Secular Devotion
Afro-Latin Music and Imperial Jazz

TIMOTHY BRENNAN
Introduction

Popular music in the Americas, although derived from a number of Arabic and European (especially Spanish and French) influences, is overwhelmingly neo-African—even in genres like ballroom, disco and Broadway where the African elements are far from obvious. Once angrily denied, this observation is now a commonplace. It is not only that musicians of African descent throughout the Americas have had a lavish presence on the pop charts or that the instrumentation, voicing and percussion of the African diaspora flow everywhere through the rivulets of popular song. The observation can be put much more strongly: there is a massive African subtext to American everyday life and leisure.

Although not unheard of, this sort of point is still finessed in many of the tributes to U.S. forms like jazz and blues, which are rightly seen as valuable reserves of the black contribution to American culture. A similar avoidance has often been true in Latin America as well, although for demographic and political reasons, much less so, especially in recent decades. This is not to say, of course, that ballroom, disco, Broadway, or other North American genres could have taken their distinctive shapes outside the unique setting of U.S. culture, or that they did not depend on many interactions with white musicians in urban and rural settings, above all Tin Pan Alley and the popular theater. All the same, the idea that there is an African unconscious to our most unguarded moments is still too disturbing for many to admit, and the redefinition of self too disorienting for many to accept in any but the most abstract way.

Even less conceded, I would argue, is the claim that I take as the point of departure for this book: namely, that New World African music extending from northern Brazil to the southern United States is hostile to the dominant religious impulses of modern life, to forms of Western labor, and to the commercial assault on demotic traditions and other types of unscribed human contact. I am not appealing here, though, to the widely used idea (taken from W. E. B. du Bois) of an African-
American "double consciousness" — which is a familiar way of rendering the matter. On the contrary, it is more accurate to say that popular music offers its listeners a coded revenge on the modern, and that this is why it is popular.

By saying this I am not linking popular music to youth rebellion, which is an argument that has been something of a cottage industry for at least two decades. For some time, in fact, this has been the political angle of most critical writing on mass culture. It was not hard for later writers to explode this doubtful thesis based on celebrating market openings and seeing racial minorities and working-class teenagers as revolutionaries who were subverting official categories through transgressive forms of art. The youth rebellion critics (U.S. rock and, later, rap were the examples of preference) tended to take musical forms at their literal word, confusing marketing with high hopes for social change, and failing to guard their flank against the inevitable evidence of co-optation where yesterday's revolt was quickly turned into the gimmick of today's ad campaign.

African New World music is political not because it is always, or even usually, a carrier of political messages (it isn't) but because the saturation of New World sensibilities by African religion and philosophy is, by its nature, political — an aspect more difficult to co-opt since the African presence is part of leisure and entertainment in the Americas at a cellular level, so to speak. For historical reasons, the African presence was expressed very differently in the United States than in other parts of the Americas — the Caribbean and Latin America — and these differences are highly revealing of the political culture of both regions, at once culturally alike and fatally opposed. Many of my observations set out from this division, exploring the richness of Afro-Latin art given its relative escape from the burdens of living in a country with imperial ambitions and a salvational sense of religious mission.

In this book, I have given this counter-monotheism and pre-modern embrace the name "secular devotion." By this I mean the resilience in contemporary popular music of African religious elements that are not perceived by listeners religiously, but to which they are, often unconsciously, devoted. The degree to which works of popular music are neo-African varies a great deal, of course (Nat King Cole's "Ramblin' Rose" not so much; Carlos Santana's version of "Oye Como Va" a great deal more). But that is not the key issue. It is rather that the disproportionate presence of neo-African musical elements in the popular music of the Americas has a political meaning. The popularity of popular music is grounded in aesthetic choices traceable to Africa, a fact that suggests that apart from being an immensely appealing idea — an idea that haunts the West's development. It has been an organizing principle of the embroiled world that consumerism wants to flee all associations with the religions of the non-euro-American embassies of an unacceptable past.

How can one speak, though, of "religion" in popular music? I believe.

First, despite the variety of Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish religions the New World (in Cuba alone, the most popular African in-Mandingo, and Yoruba, the voodoo-EBEJ, Ogu, and Shango) are the dominant and appear often in the lyrics. The second is that this made so in the streamlining and refinement of themselves. This condensing and unfolding was an attempt to achieve a unifying Europe to keep African ethnicities separate.

Second, the experience of enslavement itself to a social vision arrayed, in fact, was already well marked: African societies that the slavers Anne Phillips, for example, perceived of land-tenure and small communities and social structures of African acceptance to Western "developments" (loyalties to tribal chiefs) and the "business of intrusions), many of these social processes of production and pacification, despite trying for centuries, succeeded in making Africa proper the pariah status today in world.

The suppressed economy's fiercest opposition were revolutionaries of religious schisms, for example, from Biassou, Romaine Rivière, Hiram, and the Jews of the Americas. All won large and enth
a familiar way of rendering something to say that popular music is pattern, and that this is why it is in music to youth rebellion, which is a cottage industry for at least as long as has been the political angle of youth. It is not hard for later writers to locate market openings and teenagers as revolutionaries through transgressive forms of work and, later, rap were the musical forms at their literal uses for social change, and failing evidence of co-optation where the gimmick of today’s ad... Because it is always, or even (it’s not) but because the saturation and philosophy is, by its own self co-opt since the African presence in the Americas at a cellular level, the African presence was more effective than in other parts of America - and these differences are of both regions, at once... of my observations set out... of Afro-Latin art given its being in a country with imperial conscious mission, monotheism and pre-modern... this I mean the resilience in religious elements that are not which they are, often unconsc... works of popular music are... (Nat King Cole’s “Ramblin’” and/or “Oye Como Va” a great one). It is rather that the disproportions in the popular music of popular music is Africa, a fact that suggests that... apart from being an immense continent of great complexity, it is also an idea – an idea that haunts the West given its unasked-for role in the West’s development. It has become the ethical destination of those who want to flee all associations with that earlier and tainted relationship, the embodiment of an unacceptable status freely taken on.

How can one speak, though, so generally of “Africa” and “African religion” in popular music? Let me make three points.

First, despite the variety of African ethnic groups forcibly brought to the New World (in Cuba alone, these include the Arara, Lucumi, Congo, Mandingo, and Nhaigos), the great productive centers of New World music drew on a relatively small body of divinities and theological notions. The worldview emerging from them was manageably similar. In Cuba and in northeast and southern Brazil, for example, Yoruba culture predominates. In the third great source of African New World creativity – the deities of Haitian vodun derive from the Fon and the Yoruba, especially the Fon, although many of these deities (Legba, Ezili, Ogu, and Shango) are shared with the Yoruba pantheon as well, and appear often in the lyrics of popular Caribbean songs. This means is that the religious motifs acquired a coherence that was partly made so in the streamlining of religious belief by diasporic Africans themselves. This condensing was the result not only of syncretisms, but was an attempt to achieve a unity impeded by colonial policies designed to keep African ethnicities separate.

Second, the experience of capture, transport, forced labor, and death lent itself to a social vision antagonistic to the market. This antagonism, in fact, was already well marked in the relationships and structures of the African societies that the slave trade disrupted. The economic historian Anne Phillips, for example, points to communal (non-commercial) forms of land-tenure and small commodity production as being among those social structures of African societies that led to long-established resistance to Western “development.” Looking both to the past (in their loyalties to tribal chiefs) and to the future (in their resistance to colonial intrusions), many of these societies were inimical to capitalist forms of production and pacification, particularly as it concerned free labor. So despite fighting for centuries, European and U.S. companies never succeeded in making Africa properly capitalistic – one of the reasons for its pariah status today in world economic business projections. The imposed economy’s fiercest opponents in the New World were, moreover, revolutionaries of religious stripe. In Haiti, Macandal, Jean-François Biasou, Romaine Rivière, Hyacinthe Dugoucay, Halaou, and Boukman all won large and enthusiastic followings based on religious and
magical performances used to inspire and unify the local population in the decades preceding independence.  

Third, African music in the New World tends to operate (although obviously not exclusively) at the level of social allegory – one, moreover, expressed in musical structure and performance practices rather than the verbal content of messages alone. This was not just part of its secret life under conditions of repression but of an original African value system that made art and social commentary one and the same. These formal, sonoric features (not only the words and incantations sung) were capable of passing more easily from one social context to another, and so they retained their original meanings in the secular setting of a modern urban entertainment that was, and is, for that reason ritually significant. These features go beyond the well-known commonplace about African music – namely, that it is rhythmically complex, that it relies heavily on percussion (especially that of the hide drum), and that it is syncopated. The matter is more complicated than that.  

In Western music the rhythms of the bass and treble clefs generally unfold in the same meter. Music is divided into standard units of time, always actually or implicitly written. As a number of specialists have observed, our very concept of syncopation is premised on the idea of a departure from the “normal” accents of regular rhythm. In African music, by contrast, there are always at least two rhythms in play to the point where, were the music written, more than one meter would be required. I will look in more detail at these differences in Chapters 2 and 7 (and the examples I have just given are only preliminary). For now let me say that the meaning of form can be said to emerge in a differential emphasis on beat and tone as well as on the plural and the singular. To a large extent, neo-African music carries on that aspect of its original African setting where music never merely accompanies a social context. It is not just aurally taken in by a community but involves them as participants since music is not meant to be listened to passively. Much more than random aesthetic taste lies behind the fact that in African music the stress of the measure is typically on the offbeat. Musicians play “around” the beat, so that understanding African music means being able “to maintain, in our minds or our bodies, an additional rhythm to the ones we hear.”  

This formal feature not only can be, but usually is, understood by listeners in a substantive social and ethical way – in this case, where the implied or phantom beat is a striving or escape that is also and at the same time a complaint. In the chapters below, I examine in some detail how actual pieces from New World African music create a sonoric environ-
ment that amounts to a vision of society that is attractive in the West for being a not-West. The degree to which these neo-African formal elements apply to mixed forms like early jazz and blues, Cuban *rumba* and *son*, the *calenda* of Trinidad, or Jamaican reggae is very well-established and uncontroversial. With a great deal more cultural mixing, it has been repeatedly shown that these elements are found as well in pop R&B, 1960s and 1970s rock, some film music, *nueva canción*, and a variety of less obviously African forms. But there has been no systematic attempt to demonstrate the link between these forms and what I am calling secular devotion.

In this book I treat neo-African music of the Americas as a unity. Afro-Latin and African-American music are to a substantial degree part of a single complex, and the unwillingness in most writing on popular music to treat them this way has, among other things, prevented people from appreciating the message of neo-African form and its secular rituals. For a number of reasons, though, my primary focus is Afro-Latin music, especially the Cuban *son*. We notice something striking and significant about Afro-Latin music from the outset that separates it sharply from the various black musical genres of the United States. The degree of the latter's deeply Christian and revivalist surroundings is an obvious difference, and it certainly mitigated the more overt African-ness of the popular idiom – partly overcome, though it was, by the constant influx into the United States of Latin forms under assumed identities. But there is another factor I would like to highlight at this point.

The global spread of Latin music took place without occupying armies, high-tech distribution networks, or a well-developed advertising apparatus. It did so, some have argued, because of the pathways laid down by the publicity networks of North American jazz between World War I and the late 1930s (the United States being in those years, as now, highly skilled at training foreign ears). But there is at least one important reason to modify the view that jazz played this leadership role or that the United States paved the way for commercialized global popular music by establishing itself as the model for everything that followed. For it could only have been a highly developed outlook, a coherent body of thought and feeling, that gave Latin music its global reach and staying power without any of the assistance given jazz by Madison Avenue, military occupation, and a media mobilized to instruct the global public in matters of taste. It needed a worldview in order to be passed on and to circulate intact.

From a variety of angles, this book is an attempt to describe and assess that worldview. In the last decade or so, various Caribbean musical forms
(what Ángel Quintero Rivera and others have called “Tropical Music”) have enjoyed unprecedented critical attention. Suddenly, a number of excellent books on salsa, samba, calypso, and rumba began to appear. Almost nothing of this caliber, in English at any rate, existed even as recently as the 1980s. Even the popular “music-as-subversion” trends in various works of cultural studies and pop-music criticism mostly overlooked Latin music until very recently. With a few exceptions, until a decade or so ago, an actual tradition of first-rate writing on Latin music could be found only in Cuba. This was the direct result of the pioneering work of the novelist and musicologist Alejo Carpentier after World War II as well as the encouragement by the Cuban government of the critical apparatus he inspired, which led among other things to an entire generation of critics in the Carpentier mode of very high quality (explored in more detail in Chapter 5). A few precursors ahead of the curve could also be found outside Cuba, although they were conspicuous by their small numbers.¹⁵

In all of this, what went under-reported was what might be called Afro-Latin music’s guilty popularity based on a counter-Christian allegory working through symbolic form and sonic structure. Buried within its sounds was the architecture of African religion preserved at various levels of intensity. It was popular given its ability to mount a protest that was not just mixed with fun but in which fun was the protest itself. Stalked by a highly disciplined and militant Christianity, the Americas adopted popular music as an underground religion that found its cathedrals in the communal sites of dancehalls, ballrooms, and the street, publicly sharing an agenda of ideas that did not seem religious to the Western mind at all: animism, polytheism, political satire, transcendence through sex, and a secular humanism indistinguishable from all of them. This was not just a matter of youth breaking out of their parents’ conservative straitjackets. The historical memory of a bad colonial inheritance was embedded in the leisure-form, and had continually to be exorcized by a cultural conversion. In a manner that the guardians of order sensed, popular music was a rival and nemesis of the Judeo-Christian tradition.¹⁶

In many places and times, it was so deliberately.

Behind the concept of secular devotion is also a broader, arguably more consequential, claim. In this form, the argument will be more recognizable since it is more widely found and, in that sense, I am offering a view that only helps substantiate a colloquial version of an already shared public understanding. In the United States, it was Abolition, Reconstruction and the early Civil Rights movement; in the Caribbean, it was the invention of mestizaje (the idea of mixed race as a desired, even patriotic, destiny against Spain, and later of neo-pluralism ideal) during the independence struggles that made it possible to say “Our” Americas is inseparable from “That” Americas because, in case after history, men and women themselves as an embattled religious group being in the Americas against European superior ethno-religious public life for that reason foremost. But it is true also because the models of ethical conduct and virtue is on the whole very un-American.

These qualities permeate the Americas as a whole not only in its African example, that rap rose to prominence in Cuba found its voice in the independence struggle against imperialism was also an ethical reaction to a Christian revival that accompanied the rise of power. In black culture, a particular sensuality is cast in the warm occasion. Self-mortification, denial simply as release or play, in other words from its routine murders; it is in the joy that comes from cutting out that makes it attractive, although in the Americas, popular music is a necessary theoretical roots that extend far beyond an alternative history of the Latin American.

Under a firestorm of abuse, stood out a position of moral virtues of corporate greed. The audience a moral center, even different decades when they are a dominant force. For its part, as some Latin music has been a vibrant movements of Latin America.¹⁷ But a more overt dimension. Its naivety, its like heroism and sociability are a leisure – a rare coupling in ma
INTRODUCTION

A desired, even patriotic, destiny) during the independence struggles against Spain, and later of negrismo ("black-ism" as a common social ideal) during the independence struggles in early twentieth-century Cuba, that made it possible to say that the ethical core of civic life in the Americas is inseparable from the African presence. This is so first of all because, in case after historical case, public ethics tend to express themselves as an embattled response to the scandalous fact of Africans being in the Americas against their will. The very beginning and end of ethical public life for that reason tends to be defined by this issue first and foremost. But it is true also because African-American and Afro-Latin men and women, in response to hard times, were inspired to provide models of ethical conduct and truth-telling – a kind of anti-cynicism that is on the whole very un-American in the U.S. sense.

These qualities permeate the best of New World African popular music as a whole not only in its Afro-Latin guise. It is no coincidence, for example, that rap rose to prominence during the age of Reagan or that the son in Cuba found its voice during a particularly depressing hiatus in the independence struggle against Spain. The rejection of political extremes was also an ethical revamping and re-direction, often opposing the Christian revival that accompanied the rise of the new conservative power. In black culture, a peace treaty is signed with the body and sensuality is cast in the warm colors of the human in its divine manifestation. Self-mortification, denial, and abstinence are left behind. It is not simply as release or play, in other words, that popular music saves society from its routine murders; it is not just relief from the long day’s work or the joy that comes from cutting loose or the affirmation of community that makes it attractive, although all of these play their parts. In the Americas, popular music is a mission and strategy of recovery with deep theoretical roots that extend far into the past and constitutes nothing less than an alternative history of Western civilization.

Under a firestorm of abuse, forms like rap, the son, rumba, and calypso staked out a position of morality in a society drunk with the hollow virtues of corporate greed. These types of music were for much of their audience a moral center, even though in every instance, and despite the different decades when they arose, they were attacked as immorality incarnate. For its part, as some very good scholarly work has shown, Latin music has been a vibrant player in the democratic national movements of Latin America. But again, its politics typically do not lie in this overt dimension. Its naiveté, its happy promotion of unfashionable ideas like heroism and sociability are fused with its ideas of self-expression and leisure – a rare coupling in mainstream North America.
The recent U.S. revival of traditional Cuban music inspired by Buena Vista Social Club has struck many commentators as novel—as though the music were finally getting its due. Actually, the film and the phenomenon that followed it are only the latest stage in a long history of affection and forgetting. The global circulation of these traditions dates from at least the mid-nineteenth century, sprang again curiously to life at the turn of the century during the Spanish-American war, rose up once more in the Parisian and Mexican nightclubs of the 1920s and 1930s, and achieved its golden age in New York and Havana during the 1950s. Once these facts sink in, they have the power to affect our thinking about many other aspects of New World African music. Despite the detailed work by scholars like John Storm Roberts, Thomas Fiehler, Isabella Leymarie, Leonardo Acosta, and others, accounts of jazz (for example) still tend to be based on the thesis that the Caribbean and the United States exist in different musical zones—a position that seems to run up against everything we know about artistic exiles, maritime traffic, and what has lately been called “trans-border cultures.” New Orleans plays the same iconic, and largely fictional, role in jazz criticism that Athens plays in accounts of the origins of Western civilization: the absolute origin that is not (an issue I return to in Chapter 7).

Hard national-cultural categories do not seem to have weakened very much despite the explosion of writing today dedicated to transnationalism and hybridity. The fact is that nation-centered assumptions are often as strong in that criticism as in older or more conventional studies. In any research library, one can find hundreds of books and articles on ragtime, delta blues, New Orleans jazz, swing, big-band, bebop, rock & roll, R&B, doo-wop, Motown, soul, gospel, and hip hop. There are little more than a handful on samba, beguine, soca, son, bolero, tango, forró, charango, merengue, danzón, calenda, tejano, conga, bachata, vallenato, plena, cumbia, norteño, pachanga or reggaetón. Latin America and the Caribbean continue to be segregated from U.S. cultural reality. To read the American composer George Antheil from the late 1920s is to get the sense that this segregation has had a very long career:

From 1920–1925 we see one definite trend... no matter how absolutely Latin the Latins might become... or how Germanic the Germans might become... deep down (or perhaps not even concealed at all)... is ever present the new note of the Congo. This note has erroneously been called “American,” but this note belongs no more specifically to the North American Negro than to those of the West Indies or South America. It is strongly marked and recognizable as musical illiterate. 19

This denial of a common cultural ground in the U.S. Left as well as the Right has flourished in theories of popular and classical music, about globalization and the supposed more for instance, many still seem to see the U.S. border as a line that is more like a sovereign mentality, not just a Louisiana delta as the Americas were seen, say, in the 1890s as the 1890s.

The reasons for these fissures in the barriers of language, the image of the North to portray its own perspective, and the broad similarities in the way these identify us as colonial settler states, and the Atlanticists, the one for something for nothing. But this perspective of culture, we are never facing of civilizations. When we study the arts of the non-Western based popular music plays a major role in the Caribbean that literature does not. It is appreciated that the popular music of Colombian, Jamaican, Cuban is a musical style, the power of which can cut every bit as strong as the urge for success or literary skill (in which we are the most excellent, of course)?

The European struggles were also important in centuries against monarchy and in the development of the modern nation-state at the apex of imperial expansion. Imperialism helps to define civilization in terms of race and cultural or and defined by popular or folkloric, not by the awareness of the ethereal, transitory, and unsung. In the present, the predominant expressive means of popular education were possible, not hidden and discounting attribution were...
Indies or South America. It is black... not white, nor yellow. It is strongly marked and recognizable, never to be mistaken, even by the musical illiterate.  

This denial of a common cultural destiny of the Americas exists on the U.S. Left as well as the Right, and is as strong in literary criticism as in theories of popular and classical music. Despite the recent excitement about globalization and the supposed transcendence of the nation-state, for instance, many still seem to think of the world in strictly cartographic terms. The U.S. border is not just a legal demarcation written about in news features and documentaries on Arizona and southern California. It is more like a sovereign mental space, as true of south Florida and the Louisiana delta as the American Southwest, and just as sharply drawn in the 1980s as the 1890s.

The reasons for these fissures are partly obvious. They have to do with the barriers of language, the ignorance of history and context, the desire of the North to portray its own national character as unique despite broad similarities in the way the Americas were cultivated and developed as colonial settler states, and finally (it must be said) the desire to get something for nothing. But there are deeper reasons too. In any discussion of culture, we are never far from the war over the comparative value of civilizations. When we study culture, what are we studying? Is it even remotely clear to most students of “English,” for example, that African-based popular music plays a similar role in Latin American and the Caribbean that literature does in Europe and the United States? Is it appreciated that the popular and national sense of self – of being Colombian, Jamaican, Cuban – is bound up with musical expertise, musical style, the power of exerting musical influence that seems to be every bit as strong as the urge for political dominance, scientific prowess, or literary skill (in which the Caribbean and Latin America have also excelled, of course)?

The European struggles waged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries against monarchy and religious absolutism (which took place at the apex of imperial expansion), guaranteed that intellectuals would define civilization in terms of reason, logic, and the mind – qualities more closely associated with literature than the other arts. Foreign cultures defined by popular or folkloric music were considered, like sound itself, ethereal, transitory, and unsubstantial. Where a music from below was the predominant expressive mode of a people, only atmosphere or diversion were possible, not history. Ignoring the authors of inspiration and discounting attribution were invitingly easy for Europeans, and the
revolt against modernity by secular devotion largely invisible. Writing is, after all, as much a technology as a technique. As a weapon, it aided invasion by way of the fabulous narrative accounts of travel that encouraged foreign adventures, in the justifications of conquest issued by the royal courts, and in the legal documents that dispossessed the illiterate from their lands.

As the earliest European travel narratives to the Americas show, music was described from the start as writing's other. Apart from being the vehicle for a strange and compelling sexuality – all travelers either were, or pretended to be, appalled by this aspect of native life – music was poorly designed for stalking out a clearly bordered territorial possession. It was and is too ubiquitous, it flows, is everywhere, is atmospheric – although not necessarily borderless since it also marks space and claims territory. Popular music, moreover, is taken to be pre-intellectual and nebulous; one is supposed simply to absorb it, to like or dislike it, but (it is assumed) not as the result of a calculated judgment. On the other hand, music is audible form: the structuring of time as well as structured by time, and therefore on those terms attractive to the European values encoded in the age of the conquering Mind.

These observations bear on devotion in a specific way. As Régis Debray points out in God: An Itinerary, the divine was always bound up with technological invention. Monotheism derives from the invention of writing and the wheel (the two discoveries that began a long-term mastery by humans over time and space). Debray then touches on an idea already underlined in the novel by Ishmael Reed from which I took the epigraph opening this book (and which I examine in Chapter 6): “Whatever their differences, the Jewish, Catholic and Protestant Gods share the Holy Book as their source within a civilization dominated for 2,500 years by the authority of writing.”22 As Janheinz Jahn observes, despite the immense accomplishments of sub-Saharan African societies, they typically did not excel in two of the areas identified as signs of civilizational greatness: architecture and writing. On the other hand, as a number of music critics have observed (most recently, Cheryl L. Keyes), the inherited concept of the Word in neo-African practices is non-literary in the sense of being unwritten as well as being indifferent to the purely aesthetic properties of verbal invention. Jahn puts the matter clearly: “Nommo is the magic power of the word . . . the life force which produces all life . . . Only through the effect of a muntu, a man, living or dead . . . can ‘things’ become active and in their turn influence other ‘things.’”23 He explains further:

The European poet is an individual who has experienced, and wants. He means sorcerer, prophet, teacher, not therefore ‘collective’ in the way he raises him above the community.

This dedication to an animistic word – one not dependent on writing –

African New World music, in its performances, challenges this European literary values for the most parts of fiction, and irony – a list that could include the aesthetic outlook that still pervades the concert hall and museum. The neo-African practices of secular practices of venerated, disciplined approaches that counter-values. Among these are the voice, which set out to explode the traditions of them by going back to older practices.

There is a war between literate, educated college student in the sciences, or courses in literature, and these are called “culture” and the humanities. Even near a course in music, and finally: Meanwhile, outside the university, everyone is “literate” is overwrought to – their time, their emotions – and in the popular music. Broadening the demand for more music appreciation, the unforgivable absence in our curricula.

To get a sense of the severity of the Barbadian poet Edward Kasulka’s “culture of the circle” transport of the slave trade, and “Europe: the formed itself into a missile” (citedly polemical view, which sought at least the fundamental nature of the term in Brathwaite’s imaginative range, and polymer are set in music. Both sides recognize the
The European poet is an individual and expresses what he feels, thinks, has experienced, and wants. The African poet is a person, and that means sorcerer, prophet, teacher. He expresses what must be. His ‘I’ is not therefore ‘collective’ in the European sense; it is not non-individual. He speaks to the community and for them. He has a social task which raises him above the community.²⁴

This dedication to an animating rather than a recording or expressing word—one not dependent on writing—is also a difference from literature.

African New World music, but particularly, I think, the Afro-Latin forms, challenges this European monopoly on technique. For European literary values for the most part consist of novelty, complexity, innovation, and irony—a list that comes out of literary modernism and gives us the aesthetic outlook that still governs the general public sensibilities of the concert hall and museum. These aesthetic norms are challenged in the neo-African practices of secular devotion. Their “classical” (which is to say venerated, disciplined) approach to technique is based on a set of counter-values. Among these are repetition, sincerity, personality, and voice, which set out to explode the older hierarchies—or better, reassert them by going back to older practices.

There is a war between literature and music. Any moderately well-educated college student in the United States or Britain takes a few courses in literature, and these are identical in their minds with studying “culture” and the humanities. Far rarer for them to have gotten anywhere near a course in music, and far rarer still a course on Afro-Latin music. Meanwhile, outside the university walls, the culture with which almost everyone is “literate” is overwhelmingly musical. What they are devoted to—their time, their emotions, their sharing are all invested in it—is popular music. Broadening the canon with more course offerings, or requiring more music appreciation courses, does not begin to get at this unforgivable absence in our cultural training.

To get a sense of the severity of the divide, consider a contrast made by the Barbadian poet Edward Kamau Brathwaite between what he calls the “culture of the circle” transported from Africa to the Caribbean during the slave trade, and “Europe: that great vast ice-eroded plain” which “formed itself into a missile” (a different shape entirely).²⁵ This admittedly polemical view, which some might write off as arbitrary, suggests at least the fundamental nature of the rift. Just as circle is opposed to missile in Brathwaite’s imaginative iconography, orality, communal performance, and polymeter are set against the European Word in popular music. Both sides recognize the other as its other, and know that the very
media of expression (literature, music) – rather than any particular form they take – are symbolically associated with peoples and civilizations whose past hostilities never ended. To teach “English” faithfully today, one has to teach popular music, which is to say (among other things) neo-African music.

My starting point in “World Music Does not Exist” (Chapter 1) is the observation that the music that really is “world” in the sense of being globally familiar and admired is European classical music and jazz – two forms never included under the term’s rubric. As a place rather than a style of music, world music grows out of earlier colonial relationships. I dwell on the fact, first of all, that the greatest cultural influence on the West by the global periphery is in music, and that the idea of world music structures the reception of these sounds and styles not unlike trade embargos do, or the filtering of foreign news by government spokes-
persons. The music disseminated internationally never attains the status of the international; it remains a transported locality. If the exoticism of early colonial travel narratives was erotic, that of world music is aesthetic, expressed in the suggestive titles and opulent CD covers of boutique collections of world music. By exploring early American film and theater, I identify a long history of “world music” that existed in the 1930s and 1950s before the term was ever coined. World music is not simply appropriative, though; it demonstrates an escape from the American self.

In “Surrealism and the Son” (Chapter 2), I test my thesis that Latin music thrived in an anti-modern outlook. By tracing the trajectory of success that Cuban music found in interwar Europe and in the World War II era in the United States, I develop the ideas formulated by Ángel Quintero Rivera, for example, that Latin music’s otherworldliness had to do with its reorientation of Newtonian time; or, as Ruth Glasser has argued, with a form of ethnic reassertion camouflaged to appear as European melody. If the European avant-gardes have been understood almost exclusively through painting, sculpture, and literature, its musical sources are seen clearly in the avant-garde’s use of the medium of radio. The Cuban son, however, is a musical genre that is largely about itself, where self-reflexivity is a basically modernist gesture. And yet, very much unlike the market detours of a surrealism already commercialized by the mid-1920s, the son moved rather in the direction of offering a formal allegory of the indigenous: just the opposite of the contemporary focus on “hybridity.” The compositional mechanics of what later became salsa was based on a delayed merging of cultural elements that existed side-by-side in an intentionally unresolved state.

In “Face Down in the Mainstream” (Chapter 3), I argue that the authentic or genuine are usually stigmatized in a myth of origins and rely on the audience’s aversion to that point, I argue that the authentic work is one that knows how to map the traditions of sound that are looking at the work of Fernán
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ments in Nicaraguan rural music to contemporary salsa.

“Rap and American Business” (Chapter 4) takes up the coincidence in the 1970s of the rise of salsa in neighboring bars and the emergence of two forms offered diametrically opposed to the avant garde rock scene. The chapter analyzes the fusion of artisanal and commercialization its final phase. As much as it benefits well, for all its nonconformity, the rap of consumer to producer. Rap and bohemian (rock) or the working class paradoxically paves the way to a new salsa and (2) the R&B/rap duet. I look to the Latin forms of music that most influenced rap.

In “Global Youth and Locality” (Chapter 5), I explore the paradoxes of world music in our globalized world. Inasmuch as U.S. marketers have contributed to this process (music), it is not surprising that young people in Europe and Asia would also be affected by this American vision of a venerable older Cuba. I write rap and listen to música ron, and by insisting on the importance of youth as a new force in Third World African music genres, I argue that particular kinds of pleasures are central to the African New World milieu with the music of the “Trini” and “Salsa” movements. The War of Writing on Music (Chapter 6) looks at the most important African-American postwar period. This chapter takes up the fact that African New World music...
rather than any particular form with peoples and civilizations with “English” faithfully today, say (among other things) neo-

“World music does not Exist” (Chapter 1) is the world in the sense of being classical music and jazz—two historic. As a place rather than a colonial relationships. I met cultural influence on the idea that the idea of world music and styles not unlike trade news by government sporadically never attains the status of locality. If the exoticism of that of world music is aesthetic, elegant CD covers of boutique early American film and theater, that existed in the 1930s and World music is not simply escape from the American self. 2), I test my thesis that Latin music. By tracing the trajectory of war Europe and in the World the ideas formulated by Ágel music’s otherworldliness had to time; or, as Ruth Glasser has camouflaged to appear as avant-gardes have been understood gesture, and literature, its musical the use of the medium of radio. more that is largely about itself, the gesture. And yet, very much already commercialized by the direction of offering a formal form of the contemporary focus on classics of what later became salsa salient elements that existed side-by-

In “Face Down in the Mainstream” (Chapter 3) I revisit an issue that has been debated repeatedly in popular music theory: the problem of “authenticity.” I offer a defense of this idea, which has been mostly ridiculed in writing on music in recent decades. Appeals to what is authentic or genuine are usually thought deeply suspect since they indulge in a myth of origins and rely on a notion of inviolable essence. While conceding that point, I argue that the question has been misposed. An authentic work is one that knows its own history of making, and is able to map the traditions of sound that made it possible. I explore these ideas by looking at the work of Fernando Ortiz, eventually turning to developments in Nicaraguan rural music during the Sandinista revolution and in contemporary salsa.

“Rap and American Business” (Chapter 4) takes as its starting point the coincidence in the 1970s of the birth of hip hop in the Bronx and the rise of salsa in neighboring barrios, often with the same personnel. These two forms offered diametrically opposed alternatives to the then-dominant rock scene. The chapter argues that co-optation is the goal of rap, and commercialization its final realization. It is a music that conforms well, for all its nonconformity, to the market, for it blurs the relationship of consumer to producer. Rap lionizes the lumpen rather than the bohemian (rock) or the working-class man or woman (salsa). This paradoxically paves its way to the mainstream. The mainstreaming of rap was also accomplished through the creation of (1) the female mack and (2) the R&B/rap duet. I look at the reception of Cuban rap and those Latin forms of music that most closely resemble U.S. rap.

In “Global Youth and Local Pleasure” (Chapter 5) I look at the paradoxes of world music in contemporary Cuba and Puerto Rico. Inasmuch as U.S. marketers have always targeted youth (and not only in music), it is not surprising that the Caribbean island considered a pariah nation would be portrayed as cramming the style of youth, pushing a stale vision of a venerable older Cuban music onto those who really just want to write rap and listen to música romántica. I show the weaknesses of this view, and by insisting on the importance of Cuba’s role in the dissemination of New World African music generally, try to make a related case for the particular kinds of pleasures available in Cuban society. I contrast this milieu with the music of the “pisto-locos” of Colombia and Mexico to discuss criminality and the marketing of youth rebellion.

“The War of Writing on Music: Mumbo Jumbo” (Chapter 6) is a reading of the most important African-American novel about popular music in the postwar period. This chapter takes up Ishmael Reed’s provocative thesis that African New World music is a search for the lost “Text” of African
religion. His key moment of 1920s U.S. history for Americans of African descent is not, as usually advertised, the Harlem Renaissance but the occupation of Haiti by U.S. troops, which was simply a continuation of a millennia-long effort to cut off African religion at its source (a religion disseminated by way of New World popular dance). Reed offers a confirmation of the thesis of secular devotion which is relayed by him in a retelling of the history of the rise of Western civilization.

"Imperial Jazz" (Chapter 7) opens by reminding us that New Orleans between 1880 and 1910 was primarily a Caribbean city, its eyes trained on Port au Prince and Havana rather than Chicago or St. Louis. It is just as significant that the first acts of U.S. empire in Cuba and Puerto Rico at the turn of the century created the cultural contacts (often in the form of the recruitment of musicians) that helped create the viability of jazz. And yet, against this story, what was originally the artistic creation of an outcast and enslaved people was transformed overnight by U.S. journalists and music critics into proof of what was most liberating about the society that did the enslaving. The national mythology of jazz has always been deeply redemptive, broadcast by black and white scholars alike as the signature cultural creation of the home country characterized by improvisation, self-fulfillment, and social mobility. I conclude this chapter by reflecting on the tragic separation in jazz from its blues influences: a situation that stands in contrast to Latin music whose commercialized forms in salsa retain close and ongoing connections to the son.

I have tried to make an argument about musical form that does not limit itself to a discussion of genres or playing styles. I am less interested in insider knowledge, or the jargons and terms of practicing musicians, than the relationship of musical form to representative peoples and worldviews. If jokes are among the first things that do not translate from one language to another, it is also the case that whatever is culturally untranslatable appears as a joke to outsiders. There is nothing more outlandish than a situated signer cut loose from its moorings: one of the reasons Latin devotion is misrecognized or, worse, rendered as corniness, kitsch, or nostalgia. Music criticism has been very effective at providing the lost cultural contexts of a genre's creation, but less so the imperial imagination in which culture is learned. To understand that imagination is to begin to understand what is classical about Afro-Latin music, and it is in the name of that understanding that I have written this book.26

**World Music**

It takes an era advertised as having things that never exist – despite my title – as an idea. The buyers of records. It is real if only it were real. When so much of the world is having to leave home, and our experience of the representation of things, the important and as real as a world.

By way of television and film, the world is array of music from around the world, and 1998, one could find rock, rap, and the United States on MTV or a CD or download an MP3 file. All into contact with soundtracks of audiences, even without looking for music, Latin salsa, West African, Brazilian samba, Colombian campesino time actually becomes familiar, as names of the styles or where they mean in other locales. In stores section of shelves with CDs grouped labeled "world music." And then a record store, world music is born marketing suddenly coalesces into what already exists. In the countries of what hearing music from other places we can make of it: namely, not choral, written, improvised, rural music of everywhere else.

Think of world music in terms and electronics industries, which
Notes

Introduction

1. Janheinz Jahn, Muntu: An Outline of Neo African Culture (London: Faber and Faber, 1961 [1958]). I share the position of Jahn's classic study that "Afro-American culture belongs to African culture . . . and we may consider the two together" (17). These propositions are developed well in John Storm Roberts's Black Music of Two Worlds (New York: Praeger, 1972), which explores "neo-African music [whose] elements [are] still totally or very largely African" (19).


4. Religious expression by Africans in the New World is extremely varied. The categories would include Revivalist and Spiritualist cults, Religio-Political cults, types of Protestant sectarianism, and Neo-African cults such as Vodun (Haiti), Shango (Trinidad), Santeria (Cuba), Candomblé (Brazil). It is this last type that concerns me most, since there (unlike in the more Christianized forms) "ritual actions [such] as providing offerings to the gods and the dead, dancing, speaking in unknown tongues, singing, and asking the spirits for assistance" was less about "supernatural phenomena than . . . 'social consensus'" (George Eaton Simpson, Black Religions in the New World (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

5. Slaves to the New World, moreover, were primarily taken from contiguous areas of the western part of the continent: the Gambia and Senegal area, Sierra Leone, the Ivory Coast and Liberia, the area of present-day Togo and Dahomey, and the Niger delta. In fewer numbers, however, slaves were also taken from the area of Angola and the Cape of Good Hope.

6. Simpson, 58. "In the worship of African deities in Cuba . . . the African elements of Santeria are predominantly Yoruba . . . Yoruba music is played on African types of drums, songs with Yoruba words and music are sung, and dancers are possessed by the orishas" (59).

NOTES TO PAGES 3–9

8. The cabildos, or mutual aid societies, were set up in Cuba in part to achieve this end, for example.
10. Simpson, 52.
12. Ibid., 45, 47. He goes on to note, though, that “most African music is in common variety of duple or triple time (like 4/4 or 12/8),” a point to which we will return when considering jazz in Chapter 7.
13. Jahn, 149.
14. Chernoff, 49. John Storm Roberts identifies the neo-African features of music even more simply: (1) complex, overlapping rhythms, working in counterpoint; (2) musical instruments and the human voice used percussively as well as in their normal function as the carriers of melody and harmony; (3) music as a communal meditation: the antiphonal structure demands that the lead singer utter a line that the chorus expands and develops (Black Music of Two Worlds, 16–98).
17. This argument has been posed in all of the following studies: Gage Averll, A Day for the Hunter, A Day for the Prey: Popular Music and Power in Haiti (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Robin Moore, Nationalizing Blackness: Afro-Cubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920–1940 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997); Ruth Glasser, My Music Is My Flag: Puerto Rican Musicians and Their New York Communities, 1917–1940.
20. I am aware that the term “music of composition and tonality. With theory,” I am referring instead of its social uses or aesthetic
23. Jahn, 121, 123.
24. Ibid., 149.
30. I would like to thank Lindsey}
32. It should be said that Sweeney of salesmanship (which he opposes). Although he assumes that pop implicitly excludes “exotic” rock musicians with African or popular forms under world music: Texas swing, country western, and Under the “general” category, imperial dimension, his critique of Essentially, world music for corporate pop.
33. Cornel West in Cornel West and the Bay Press, 1992) refers at one culture. However, he says very not Afro-American (Afro-Latin poly of U.S. black culture in such a way, it seems to me, that it could be used to argue that the “African” category is not relevant to an understanding of black music.
34. Goffman, 149.
35. Jahn, 121, 123.
36. I am not suggesting that African American music, which has been a mixed bag of musical traditions from across the African continent, is somehow less African than the music of Africa itself. What I am suggesting is that the music of African Americans in the Americas is a unique tradition, one that has been shaped by the specific historical and cultural circumstances of the slave trade and the resulting diaspora.
37. Jahn, 121, 123.
20. I am aware that the term “music theory” refers in musicological circles to theories of composition and tonality. When I use the terms “theories of music” or “music theory,” I am referring instead to any commentary on music or theorizations about its social uses or aesthetic values without any other specialist meaning.


22. Brian Rotman, “Monobeing” [a review of Debray’s God: An Itinerary], London Review of Books (17 February 2005), 30 (these are Rotman’s words).

23. Jahn, 121, 125.

24. Ibid., 149.


Chapter 1 – World Music Does Not Exist

1. Philip Sweeney, The Virgin Directory of World Music (London: Virgin Books, 1991). Sweeney recounts how the term “world music” was coined by record executives meeting in a London pub in order to come up with an identifying category that would give it a niche on the record racks.


3. I would like to thank Lindsay Simms for bringing this film to my attention.


5. It should be said that Sweeney seems more overwhelmed by the inexorable logic of salesmanship (which he opposes) than he is under the sway of a reductive idea. Although he assumes that popular music “is not art or classical music” (ix) and deliberately excludes “experimental hybrid music created by Western jazz and rock musicians with African or oriental counterparts” (x), he does include U.S. popular forms under world music — for example, Cajun, Tex/Mex, delta blues, Texas swing, country western, conjunto music and accordion polkas (250–53).

6. Cornel West in Cornel West and Gina Dent, ed., Black Popular Culture (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992) refers at one point to the “African-Americanization of global culture.” However, he says very little about the African-Americanization that is not Afro-Usonian (Afro-Latin music, for example). There is an assumed monopoly of U.S. black culture in such matters, and that — as Ken Burns’s recent PBS