an African American Pentecostal Church. It provides a basis for understanding the relationship of some African musical and religious practice to the contemporary musical and religious practices of African Americans. Parallels are drawn between the musical elements observed at Maranatha and similar elements that are present in the ceremonial and recreational drumming, dance and song among certain Ghanaian cultures of West Africa.

The field work for this research was conducted at the Church of Maranatha in San Jose, California.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend warm and gracious thanks to the many people who have helped me realize this project. To Dr. royal hartigan who has given his undying support, caring, insight, expertise and vision. To Baomi Butts-Bhanji for her contributions, ever positive position and friendship. To Marsha Boyd and Derrick Black, the choir and the congregation at Maranatha for their warmth, "hugs", participation and contributions. To my mother who was an ever present source of encouragement and was there to guide me through my darkest hours. To my brother Scott for providing the inspiration and gentle "kick" that led me to my present path. To Gary Montrezza for his friendship, support and positive insights into the thesis/ document writing process. I want to thank Michael Andrade for all of his help and being "the very best friend any human being could ever ask for." Lastly, I thank Freddie Hebert for his love, patience and support and for possessing the strength that has helped him put up with me during this process.

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to document and discuss the events observed at the choir rehearsals and worship services at the *Church of Maranatha*, an African American Pentecostal church in San Jose, California from March 2, 1995 to April 9, 1995. Parallels, if any, will be drawn between the social and musical elements observed at the *Church of Maranatha* and certain West African social and musical traditions.

Previous research by scholars Eileen Southern, J. H. Kwabena Nketia, Iain MacRobert, Portia K. Maulsby, Bernice Johnson Reagon, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya will be cited and integrated where appropriate into the field work portion of the study to support and solidify specific events and concepts which were observed during the choir rehearsals and worship services.

The information gained from this research is based on direct observation and interviews conducted with church member Baomi Butts-Bhanji, the Adult Choir Director Marsha Boyd, and the Minister of Music, Derrick Black. The purpose of this research is to explore and document specific musical qualities and performance practices observed in an African American Pentecostal church choir and relate the resulting personal, social and spiritual events that occur during the rehearsals and worship services as a direct result of the music. Previous research with this focus is scarce. The intent then is to examine and relay some of the relationships and roles that music has in the Pentecostal worship service, these may then serve as a foundation for cultural understanding and provide a basis for further research.

## Chapter I

### The Music and Musicians of The Church of Maranatha

This section will focus on a detailed description of the environment in which music is rehearsed and performed, the type of music, its function, and the interaction between choir director, choir members and accompanying musicians. This will lead to a discussion regarding the issue of gender and its relationship to the music and to the members of the congregation, the method of musical transmission, and an account of the musical, spiritual and social events that take place during the worship service.

The Pentecostal *Church of Maranatha* is located in an industrial office space on 1811 South Seventh Street in San Jose, California. The sanctuary is located in the rear of the building. The atmosphere is very modern with neatly aligned maroon colored chairs on a gray carpet while the pulpit is constructed of Plexiglass with the logo and name of the church etched on it. Below the pulpit is a Plexiglass altar with the words "Always Remember Jesus" etched on it. Three low sets of stairs lead up to the altar area and two more sets lead up to two rows of chairs where the choir members sit. Two monitors are on opposite sides of the pulpit and an organ, bass guitar, electric piano, and drumset are positioned to the right of the altar area. Two speakers are suspended from the roof of the sanctuary pointed outward toward the congregation seating area. The ceiling is covered with black acoustic baffles and there are six fans attached to the ceiling.

The first interview conducted with Marsha Boyd took place on April 6, 1995. In this interview she stated that the choir's main source for musical

material is taken from pre-recorded contemporary gospel tapes. Boyd attends the national Gospel Workshop of America annually, where she sometimes obtains sheet music for the choir. The repertoire rehearsed and performed in the church consists of contemporary gospel music which is orally transmitted from the choir director or minister of music to the choir members.

During our second interview on April 6, 1995 Boyd conveyed that she had been the choir director for Maranatha for four years and a member of the church for seven years. The position at Maranatha was her first choir directorship. Previously she sang in church choirs and was the student director of her accapella high school choir. When referring to the accompanying instrumentation for the choir, Marsha stated the music differed from the more traditional hymnody due to the use of different kinds of chords that stem from the jazz idiom. She explained that in traditional Baptist and Methodist churches there is usually an organ or piano that accompanies the choir and that it was the Pentecostal faith was responsible for bringing other instruments such as drums, bass, guitar and tambourines into church music.

Boyd stated that the function or role of the music in the opening section of the worship service called Praise and Worship is to help the congregation "settle in ... and get focused." Referring to the choir's function after the Praise and Worship she explained that its purpose is to take the congregation to a higher level in preparation for the spoken word. Boyd also conveyed that the music functions to prepare the congregation spiritually to receive the Word. Often members of the congregation will receive the Word through the singing. Thus, she sees the music as a ministry, choosing songs

that reflect a specific Biblical theme or message.

The rehearsal atmosphere reflected a feeling of communal warmth from the moment of entrance into the sanctuary. The choir members and accompanying instrumentalists greeted each other verbally and with no shortage of hugs. The choir members displayed an openness and outward sense of caring for each other.

Each rehearsal began with an opening prayer circle in which the members of the choir and accompanying instrumentalists joined hands and formed a circle. It is possible that the prayer circle fulfills the same function as the Praise and Worship section of the worship service in that it allowed the choir members to voice their problems, concerns, or news of the week which enabled them to focus and prepare for the rehearsal. At the end of each rehearsal praise and thanks were given to Jesus and a closing prayer circle was formed. I was welcomed openly each time I attended a rehearsal and was asked to participate in both the opening and closing prayer circles.

### ***The Gender Issues: The Music and the Women of the Congregation***

The members of the choir were predominantly female. The pianist, drummer, bassist, guitarist and organist were male. Handclaps and tambourines executed by the choir members were also incorporated as additional rhythmic accompaniment. When referring to the predominant presence of women in the choir, Boyd noted that this was not uncommon, simply because there are more women church members than men. She felt that the reason for this stemmed from a male feeling that "church is a woman thing" and is not considered a manly or masculine virtue. She explained that within her culture, women as have always played a more

active role in the church. She stated, also, that due to the expressive nature and atmosphere at Maranatha many men act as observers rather than participants in the outward display of emotion during the worship service. She concluded that this was not due to the lack of spirituality on the part of the men, but simply that women are more comfortable in expressing their emotions openly.

While there are more female members in the congregation than male members, the worship service is conducted by a male pastor in his middle to late forties. The average age of the congregation is approximately thirty. This seems considerably younger than most churches. According to Boyd the average age in the choir ranges between 25 and 32.

Baomi Butts-Bhanji is a jazz and gospel vocalist, member of the culture and an active member at Maranatha. In our interview she stated that women always had a strong role musically in the church and that it was the one place where women could be organists, choir directors and soloists and "be in control." Ms. Bhanji's Godmother was a leader of the missionary society in her community whose responsibility was to go from church to church within the black communities of Toledo, Akron and Cleveland, Ohio and teach the format of the Baptist worship services to the leaders of community churches. According to Ms. Bhanji, her Godmother was one of the first women within the church to act as a missionary, teacher and minister in the Baptist faith. It would appear that at Maranatha, the traditional gender roles are still present in that instrumentalists and key church figures such as deacons and pastors or ministers are predominantly male and choir directors and vocalists are predominantly female.

### *The Method of Musical Transmission*

As mentioned, the choir director or minister of music learns songs from pre-recorded contemporary gospel tapes and teaches them to the choir orally. If the piece is particularly difficult the tape is played through the P. A. system in the sanctuary before being taught. The music is taught in parts with piano accompaniment, the Soprano section first, the Alto section second, and finally the Tenors. There is no Bass or Baritone section in the Maranatha choir and the tenor section is comprised mostly of women due to the lack of male singers.

The majority of the songs performed by choir are in verse-chorus form. However, according to Boyd, the standard verse-chorus form is not strictly followed in contemporary gospel music. She explained that it is common to have one verse or "call" and the remainder of the form be the chorus or "response", depending on what the songwriter is trying to express in the music. The soloist sings the verse or call and the choir sings the chorus or response. Further, the soloist freely improvises and often spontaneously changes the verse usually during the "vamp" section, a common practice in other African American musical genres such as jazz and blues. According to Baomi Butts-Bhanji, gospel and blues are very interconnected and the melismas that are used in the blues are also present in gospel music.

The concepts of freely or newly composed hymns or songs and orally transmitted music are supported in *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, by Eileen Southern. She notes that one of the important elements of the camp meeting was the singing of hymns and spirituals. The camp meetings occurred during the Second Awakening, an interracial religious revival



movement that took place in the American Frontier communities between the years of 1780 and 1830. The religious services were performed in the woods under huge tents and preachers from several different denominations were present to conduct the services and maintain the large crowds (93-94).

Southern states that documentation exists stating that long after the public meetings ended, the blacks would return to their segregated quarters and continue singing throughout the night. This practice was frowned upon by the church fathers who led the public devotion for several reasons. An initial objection was that the songfests were held away from the public worship services and conducted without proper supervision. Secondly, the texts of the songs sung during the songfests were non-lyrical, newly composed pieces derived from prayers, Scripture, and orthodox hymns. The songs were lengthened by adding choruses or interjecting refrains between the verses. Lastly, the texts of the new compositions were coupled with the melodies of songs that closely resembled the style of slave jubilee melodies used for dances (96).

Southern explains that the oral method of musical transmission was used during the Second Awakening in the early years of the revival because hymn books were unavailable and most of the people attending the camp meetings were illiterate having to learn the songs either by memory or during the camp meeting services (96-97).

### ***The Maranatha Worship Service***

The service on March 5, 1995 began with an opening prayer delivered by the pastor which led directly into the Praise and Worship section of the service. During Praise and Worship the congregation stood and gave thanks

and praises to Jesus. Praise words or phrases such as "hallelujah", "praise the Lord", and "Thank You Jesus" were spoken by the members of the congregation and their arms were held outstretched, palms open, toward the ceiling. The duration of the Praise and Worship was approximately thirty minutes.

Immediately following the Praise and Worship was an opening song sung by the congregation. As Boyd explained there is no standard opening or closing song, rather a pool of songs familiar to the congregation that are cued by the minister of music. These songs are usually sung after Praise and Worship. The opening song for the service on March 5th was "Jesus is Alive". This piece was accompanied by piano and drums and members of the congregation played tambourines and clapped their hands on the second and fourth beats of each four beat grouping. The method of singing was performed in a "lining out" fashion which, according to *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (edited by Don Randel), is having a leader or minister sing or read each line of a hymn or song with the congregation echoing each line. This lining out process was first implemented in America in the seventeenth century as an aid for illiterate worshipers to memorize Protestant hymns and Psalms (452). At the end of the "Jesus Is Alive" song the congregation applauded. After the applause subsided the song "I Just Want To Be Where You Are" was led by a member of the Mass Choir in the same lining out fashion.

The next section of the service is known as the Welcome, in which the pastor of the church delivered a brief prayer and invited the members and visitors to get out of their seats and greet each other. Handshakes, hugs and

sentiments of "good-morning" and "God Bless You" were exchanged by everyone and during the Welcome process everyone sang the song "Jesus is A Rock".

Applause followed the at the end of "Jesus is A Rock" and the pastor introduced the Mass Choir, which in turn received the congregation's applause. The first of the two pieces that the Mass choir performed was an up tempo piece called "Everything Will Be Alright". The lead soloist was a male in his late forties from the tenor section of the choir, the chorus was sung by the remaining choir members and the congregation. The lead vocalist improvised freely and had a raw, powerful, non-tempered vocal style that was somewhere between singing and shouting. His powerful song was accompanied by piano. Both songs performed in the service had been prepared at the rehearsal held on the previous Thursday. The congregation stood during the performance and clapped their hands on the second and fourth beats of the song and played tambourines. The second piece, "We Worship Christ", was led by the minister of music and was accompanied by piano, bass, handclaps and tambourines.

Following the performance by the Mass Choir, announcements regarding church events and activities were given and a request for an offering was made. It was explained that envelopes would be made available by the ushers to the members who wished to make a donation. The ushers were three middle aged women dressed in white who wore white wrist length gloves. They stood in the aisles and carried tissues and paper fans that were given to the members of the congregation upon request.

The pastor then asked the choir to leave the pulpit area and take

communion. He explained that communion is taken on the first Sunday of every month and read from the Bible a passage relating to the taking of communion. While communion was being distributed to the congregation a short prayer was delivered by one of the deacons that described and explained the meaning of the communion ritual. At the closing of the deacon's prayer the minister of music sang and played the song "Always Remember Jesus", a subtle, subdued piece accompanied only by piano and delivered in a slow tempo and soft dynamic. Once communion was taken, an up tempo song "I Know It Was The Blood" was sung, led first by the pastor and then by one of the church deacons. The song was sung by the congregation and accompanied by piano, bass, drums, tambourines and handclaps.

Applause followed the end of the song and after the congregation settled The Word or sermon was delivered. The Word was delivered by the pastor in a powerful, expressive manner with exaltations of "Amen", "Well", "Alright" and "Yes" expressed by the members of the congregation. The duration of this service was approximately three hours.

This experience was my initial exposure as an outside observer to an African American Pentecostal worship service. One of the dominating characteristics present at Maranatha was a genuine, overall sense of family and community among the members of the congregation. The other element that made the experience unique was the unstifled, participatory atmosphere that allowed the members the freedom to worship in any manner they chose. Some sat quietly, others swayed from side to side and clapped their hands or played tambourines, while others stood with arms outstretched toward the ceiling and gave thanks and praises to Jesus. The pastor's delivery of the

Word was also unique. The Word was designed to evoke responses from the congregation and was delivered with power, conviction, sarcasm and humor.

After attending and participating in the worship service at Maranatha I was left with a different perspective of religion and Christian church services. The memories of stiff, well mannered, uncomfortable, uninteresting, church experiences that I had experienced as a child were beginning to fade.

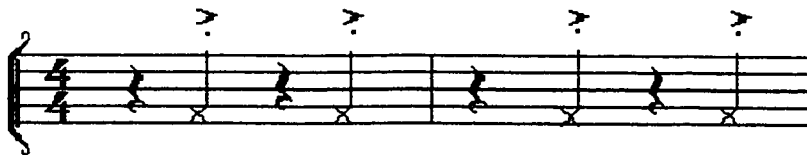
The following discussion will pertain to the specific musical qualities that have been observed in the choir rehearsals and in the worship services at Maranatha, as well as the personal, social and spiritual events that occurred as a direct result of the music.



## Chapter II

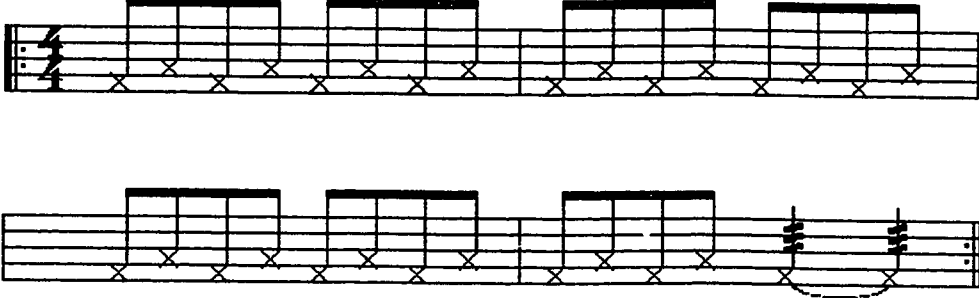
### Elements for Musical and Social Analysis: Choir Rehearsals and the Worship Service

Adult choir rehearsals are conducted in the sanctuary of the church three Thursdays a month, while the Mass Choir rehearses on the remaining Thursday of each month. The accompanying instruments for the choir include piano, bass, guitar, drums, organ and tambourines. The first musical quality observed in the choir rehearsals is the percussive attitude toward instrumental and vocal note production. The rehearsal on March 16, 1995 began with the piece "He's Able". The song was accompanied by piano, tambourines and handclaps on the second and fourth beats of each measure. Following a short introduction by the piano the choir sang the chorus twice in unison, before the lead singer came in with the first verse.

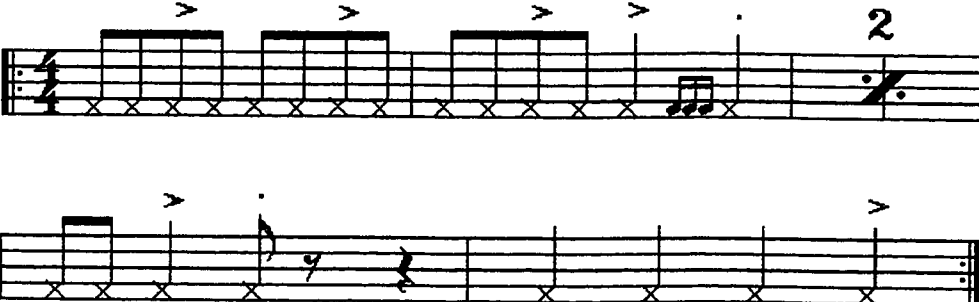
Example 1a: Chorus handclap rhythms in "He's Able".



Example 1b: Tambourine rhythm  = down stroke  = up stroke



Example 1c: Piano rhythm



The notes were executed by the lead singer at a forte dynamic and were delivered in a "staccato-like" style which was forceful and raw.

Example 2: Accented/staccato vocal style

Example 2 consists of two lines of musical notation in 4/4 time. The first line shows a 'Leader' part with lyrics 'He's ab - le' and a 'Chorus' part with lyrics 'He's ab - le'. The second line shows a 'Leader' part with lyrics 'Oh yes He is' and a 'Chorus' part with lyrics 'Oh yes He is'. Accents (>) are placed over the first notes of each phrase. The Leader parts end with a short, accented offbeat rhythm.

Another characteristic of the lead vocal note production is the terse phrasing, concluding phrases with short, accented offbeat rhythms and the regular practice of note bending.

Example 3: Offbeat accenting at ends of phrases.

Example 3 shows a single line of musical notation in 4/4 time for the phrase 'I know that He can do it'. An accent (>) is placed over the final note of the phrase, which is an offbeat.

Example 4: Note bending

Example 4 shows a single line of musical notation in 4/4 time for the word 'Li - i - ght'. A downward arrow (↓) is placed above the first note, and an upward arrow (↑) is placed above the second note. To the right of the notation, a legend indicates: ↓ Slightly lower than written pitch and ↑ Slightly higher than written pitch.



The percussive attitude that is present in the music performed at Maranatha is a characteristic that is also present in certain African music. In *Black Music of Two Worlds*, John Storm Roberts asserts that in Central and Western Africa, drums are an essential part of the music. Roberts stresses that it is not only the drums themselves that are crucial but the percussive nature that the music possesses (10). Roberts quotes ethnomusicologist Alan Merriam:

It seems to be the totality of the musical concept which sees rhythm and percussive effect as the deep, basic organizational principle underlying African music. Drums and drumming, the use of idiophones, the forceful and dynamic vocal attack, and other characteristics reflect this principle; it is African music which is essentially rhythmic and percussive in effect, and the devices used simply reflect this principle (Roberts 11).

Although other musical elements exist in the contemporary gospel music performed at Maranatha, it would appear that the two most salient characteristics are the percussive effects produced by vocal and instrumental technique and the concept of rhythm. These elements serve as the driving force behind the music and provide the basis for the musical frame work

The second musical quality I observed in the rehearsals and worship services was the importance of body movement or the physicality of the music. The incorporation of handclaps and footstomps performed by the choir director, choir members and members of the congregation aided in the overall sense of power, energy and rhythm of the music.

In her paper *Afro-American Religious Music: A Study In Musical Diversity*, Portia Maulsby has noted that the foundation and style of the Afro-American music performed in the early African American churches was established by the black preachers of the praise houses whose improvised songs and chanted sermons encouraged sung responses from the congregation and resulted in the development of the nineteenth century spiritual (8). Maulsby offers this description of some of the musical elements present in black folk spiritual regarding the reinterpretation of the songs in the Protestant tradition:

melodies and rhythms were altered; original texts often were replaced by new texts; English words and phrases were combined with those of African origin; refrain lines and choruses were added; shouts moans, groans, cries and word interjections were woven into the melody by slaves. A faster tempo was substituted for the original one, and complex footstamping and handclapping patterns and bodily movements were incorporated as an integral part of the performance (9).

During rehearsals and worship services body movement and use of handclaps and footstomps were an integral part of the music. The body movements would not be considered a dance, but rather a "gentle swaying" from side to side. The prayer circle which began and concluded each rehearsal consisted of the musicians and the choir members interlocking hands and forming a circle. It is possible to conjecture that the origin of the prayer circle, the importance of body movement and use of the body as a means of sound production stems from the earlier practice of the *ring shout*.

Southern notes that the earliest documentation of the African religious dance ceremony known as the ring shout occurred in North America during

a camp meeting in the period of the Second Awakening. The early nineteenth century author John F. Watson in his book, *Methodist Error*, documented a "curious activity" which occurred in the black worshipper's quarters after the public services had ended (Southern 98). "With every word sung, they have a sinking of one or [the] other leg of the body alternately; producing an audible sound of feet at every step ... If some, in the meantime, sit they strike the sounds alternately of each thigh" (Southern 99). In this early account it is believed that Watson did not observe the circle formation of the dancers but did document the thigh slapping (99).

Lydia Parrish, in *Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands*, stated that it was previously believed that as captive peoples, black Americans referred to the ring shout as a shout because dancing was considered by their captors to be an inappropriate, sinful and unacceptable form of religious expression. Parrish also stated that it is believed that the Afro-American ring shout with its accompanying chants, form and melody are a direct counterpart to African tribal dance (54).

Parrish explained that before the Civil War shouting was a common practice and was a typical part of black American Sunday afternoon worship services. By the early twentieth century some black preachers considered the shout to be an inappropriate form of worship because it did not conform to the conventions of the white man's religious service. The use of "Amen" and other praise words were also frowned upon by the more fashionable black preachers within the African American Church in the early part of the twentieth century (55).

The third musical quality observed at the choir rehearsals and worship services was the raw, dynamic quality of vocal note production and singing, including significant variation in tone and timbre. At times the vocal quality was a combination of singing and shouting. The notes were attacked in a percussive, accented, forceful manner. The phrases were often short and accentuated the off-beats. The generation of pure tones was not emphasized in this vocal technique, rather the manipulation and changing of tone color and timbre over time. The notes produced vocally were frequently bent up or down, adding to the emotional expression of the lyric or phrase. Additional vocal embellishments such as melismas, glissandos and slides were usually produced by the leader or soloist, while through the repetition of the chorus the remaining choir members accentuated and emphasized the percussive energy which moved the music forward. A large percentage of the choir's repertoire are up tempo pieces that are performed in a forte dynamic. These characteristics reveal the priority given to personal emotional expression over strictly technical considerations.

The vocal sound quality and some of the vocal techniques that I observed at Maranatha and the purpose that the music serves in the worship service can be paralleled to the vocal practices and ceremonial purpose that music serves in some West African communities. John Storm Roberts explains that vocal tone varies from region to region, and from people to people. The Akan and the Frafra are both from Ghana; the Akan use an "open" voice quality, whereas the Frafra use a more "intense" tone. The beauty or aesthetic quality of the voice is not what is important in African music (Roberts 8). Roberts explains that one of the most common vocal

inflections used in African vocal technique is to "slide up to the first note of a phrase and slide off the last note" (Roberts 12). Other devices used in African vocal technique include note bending and in some instances the songs are shouted instead of sung (Roberts 12). The purpose of singing is to reflect and depict the events and emotions of the ceremony or occasion for which the music is sung. Roberts asserts that the philosophy behind singing African music is that the singer must be effective rather than aesthetically pleasing. Everyone is a potential singer and the criterion used in choosing a singer is a social consideration, not a musical one (8).

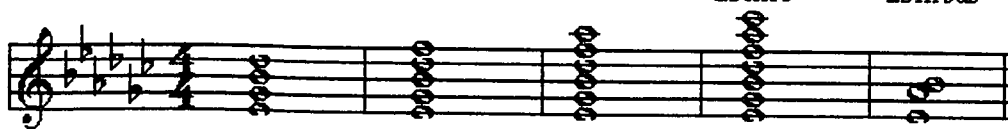
Other aspects that Roberts mentions is the "call and answer" practice of singing that is the most common technique for group vocal performance and the use of short musical phrases which are often repeated to increase intensity in the music. The two final elements that Roberts describes are the rhythmic elements , or what he calls the percussive approach to the music and the purpose and philosophy behind the music as being "communally functional to a far greater degree than most other parts of the world" (Roberts 4-5).

Variation in tone and timbre and the raw, dynamic qualities of vocal sound production seem to be characteristic of both West African and African American traditions.

The fourth musical quality that I observed at Maranatha was the use of extended harmonies in the instrumental accompaniment which relate to other African American traditions such as jazz and rhythm and blues. In the song "Worth It All ", the harmonic accompaniment centered around the use of extended jazz harmonies such as 7ths, 9ths, and 11ths.

Example 5: Extended Jazz harmonies in "Worth It All"

Ebm7      Ebm9      Ebm11      Ebm13      Ebm sus



Black also used suspended fourth chords and thirteenth, but these appeared less often. Another characteristic of the accompanying harmonies was the doubling of the root and sometimes the third of the chord. The introduction for the vamp in "Worth It all" consisted of a descending chromatic octave pattern that started on the Relative Major key of Gb. At times octaves were also used as part of the harmony when the roots and thirds were doubled in a chord.

Example 6: Vamp introduction to "Worth It All".



Example 7: Verse chords for "Worth It All".

Musical notation for Example 7, showing the verse chords for "Worth It All". The notation is in 4/4 time and E-flat major. The chords are: Abm7, Db9, Gbmaj7, Cbmaj9, Eb7sus, Eb7, and Ebmaj7. The notation is presented in a grand staff with treble and bass clefs.

Example 8: Turnaround to verse chords in "Worth It All"

Musical notation for Example 8, showing the turnaround to verse chords in "Worth It All". The notation is in 4/4 time and E-flat major. The chords are: Ebm, Db9, Gbmaj7, and A9b5. The notation is presented in a grand staff with treble and bass clefs.

The fifth element that I observed was not a musical element but a direct result of the music. At each rehearsal and worship service that I attended I observed a direct and intimate relation between the music and movement, and in some cases, dance. Although I am referring to the movement as dance this should not be misconstrued or confused with a structured, choreographed, rehearsed dance. The dances I observed appeared to be free form, spontaneous, individual and personal expressions of the members of the choir and congregation.

During rehearsals choir members would frequently clap their hands and as they sang their bodies would sway from side to side in unison. Other bodily movements brought about by the music are directly related to the act of transcendence which will be discussed later in this section.

The sixth characteristic of performance practice that I observed at Maranatha was the absence of audience-performer separation, a unity of congregation. During the choir's performance and the pastor's sermon the audience or congregation was almost always participating in some manner. Although there is no set format for the worship service the choir generally performs two pieces after the Welcome section in the service. During the choir's performance the audience would sing the chorus of the piece if it was familiar, clap their hands and some members would play tambourines. There is also a place in the service for congregational singing in which everyone in the church participated in the music. During the pastor's sermon or Word the audience also participated by interjecting praise words or phrases while the Word was being delivered. The musicians, choir and pastor are located in the altar area but the members of the congregation are allowed to stand or move about freely during the majority of the service.



This absence of audience-performer separation can be seen in the religious and secular music and dance of the communities in Africa. In *The Music Of Africa*, J. H. Kwabena Nketia states:

... Where an audience is present, it may not necessarily be the primary focus of attention... Where there is an audience present, there is not usually a wide gulf or clear-cut boundary between them and the performers, except where the nature of the performance requires this. ...When the performers arrange themselves in a circle, the spectators similarly form a circle around them. The actual details of the seating or standing arrangements for the performers themselves vary in different societies. Whatever the formation, the atmosphere in the performing arena is usually informal, and spectators are free to move about or leave any time they wish (33-34).

One could conclude that the communal atmosphere, participatory nature of the service and the ability to move about freely at Maranatha all support the unified audience-performer concept which increases, enhances and intensifies the worship experience. This element, along with other social factors is instrumental in creating an aesthetic of emotion and spirit that is then manifested in the members of the congregation.

The seventh musical characteristic I observed at Maranatha was the rhythmic complexity of the music. Many of the up-tempo pieces performed by the choir are multi-part and polyrhythmic in nature. The piece I would like to examine is "Worth It All" performed by the Adult choir. The aesthetic of multiple parts was demonstrated in the instrumentation of the piece which included piano, bass, guitar, drums, tambourines, lead voice and chorus, each with an independent yet interlocking part. The polyrhythmic element of the music was demonstrated in the vamp section of the song

where the voice parts of the chorus were split into three rhythmic parts in addition to those of the instrumental accompaniment. The parts consisted of short repeated phrases that were in three different rhythms and designed to produce a layered effect and increase the intensity of the music.

Example 9: Vamp rhythms for "Worth It All".

The musical score for "Worth It All" features three vocal parts: soprano, alto, and tenor. The soprano part has a vamp rhythm of two eighth notes followed by a quarter note, with the lyrics "worth it all". The alto part has a vamp rhythm of two eighth notes followed by a quarter note, with the lyrics "It will be worth it all". The tenor part has a vamp rhythm of two eighth notes followed by a quarter note, with the lyrics "It's gon-na be worth it".

The presence and importance of multiple parts, polyrhythms and rhythmic complexity can be also seen in African music. John Storm Roberts elaborates on Alan Merriam's concept of rhythm being the "glue" of some West African music by positing polyrhythmic activity as the most salient and important characteristic of the music. He explains that rather than having a single meter, either "duple (two to four beats) or triple (three or six)", performances will incorporate two or more opposing meters together (Roberts 11). He also mentions that recurrent contrasting beats and irregular beat patterns characterize the rhythm of the music (11). While the use of meter is a Western European concept and may be open to argument, his idea

of multi-layered rhythmic textures appears to be appropriate.

Although drums are the main sources for the multiple layers and polyrhythms in Central and West African music one can make a connection between the two aesthetics in that the multi-part polyrhythmic effects are still present in contemporary gospel music - only the specific means - instruments and voices - used to produce them are different.

The eighth characteristic I observed was the essential role of the music in bringing about the emotional and physical act of "transcendence". I observed the act of transcendence on two occasions. The first occurred during a Mass choir rehearsal on March 2, 1995 and the second at a worship service held on the 9th of April 1995, Palm Sunday. I am including a detailed description of the experience which occurred during the Mass choir rehearsal because I was able to observe at a close proximity, thus providing a more accurate depiction of the sequence of events.

The Mass choir rehearsal was my first exposure to the Pentecostal religion and Maranatha. It was a powerful, deeply moving, and thought provoking experience. The only previous knowledge I had attained regarding the Pentecostal faith before attending Maranatha was a documentary film I had viewed entitled "The Holy Ghost People" which was an overview of Appalachian Pentecostal worship practices. After viewing the film I was aware that spirit possession and speaking in tongues were a part of the Pentecostal faith; however, I was still unprepared to witness these experiences first hand.

The transcendence occurred during the second piece that the choir rehearsed that evening entitled, "We Worship Christ". The instrumentation

for the piece included piano, organ, bass, guitar, drums, lead vocal, and chorus. This piece was one that the choir had memorized as there were no lyric sheets made available to them before rehearsal. The rehearsal progressed in a standard fashion with the exception that a male vocalist from the tenor section helped Boyd direct this piece. The director stopped and started the choir when he wanted changes or emphasis on certain words or phrases. The organ player joined the rehearsal at about 8:15 P. M. and the transcendence occurred during the vamp part of the song on the repeated phrase of "Hallelujah, Hallelujah, We worship Christ our Lord". The vamp was led by the lead vocalist and answered by the chorus. As the phrase was repeated and intensified the organ would stop playing for one cycle of the vamp and the choir was accompanied by only accented quarter notes played on the ride cymbal. The instruments came back in with the organ playing the main melody of the vamp. At this time many of the members were screaming, crying, shouting, and leaving their places in the choir. One of the members ran up and down the aisles of the church. Another member was helped to the floor as she experienced her transcendence and one of the members held and rocked her gently. The energy of the vamp slowly subsided and the female lead soloist gave thanks and praises to Jesus. As the transcendence slowly dissipated people applauded, hugged each other and gave praises to Jesus. The rehearsal ended with a closing prayer circle in which I was invited to participate.

The act of transcendence or spirit possession has been documented in West African religious ceremonies. In *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA*, Iain MacRobert states that one of the prime

elements of West African "religious practice" is the extensive use of music, especially drumming. In West Africa "drumming, singing, and dancing" are part of the ritualistic practice in which the devotees are "possessed by lesser deities and spirits" (14).

MacRobert also states that the dominating characteristic of West and Central African religious thought is that the individual and community share a continuous connection with the spiritual world. The philosophy of African religion is not an individual relationship with God but rather a "social" interrelationship with God, the spirits, the community and the ancestors of that community. MacRobert explains that the word "religion" does not exist in most indigenous languages of Africa because religion is considered to be all of life. The one dominating characteristic that Central and West African religions share is the belief that the individual and the community have continuous contact with the spirit world. The supernatural and the sacred are joined with the physical and the material and this integration of the seen and the unseen is practiced by the individual for the sake of that individual and the overall welfare of the community. Each member of a community must also understand that sacrifice, spirit possession and divination are a part of this daily interaction with the spirit world (12).

Portia K. Maulsby asserts that the twentieth century religious practices of black Americans were founded on the concepts set fourth during the praise house meetings of captive peoples. She also contends that these religious practices continued to be observed by black Americans for approximately seventy-five years after the Emancipation Proclamation. The twentieth century sect that adhered to the philosophies and concepts of praise house

religious practice was known as the "black folk church", which was closely associated with the Pentecostal, Holiness and Old Baptist black denominations (12). Maultsby states that some of the characteristics of the religious practices associated with these denominations are "spirit possession, shouts, chanted sermons, the feeling of familiarity with God and the ancient heroes, and the communal setting in which songs were created and recreated" (Maultsby 12-13).

Bernice Johnson Reagon, in her article *Pioneering African American Gospel Music Composers: A Smithsonian Research Project*, states that in the post-Civil War years the function of the congregational singing was to bring about spirit possession in the new Pentecostal churches, also known as Holiness, Sanctified, or Church of God in Christ congregations. She cites ethnomusicologist William Dargan as being responsible for naming this genre as "congregational gospels" and states that these songs provided for the transition between "slave based repertoire to the rehearsed gospel song tradition" (13).

Johnson also states that it was the development of the Pentecostal denomination of the Church of God in Christ founded in Mississippi by Bishop Charles Henry Mason that was responsible for reformulating the spirituals into shout songs which became part of the standard repertoire in Pentecostal congregational-song services. In conjunction with this new style of congregational singing the other musical element that departed from traditional Methodist and Baptist musical practice was the incorporation of tambourines, washtub basses and later, piano as instrumental accompaniment. The instruments were used as percussive forces to move

the music. Another purpose of the accompanying instruments was to evoke spirit possession which is a crucial element in the Pentecostal worship service (13-14).

C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, in their book *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, have noted that the singing of gospel songs evokes the holy dance or shout to occur in certain members of many of the adult choirs in the Holiness-Pentecostal churches. Lincoln and Mamiya describe shouting as a religious phenomenon in which spiritual possession takes place in a worshipper and during the possession experience the worshipper "... praises God in a paroxymal dance" (365).

It seems there are strong similarities between certain West African religious thought and musical practice and the religious thought and musical practices practiced in some African American Pentecostal churches.

The ninth element that I observed was the improvisation and constant variation that was present in the music. During the worship service I had observed that Black was almost always playing. In our interview I asked him to explain why this occurred and what were his sources for the music. His response was that playing music during prayer was something that the pastor allowed him to do and that it was a reflection of his own personal style or contribution to the service. When referring to the source of the music his response was that it was a spontaneous, improvised composition that was designed to complement the minister and was often created unconsciously. He stated that his musical compositions were expressions of the rises and falls and inflections in the minister's voice as he spoke, sang, or prayed. He also noted that one may find that this occurs at other Pentecostal churches, but the

feeling would be different due to the fact that it is a personal musical reflection of the experience, a specific minister, musician, place, time, occasion and mood.

The tenth characteristic that I observed was the absence of a set format in the worship service. If we view this aspect from a large or overall perspective it can be interpreted as applying the concepts of improvisation or variation to the worship service itself. During my interview with Boyd I asked her if there were any standard songs that the choir sang at specific times during the service. Her response was that the choir had a specific place in the service and their designated time to sing was during the Praise and Worship section of the service. She also noted that if the pastor was preaching on a specific topic and Black "keyed" into a song that musically expressed the theme of that topic, she would follow Black's lead and lead the choir in song. Further, Boyd stated that there is a pool of songs for the choir to choose from; however, there is no fixed order or repertoire that is followed in performance.

According to Boyd there is no set length, format, or order of the worship at Maranatha. She noted that the only constant in the worship format is the Praise and Worship section. As an example she explained that on April 2, 1995 the pastor did not preach at all, leaving room for the movement of the Holy Spirit. She noted that on that particular Sunday, the choir sang and members of the congregation started "dancin' and shoutin' and testifying and dancing more and shoutin' more" and "they came to the altar for prayer ... and then we went home." When referring to this service she stated that there was no spoken word; instead, the word was delivered through the music. As our interview continued she stated that the nature of



the worship service within the Pentecostal faith is unstructured and that if the order of worship is altered it is considered to be "the move of God - and you don't hinder the move of God, because if that's what He want[s] to do today, then that's what we do today."

A parallel can be drawn between the practice of variation and improvisation in the Church service itself, and West African ritual and dance drama. MacRobert has noted that "African primal religion was danced and sung, beaten out in the rhythms of 'talking' drums, the swaying bodies and the stamping of feet ... enacted in ritual and drama" (MacRobert 11-12). In this way, the Church service at Maranatha parallels the dynamic equilibrium of a traditional West African dance drama, with song, dance, and drumming. While certain elements such as context and repertoire are set by tradition, the specific realization of a piece or musical event is determined by the performers, occasion and the mood or emotion that unfolds during the performance.

Thus, the element of improvisation is present in the melody, lyrics, rhythm and form of the songs in rehearsals and in the worship service. Improvisation is also an integral part of the worship service itself in that, the order of the service can be altered to satisfy the spiritual and emotional needs and feelings of the moment for the individual or the congregation.

The eleventh element that I observed was the relation of the music to the aesthetic of emotion and spirit. The purpose of the music is not to create an objective, distanced work of art, but to create a mood or space for the members of the congregation to receive the spirit. Through my observations

I have learned that the music and the religious practices or beliefs have a symbiotic relationship. In my interview with Boyd she stated that the purpose the choir serves in the service is to take the congregation to "a higher level in preparation for the Word." However, through my observations I have documented that the spoken Word is not always a constant in the worship service; therefore, one could assert that at times there is no clear cut separation between the music and the word, that the word is manifested in the music.

A twelfth element is the role of music in the church musician's life. During my interviews with Black and Boyd I asked them if they considered music to be a part of life or a way of life. Black considered music to be a way of life. As an example, he stated that many times melodies would come into his mind that expressed a thought, life experience, or emotion with far better accuracy than verbal expression allowed. Boyd expressed music as being both a part of life and a way of life. She explained that music "is a part of life, period - because music is here and music is around us... music itself - regardless of the kind of music, would always be part of my life." When referring to music as being a way of life she stated that "God has called me to this. So therefore it's a way of life, it's where He has me now and what He has me doing and out of obedience - I do this."

Through my observations my informants have shown that the relationship they share with the music at Maranatha is deeply personal and can be seen as a direct reflection and expression of their act of worship.

The thirteenth and final element observed was method of musical transmission. As was previously stated the music at Maranatha is taught in

an oral fashion and that the main source for the music is derived from pre-recorded contemporary gospel tapes. The music is taught by individual voice part. During many rehearsals Boyd would sing a phrase of the song for each of the voice parts and the members would respond with an imitation of that same phrase. When the choir was not adequately expressing the emotion of a specific word or phrase, Black would leave his position at the piano and work with the choir on specific technical elements such as cut off points for words or phrases, dynamics and pronunciation.

Another technique that Boyd used as a tool in her oral transmission of the music was her use of grand hand gestures, footstomps and handclaps as she directed the choir. The arm gestures that Boyd used would evoke energy, excentuate vocal dynamics and mark cut off points for phrases. The gestures were physical manifestations of specific musical elements that Boyd wanted the choir to produce. Boyd indicated cut off points for words or phrases either by a single handclap that was executed in a staccato-like fashion, or by sharp, open fisted, hand gestures that went out horizontally from either side of her body. Circular arm movements were used to indicate crescendos, fermatas or climaxes in the music. She also used a footstomp in a repeated quarter note pattern to drive the music forward.

The oral tradition and the use of footstomps has been documented in the religious practices of West Africa. Iain MacRobert states that the captive African peoples from the sub-Saharan region of West Africa brought complex and sophisticated religious beliefs to the New World. The religion and ethics of these people was not documented in holy books or written liturgies, but passed down from generation to generation through symbolism and oral

tradition. The ethics, morals, values, sacred rituals and wisdom of the ancestors were transmitted through legends, folktales, songs and proverbs. These oral methods ensured the continuation of the African culture and maintained social conformity in Africa and the New World (MacRobert 11).

One could assert that the oral method of musical transmission used at Maranatha is instrumental in creating the necessary environment which allows for the freedom of improvisation and variation, and the personal expression of emotion and spirit that are of paramount importance to the worship.

### **Chapter III**

#### **Conclusion**

One recurrent aspect throughout this study connects West African religious and musical practice to the religious and musical practices observed at Maranatha: the primary function and aesthetic of the music in both cultures is to evoke emotion and spirit in the worshipers. Related to this concept is the idea that the aesthetic of emotion and spirit is not only experienced at the personal level, but also on a communal level.

All of the elements discussed in this study of the music and religious practices at Maranatha show a distinct parallel between this African American Pentecostal Gospel practice and West African drumming, song and dance. It is hoped that this brief overview of the musical and social realities observed at Maranatha has provided a fertile foundation for future research.

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