Music of the Common Tongue

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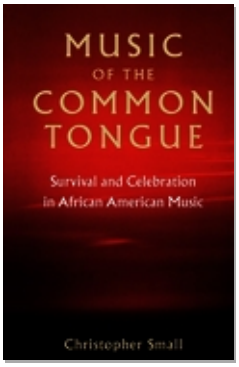

Chapter 1

AFRICANS, EUROPEANS AND THE MAKING OF MUSIC

The first thing we must understand about the Africans who were taken into slavery in the Americas is that they were by no means members of a primitive society. The societies of the Western Sudan, which, at least up to the beginning of the nineteenth century, was the principal source of black slaves, may have been technologically simple by nineteenth-century European standards (at the time of the first large-scale encounters, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, there was little to choose between them, apart from the strategically crucial technologies of shipbuilding and explosives), but, socially, politically, aesthetically and spiritually they had, and still have, much to teach Europeans, those strange creatures whom, according to Okoye, Africans at first derided 'for their horrible looks, red faces, long hair and long heads', and whom they regarded as 'unsightly because they did not possess a black skin, full lips and broad nostrils'.[1]

It is tempting to cite, as evidence for the 'advanced' nature of West African societies, that series of empires which arose in the Western Sudan from the eighth century A.D. onwards, whose names ring in the ears of Europeans like strange music, as alien as the names of planets in an epic of science fiction: Ghana, Mali, Songhai, and Kanem-Bornu. These were immensely wealthy. A fourteenth-century Emperor of Mali, Mansa Musa, who is said to have ruled over the largest domains on earth apart from the Mongol Empire, made his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324 (Islam spread early into West Africa, but the Africans transformed it, as they did later the Christianity of the missionaries, into a specifically African

syncretism that co-existed, and still co-exists, comfortably with the older polytheistic religions); his largesse with gold was so prodigal that the value of the local currency in Cairo was depressed for some twelve years after his visit. The term 'empire' is, however, only a makeshift, for we do not have a term for that kind of political organization in which power, while seemingly vested in a supreme head of state, actually permeated upwards from the smallest social units, from families and clans through a loose confederation, to the Emperor, whose position depended upon the continuing assent of all; government in all essentials took place through the lineage-based community, which was, and seemingly remains today, the basic social unit across the continent. To the western bureaucrat such a community-based system of government will appear proof of primitivity or backwardness; nonetheless I do not intend trying to appease his prejudices by pretending that the decentralized 'empires' of the Western Sudan much resembled their centralized, top-downwards namesakes of Europe.

Instead, one can only point out that, from all accounts, the continent in the centuries before the disruption caused by the slave trade and, later, colonialism, was an orderly and well-governed place. The fourteenth-century Berber traveller Ibn Battuta reported that 'Of all peoples the Negroes are those who most abhor injustice. The Sultan [of Mali] pardons no-one who is guilty of it. There is complete and general safety throughout the land.'[2] That this was a more or less general condition throughout sub-Saharan Africa is confirmed not only by African and Arab travellers but by Europeans also. A Dutch merchant's description of the city of Benin, in what is now Nigeria, was published in Amsterdam in 1668 and includes the following: 'The king's court is square and lies in the right quarter of the town as you approach it from the Cotton Gate. It is as big as the city of Haarlem and is surrounded by a wall like that surrounding the town itself. It is divided into many splendid palaces and comprises beautiful and long square galleries almost as large as the Amsterdam Exchange. These galleries are raised on high pillars covered from top to bottom with cast copper on which are engraved pictures of their war exploits and battles. Each roof is

decorated with turrets bearing birds cast in copper with outstretched wings, cleverly made after the living models. The streets of the town are very straight and wide, each over a hundred and twenty feet wide.'[3] Benin was famous not only for its artistic and architectural achievements but also for the shrewdness and enterprise of its merchants.

Even Henry Morton Stanley, by no means a sympathetic observer of Africa, allowed in 1875 that the King of Uganda was 'a pious Musselman and an intelligent humane king,'[4] while as late as 1906 the anthropologist Leo Frobenius could write of his journey to the Congo: 'And on this flourishing material civilization there was a bloom, like the bloom on a ripe fruit, both tender and lustrous; the gestures, manners and customs of a whole people from the youngest to the eldest, alike in the families of princes and well-to-do and of the slaves, so naturally dignified and refined to the last detail. I know of no northern race who can bear comparison with such a uniform level of education as is to be found among these natives.'[5] Frobenius's further comment is worth noting also: 'Judging from the accounts of navigators from the 15th to the 18th century, there is not a shadow of doubt that Negro Africa of that period, stretching from the south to the edge of the Sahara Deserts, was in the heyday of an uninterrupted efflorescence of the arts, an efflorescence which the European conquistadores callously destroyed as fast as they succeeded in penetrating into the country . . .'[6]

One could continue the list: the great Indian Ocean ports of Kilwa (which Ibn Battuta called 'one of the most beautiful and well-constructed towns in the world'), Mombasa and Mogadishu, centres of intricate networks of trade and cultural exchange that extended as far as Indonesia and even China, which the Portuguese with their superior firepower destroyed in an attempt to take them over; Timbuktu, with its splendid court and army of scholars 'bountifully maintained', wrote the sixteenth-century Spanish traveller Leo Africanus, 'at the king's expense', one of a chain of cities along the southern edge of the Sahara which served as 'ports' for the huge caravans, often twelve thousand strong, that brought European goods across the desert and returned with ivory, salt and gold. The great trading houses of Genoa and Venice knew that they were

dealing not with 'primitive' people but with shrewd traders whom they treated with respect and even deference.

But, despite the brilliance of these and other city civilizations, the vast majority of Africans lived, then as now, in village societies, content to work a subsistence economy although, as Davidson says, 'the available evidence suggests that most peoples south of the Sahara had a standard of living far above the minimum subsistence level, and enjoyed a reasonably secure life,'[7] mostly nonliterate (I shall have more to say on literacy later), the basis of social and political life the clan or lineage, the common ancestors. Two characteristics of African social life strike one again and again in commentaries.

The first is an absence of separation between aspects of life which Europeans are inclined to keep apart: the political, the economic, the religious and the aesthetic. Despite an absence of either historical founder or systematic body of doctrine, African religion permeates every aspect of human existence. The Christian theologian Dr John Mbiti, who insists that indigenous African religion, even when overlaid with Islam or Christianity, is a unity (there are, he says, many branches but only one tree),[8] tells us that no African lacks a knowledge of God as originator, as other than human, or of the ethical responsibility of humanity in the world. A human being can become fully human only in society, and the model for society is the family — not only those presently alive but also those departed, as well as those yet to be born, all of whom are perceived as present in the society of their currently living relatives. Thus, humanness is not confined to the living; love and generosity are due no less to the dead, who in their turn watch over the living community, while those yet unborn have a right to full existence, so that the living have a duty to procreate in order to bring them to that condition.

The reciprocal relationship between individual and community finds expression in a system of rites of passage; nature may bring the child into the world but only the community can make him or her fully human. Hence the importance of naming ceremonies, in which the child dies to its mother but is reborn to the wider community, gaining not just one but many mothers, fathers, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters, on all of whom falls the responsibility for nurture. Similarly, the

rites of puberty and of marriage, procreation and death, each of which is a stage in the integration of the individual into the community, not only of the living but also of the dead and the not yet born, are each at the same time an occasion for the renewal of that community, injecting fresh energy and keeping death and disintegration at bay.

Just as the living individual is the link between the departed and the yet unborn, so he or she is also the link between the physical and the natural worlds, linking God to nature through membership of the natural world (not master over, but priest of, nature) and through the unique human moral and ethical consciousness. Thus all human life and activity take place within a religious framework, and no human act is without religious significance. The arts, too, contribute to this unified consciousness. 'In Africa,' says Davidson, 'tribal sculpture was seldom designed to be enjoyed as "art". Rather, each piece was designed to attract specific religious spirits. An ancestor figure . . . was carved as a home for the spirit of a long-dead chieftain — a spirit which might otherwise roam in anger and harm the village. A beautiful doll was often fashioned to give sanctuary to the spirit of a child not yet born. Without the presence of such spirits, a piece of sculpture has little value. For example, if a wood carving began to crack or rot and was no longer a suitable home for a spirit, another figure was made to replace it, and the first piece, no matter how beautiful, was discarded as worthless.'[9] A major function of the sculptures, the masks and the costumes, no less than of the music and the dance, was their use in rituals affirming and celebrating the power of the lineage and of the common ancestors; thus art and religion together served to reinforce the integrity of the community. Works of art were not kept on display, but were more often than not hidden away until the proper time to bring them out for the particular ritual purpose for which they were designed.

It is this striking temporal, physical and social continuity that has permeated every aspect of African life, in the rituals that embodied their skills and knowledge in agriculture, in the working of metals, in the weaving and dyeing of cloths, the building of houses, the design of villages and towns, the making of musical instruments and the complementary arts of

costume, masking, musical performance and dance, themselves thought of as a single unity, the great performance art for which we lack a name (unless it be 'celebration'). All of these have been devoted to one end, which Davidson calls the art of social happiness. 'Few others', he says, 'dealt in the raw material of human nature with more subtlety and ease, or so successfully welded the interests of community and the individual. The Africans practised the art of social happiness, and they practised it brilliantly.'[10] One might say that the intelligence of Africans is devoted to learning how to live well in the world rather than to mastering it, and they do not imagine, as does the scientifically-minded European, that the latter is necessary in order to achieve the former.

None of what has been said need imply that Africa has at any time been an earthly paradise, or that Africans are in any way better, more instinctively moral, artistic, religious, or, especially, 'closer to nature' than any other human people. Not only is much of that vast continent decidedly inhospitable to human life, but also Africans have shared the same tendencies to selfishness, quarrelsomeness and murderousness that characterize the rest of our species. The point is that in that continent human beings evolved ways of coping with these frailties and other kinds of potentially destructive impulses in ways that on the one hand preserved the fabric of society and on the other allowed room for individuals to work out their own development to the limit. Social and individual needs have been thought of not as opposed but as complementary and mutually dependent. It was in the rituals, the music and the dance forms that the society has dramatized and released the tensions within it, without being under any illusion that such releases can ever be achieved once and for all, but in full awareness that they must be negotiated anew by each succeeding generation.

The second characteristic of Africans is adaptability, and the ability to choose eclectically from a variety of sources and to profit from the potential richness of a number of perspectives simultaneously. This can be seen in the way in which Africans seem to be able at one and the same time, and without visible strain, to hold, for example, both polytheistic 'pagan' beliefs and practices and those of either Christianity or Islam, to be at

the same time 'traditional' and 'Europeanized' in their daily lives, in ways which often puzzle and even infuriate Europeans; the latter can deal with contradiction only by denying or eliminating one side of it — hence the rejection and even persecution of deviants, both sacred and secular, which has been such a persistent and bloody feature of European history — while Africans seem to be able to live happily with both sides. One might say that while the European lives in a world of 'either/or', the African's is a world of 'both/and'.

Even what Europeans call African 'tribalism', which is represented as an archaic and disruptive force in present-day African states, was in all probability created by the nineteenth-century colonial powers with the collusion of a small number of African rulers and intellectuals. Terence Ranger is of the opinion that in pre-colonial Africa 'there rarely existed the closed corporate consensual system which came to be accepted as characteristic of "traditional" Africa. Almost all studies of nineteenth-century Africa have emphasised that, far from there being a single "tribal" identity, most Africans moved in and out of multiple identities, defining themselves at one moment as subject to this chief, at another moment as a member of that cult, at another moment as part of this clan, and at yet another moment as an initiate in that professional guild. The overlapping networks of association and exchange extended over very wide areas. Thus the boundaries of the "tribal" polity, and the hierarchies of authority within them, did *not* define the conceptual horizons of Africans.' Ranger also quotes another writer who contrasts the 'colonial freezing of political dynamics' with the 'precolonial shifting, fluid imbalance of power and influence.'[11]

That this is not 'primitive' or 'prelogical' behaviour can be seen from the emphasis put on multiplicity in African performing arts; John Miller Chernoff, who himself trained for some years as a drummer in the Ewe tradition of Ghana, makes a strong case for a parallel 'between the aesthetic conception of multiple rhythms in music and the religious conception of multiple forces in the world'. He says, 'African affinity for polymetric musical forms indicates that, in the most fundamental sense, the African sensibility is profoundly pluralistic . . . Just as a participant in an African musical event

is unlikely to stay within one rhythmic perspective, so do Africans maintain a flexible and complicated orientation towards themselves and their lives . . . The sensibility we have found in musical expression more accurately appears to represent a method of actively tolerating, interpreting and even using the multiple and fragmented aspects of everyday events to build a richer and more diversified personal experience . . . the adaptability and strength of an African's sense of community and personal identity reside in the aesthetic and ethical sensibility which we have seen cultivated in one of its aspects, music. As such the values of an African musical event represent not an integrity from which we are moving away but rather an integrity which, with understanding, we might approach. It is a felicitous orientation in a world of many forms.'[12]

It is music and dance that have been, and remain, the prime manifestation of the African sensibility and worldview. Robert Farris Thompson goes so far as to say: 'The traditional choreographies of tropical Africa constitute, I submit, complex distillations of thinking, comparable to Cartesian in point of influence and importance.'[13] Music itself, as these statements suggest, hardly exists as a separate art from dance, and in many African languages there is no separate word for it, although there are rich vocabularies for forms, styles and techniques.

The question, What are the distinguishing features of African music? may seem absurd when we consider the enormous variety of ways in which music is made and listened to in that vast and culturally diverse continent. It can, however, be said that beneath the diversity of technique and instrumentation, of repertory and style, there is a unity of attitude, of approach to the making of music, which can be called African, and which has proved much more persistent in the Americas than any technical features in themselves. It is not surprising that these underlying features can be related to those social attitudes which I have been discussing.

In the first place, music is not set apart in any way from everyday life but is an integral and essential part of it, and plays an important role in all aspects of social interaction and individual self-realization. Music is closely identified with

social events and purposes; without music many of those events simply could not take place at all. Just as we noted earlier that various aspects of social life tend not to be kept apart, so we find that the various functions of music making, allied always with dance, flow into one another; the most apparently frivolous of events may well reveal itself as having a serious moral import, while, conversely, the most serious and vital of rituals is extremely enjoyable for the participants. The musician who leads the occasion does so with the realization that he is responsible not only for the sounds he makes but for the whole event; Chernoff goes so far as to say that 'the music is important only in respect to the overall success of a social occasion', and that the African 'does not focus on the music but on the way the social occasion is picked up by the music'.[14] The social importance of music is reflected in the social importance accorded to professional musicians, even where their actual social status is low, and in the high level of tolerance for the deviant behaviour that seems almost to be expected of them. Alan Merriam says that among the Basongye of Zaire, 'the reaction to the facetious suggestion that these ne'er-do-wells be banished was one of extreme seriousness and even real horror . . . The fact of the matter is that without musicians a village is incomplete; people want to sing and dance, and a number of important village activities simply cannot be carried out without musicians. The villagers are unanimous in stating that musicians are extremely important people; without them, life would be intolerable.'[15]

Secondly, rhythm is to the African musician what harmony is to the European — the central organizing principle of the art. In practically all African music making there is a rhythmic polyphony, with at least two different rhythms proceeding in counterpoint with each other, held together only by the existence of a common beat; even the downbeats will quite likely not coincide in different parts. This emphasis on rhythm implies also the existence among Africans of what has been termed a 'metronome sense' — an ability to hear the music in terms of that common beat even when it is not explicitly sounded. It is assumed that musicians, dancers and listeners alike are able to supply it for themselves, making it possible to create rhythmic structures of a complexity and sophistication

unknown in European music. This rhythmic sophistication makes up for what Europeans may think of as a lack of melodic development, so that an instrument capable of a very limited range of pitches, even of only one, will be interesting to an African provided he can extract sufficiently interesting rhythms from it. For this reason, sounds of indeterminate pitch are often as much valued in African musical cultures as are precisely pitched sounds; the drum orchestra, in which each instrument is capable of perhaps two or three not very precise pitches only, is a major African ensemble. As one might expect also, percussive sounds are prominent in African music; even the sounds of voices, flutes and stringed instruments may be given a percussive edge, while musicians like to introduce into their instrumental sound a good deal of indefinitely-pitched 'noise', even with such definite-pitch instruments as the xylophone and *mbira*. Their music is rich in buzzes, thuds, bangs and other non-harmonic sounds, of much the same kinds as apparently used to fascinate the medieval ancestors of modern-day Europeans. Chernoff argues strongly that the multiplicity of rhythmic perspectives which is available to musicians, dancers and listeners reflects the multiple orientation of Africans.

Thirdly, it is assumed that everyone is musical, that all are capable of taking part in some capacity in the communal work of music making. Musicking is in fact thought of as being as basic a form of social interaction as talking. This does not mean that everyone is equally gifted or skilled, or that skills are not highly valued; African societies have always supported various kinds of professional and semi-professional musicians, but the music has never been taken over, as has the European classical tradition in our own time, by professionalism. Musicians are not separated from the rest by their skills, but function as leaders and pacemakers. The balance between leader and followers, between innovation and tradition, between individual and society, is perhaps most strikingly embodied in that ubiquitous feature of African choral singing which is known as call and response, in which solos, often improvised, alternate under strict rhythmic rules with invariant choral responses. But even if not formally involved in the performance, the listeners are never silent and static,

but respond with what J.H.K. Nketia calls 'outward, dramatic expression of feeling'. He says: 'Individuals may shout in appreciation when something in the performance strikes them, or indicate at a particular point their satisfaction with what they have heard or seen. In addition, their conduct may indicate that the performance satisfies or makes manifest a social value, or that it satisfies a moral need.'[16]

Fourthly, improvisation is widespread and richly developed. I shall have more to say about improvisation in a later chapter, but here we should note that it does not mean random or even 'free' playing, even assuming that such things are possible for human beings, but is always carried on within the framework of rules or conventions analogous to those of speech — which may of course be thought of as mainly improvisatory too. Nor does improvisation mean totally new creation on the spot, or rule out the existence of a good deal of pre-existing material; such material is indeed the basis of most improvisation, and it is even true that not much original invention need be involved. A master drummer, for example, will not necessarily wish to invent new patterns of rhythm or melody, but will use existing ones with due regard for the social shape of the occasion for which he is playing, and for the ways in which his fellow-musicians and dancers are performing.

This characteristic, taken with the preceding, means that music making does not depend on the existence of a body of pre-existing pieces; songs may be made up on the spot to suit a specific occasion and be as quickly forgotten once it is over. Everyone is a potential composer, and songs are often made up by taking fragments of existing songs, both words and music (the two may be taken together or separately) and welding them into new shapes. On the other hand, formal composition is by no means unknown, for example among the Chopi of Mozambique, where a composer-music director makes those extended multi-movement works called *mgodo* (plural of *ngodo*) for which the Chopi are famous, for chorus, xylophone orchestra and dancers — but even these *mgodo* are ephemeral, existing for perhaps a year or so before being replaced, movement by movement, with a new work. The old *ngodo* is forgotten without regret, even by its composer, as the creative process continues. There are also repertoires of

traditional songs which may have been handed down through generations; these are usually associated with the celebration of lineages and ancestral values and serve often to affirm the legitimacy of chiefs and kings. These songs are known and performed mainly by members of a hereditary caste of praise singers known outside Africa by the French term *griots*, whose social function is complex and embraces everything from local historian to social critic and village gossip.

As Nketia says; 'There are restrictive traditions that tend to limit the freedom of performers to make significant changes of their own, such as the court tradition of some societies which demand fidelity to known texts, particularly in historical songs and pieces that legitimize the authority of a reigning chief or his claim to the throne. The latitude for variations as well as for extemporaneous expression gets wider and wider as one moves from such musical types to those which provide a basis for expressions of social values or social interaction. Songs of insult, songs of contest or boasting songs, songs designed in such a way to allow for references relevant to the present moment, all give scope for creativity or for limited improvisation.'[17] A mainly non-literate society, as were most of those of West Africa, was able to remember what it wanted to remember and to forget what it was better to forget, and even the most formal of praise songs would quite likely have undergone changes and adaptations in response to the dynamics of the 'shifting, fluid imbalance of power and influence' of precolonial Africa. In the main, then, fidelity to a received text is not highly valued in African music making.

Lastly, music and dance interpenetrate to an extent that can scarcely be imagined in white society. It is not just a matter of musicians playing while dancers dance, but of musicians dancing as they play and of dancers contributing to the music, and of both responding to one another on equal terms, in doing so contributing to the meaning of the occasion. 'The dance,' says Nketia, 'can be used as a social and artistic medium of communication. It can convey thoughts or matters of personal or social importance through the choice of movements, postures and facial expressions. Through the dance, individuals and social groups can show their reactions to attitudes of hostility or cooperation and friendship held by

others towards them. They can offer respect to their superiors, or appreciation and gratitude to well-wishers and benefactors. They can react to the presence of rivals, affirm their status to servants, subjects and others, or express their beliefs through the choice of appropriate dance vocabulary or symbolic gestures.'[18] Likewise, the total bodily involvement of the master drummer as he leads the ensemble, giving the pattern to the other musicians and the dancers, is not merely ornamental but is an essential element of the performance, adding as it does an extra strand to the rhythmic texture, while the sounds made by the dancers as they stamp and leap, often emphasised by bells or rattles tied around ankles and wrists, are not incidental but integral to the great performance art which comprises not only music and dance but also masking, costume and drama.

That the continent of Africa is the home of one of the great civilizations of the human race there can be no doubt; and at the heart of that civilization lie music and dance. Nowhere else is the affirmation and the celebration of identity and of right social relationships through music and dance more highly cultivated. Not only tribes and peoples, but religious cults, occupational groups, age groups and the two sexes, all enact in music and dance those rituals which are the embodiment of selfhood, and an acting-out of those myths which shape and give meaning to life. Music and dance give the individual his or her precious sense of uniqueness, of worth, of place in the scheme of things, and mediate relationships, teach responsibilities and show opportunities. That the human values embodied in the great performance art are wide (one is tempted to say, universal) in their appeal is shown not only in the way in which the art proved its value in the social and psychological, as well as the sheer physical, survival of those Africans, and their descendants, who were enslaved in the New World, but also in the way in which it has gone out to become the dominant music and dance in the west in our time. Like all aspects of West African culture brought by the slaves to the Americas, it was profoundly modified both by their ordeal and by the encounter with European culture, but I intend showing that these values, or something very like them, have survived, even when most of the actual technical

features of African music have disappeared, and that they continue to exert a life-giving influence, deeply subversive of the official values of industrial society, within that society today.

To conclude this summary of some of the aspects of African culture, which will reveal their relevance in later chapters, it might be useful to remind ourselves of how Europeans have reacted to their encounter with Africa. The two quotations I give below tell us, the first all unawares, and the second with insight, something about the ways in which Europeans persistently project on to Africa, and on to Africans, their own fears and fantasies. The first is from a curious book of African travels by the distinguished Italian novelist Alberto Moravia, in which he says: 'The "Africa sickness" is a spell with a basis of fear, and this fear is the fear of prehistory, that is, of the irrational forces which in Europe man has succeeded in repelling and dominating during many thousands of years, but which here in Africa are, instead, still intrusive and uncontrolled. It is a fear to which the European finally becomes accustomed, partly because he has his roots elsewhere and his personality is sounder and less unstable than that of the African; it is a fear, in fact, that is painfully agreeable. But the fear of the African, who has no historical background, whose personality is flickering as the light of a candle, is a serious fear, a nameless fright, a perpetual, vague terror. Magic is the expression of this prehistoric fear; it is as foul and gloomy and demented as the "Africa sickness" is aphrodisiac, even is disruptive and destructive. The truth is that magic is the other face of the "Africa sickness"'.[19] This extraordinary statement was first published in English, not in 1874, but in 1974.

The second, published in 1979, comes from Patrick Marnham's *Dispatches from Africa*: 'As the North has penetrated Africa, it has proved less and less capable of learning from the experience; we can only instruct. Even the anthropologists, who originally approached their subject in the spirit of pure enquiry, are increasingly willing to place their knowledge at the disposal of governments or international companies whose objectives are less detached. The North justifies its pedagogy by characterizing the African as ignorant, un-

educated, or impoverished. At the same time, it has found in Africa "a refuge from the intellect" or an invitation to indulge in stupidity and dishonesty on its own account. It becomes increasingly difficult for us to explain the prolonged frustration of Northern plans in terms of "backwardness" or "isolation". Much of Africa has had close contact with the North for six hundred years and the African characteristics that have survived such long exposure are not going to be eliminated now.

'African resistance to the North takes many forms. But its constant purpose is surely to reject the alien uniformity which the North strives to impose on the unnerving variety of African life. The North finds this variety unnerving because it challenges the necessity for the progress, control, authority and research with which we order our lives. We fear Africa because when we leave it alone, it works'.[20] We might see the history of Afro-American culture, too, and especially its music, as one of constant struggle to resist the uniformity imposed by industrial society, of which slavery was an early manifestation; it is no wonder, then, that those who run the agencies of authority, control and research in western society fear and reject both the bearers of that culture and their music making.

At the time when the first African slaves were imported into the Americas, slavery was a common enough institution, not only in Africa but also in Europe. There had been African slaves in Portugal since the early fifteenth century, long before Columbus, and in West Africa it is by no means extinct, even today. But the slavery practised in Africa bears little resemblance to the ruthless and voracious institution, with its insatiable appetite for human souls and bodies, which evolved in the Americas. An African slave could become a respected member of his master's household, even of his family, perhaps by marriage, and could accumulate wealth in his own right, becoming perhaps the most trusted adviser of a king or aristocrat. Nor was slavery generally hereditary; as Davidson says, 'Captives . . . became vassals, vassals became free men, free men became chiefs.'[21] Even the Arabs, whose system of slavery was in many ways closer to the American, were exhorted by the Koran to manumit slaves, and, again slavery was not hereditary; a child born of slaves could be a full and

free member of the household. Those African kings and other rulers who sold prisoners of war and other, to them, surplus subjects to the white adventurers in their huge ships had not the faintest idea of what they were delivering those unfortunates into — a system which equated human beings at best with livestock, to be bought and sold like cattle, not only themselves but their descendants in perpetuity, deprived of any rights through which it might be recognized that they were human. And of course the social and economic ruin brought to West Africa, as one kingdom after another became caught up in the terrible trade, is well documented.

Black slaves were introduced into the economy and the culture of the Americas very early in the history of European colonization; as early as 1503, a mere eleven years after Columbus, the governor of the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, now Haiti and the Dominican Republic, was writing to the Spanish court to complain that African slaves were escaping and preaching insurrection to the Indians, and asking for an end to the importation of Africans. Queen Isabella granted his request, but the shortage of manpower was so acute that within two years the trade had to be resumed. The consequences for the Americas of the slave trade have been beyond calculation; in all, it seems that not less than twelve and perhaps as many as twenty million Africans reached America (how many were taken but did not reach there we shall never know, but mortality on the terrible sea journey, innocuously named the Middle Passage, probably exceeded twenty per cent) during the three and a half centuries of the trade — surely the greatest forced migration of souls in the whole of human history.

It was not until 1619, the year before the *Mayflower* brought the Pilgrim Fathers to Massachusetts, that the first known group of Africans was imported into the British North American colonies; in that year twenty were disembarked from a Dutch vessel at James Town, in the colony, later to be the state, of Virginia. They were designated as indentured servants, a common enough status in those days, rather than as slaves, and it was not for some time that the slave status of Africans and their descendants became legally established in the British colonies; Massachusetts, interestingly in view of its

Puritan origins, was the first to make slavery legal, in 1641, with Virginia itself and the other southern colonies not following until 1661. The number of black slaves remained small, a matter of thousands only, until the early eighteenth century, when with development of such labour-intensive cash crops as tobacco, and, later cotton, it burgeoned, creating an insatiable demand for more and more workers, not only on the plantations but also increasingly in areas that hitherto had been the province of free artisans and craftsmen, as well as in fields such as domestic service, the care of children, stevedoring and animal husbandry. Contrary to popular belief, it was not just the physical strength of the slaves that was exploited but also their skills and knowledge — for example in the working of wood and metal, in tropical farming, of which they might have been expected to have more experience than their masters — and, as we shall see, in music. By 1800 there were in the United States about a million people classified as black; by 1830 the number had increased to three million and in 1860, the year of the last census to be held under slavery, there were about four and a half million blacks, of whom about three quarters were slaves.

I shall leave to a later chapter an account of the patterns of dependence and mutual influence that evolved between the slaves and their masters; it can be said at this point that it was not just a simple matter of the Africans and their descendants being acculturated into a stratum of American society, but rather a complex process of negotiation which affected masters no less than slaves. Let us consider the possible ways in which the enslaved Africans responded initially to the new situation into which they had been so abruptly and traumatically thrust. One thing is clear: the slaves, from the moment when those first Africans were landed at James Town, were never mere passive victims of the system. When they found themselves delivered to the slavers, marched to the sea (tens of thousands perished on that leg of the journey alone) and transported in a terrible voyage under conditions that, in reading of them, still provoke horror and shame, they may have been stripped of all possessions and of the accustomed support of kin, they may often have found no-one to whom they could speak in their own language or who prayed for

relief to the same gods, but they were by no means psychologically helpless; those who survived the journey must have been well equipped to survive in the new conditions under which they found themselves. As we have seen, underlying the diversity of language, of ritual and of social customs were deeper shared values, a shared grammar and syntax of social interaction, and, further, those values were not static but dynamic and adaptable; the natural tendency of Africans has been, and remains, to select what they need from a variety of sources, and to use contradictory and disparate elements to construct meaning from their experiences. Nonetheless, it must have been a daunting task, to reconstruct, in the new conditions, structures of value and belief, and their associated social gestures, which would give meaning to the apparently meaningless nightmare into which they had been thrust. Sydney Mintz and Richard Price put the matter well: 'The Africans who reached the New World did not compose, at the moment, *groups*. In fact, in most cases it might be more accurate to view them as *crowds*, and very heterogeneous crowds at that. Without evading the possible importance of some core of common values and the occurrence of situations where a number of slaves of common origin might indeed be aggregated, the fact is that these were not *communities* of people at first, and they could only become communities by processes of cultural exchange. What the slaves undeniably shared at the outset was their enslavement; all — or nearly all — else had to be *created by them*. In order for the slave communities to take shape, normative patterns of behaviour had to be established, and these patterns could only be created on the basis of particular forms of social interaction . . . Thus the organizational task of enslaved Africans in the New World was that of creating institutions, institutions that would prove responsive to the needs of everyday life under the limiting conditions that slavery imposed upon them'.[22] And they add, 'We can probably date the beginnings of any new Afro-American religion from the moment that one person in need received ritual assistance from another who belonged to a different cultural group'.[23]

The struggle for survival, both physical and psychological, must have been unending. One wonders how long it would

have taken the Africans to realize that the cruel and irrational world in which they found themselves, and the seemingly arbitrary events which governed their lives (determining whether they stayed with those they knew and loved or were sundered from them, whether they were submitted to a cruel or a lenient master, even whether they lived or died) were in fact governed by a highly rational god whose name was Mammon, whom their masters worshipped above all others and whose rational calculations were, as they remain today, inimical to the needs of human life. In North America and the Caribbean, to satisfy the demands of the rational god, tribes and even families were deliberately broken up to destroy traditional unities and loyalties and discourage insurrection (in Latin America the opposite policy, of keeping ethnic groups together and playing them off one against another, proved in fact more effective). Apart from the fact that labour was incessant and punishment frequent and brutal on the majority of the slave estates, perhaps the worst feature was the sheer hopelessness of the slave's situation, with nothing to look forward to but a lifetime of labour and beatings, with only the remote possibility of escape (but into a hostile society) to keep hope alive, with all possibility of attaining respect and status within a community, a stable family life and the deference due to the old cut off.

But slavery never took over the minds of the slaves to the point where they had no independent life or personality, however cunningly these had to be concealed. Patiently, persistently, generation after generation, they laboured to create for themselves a psychological living space in whatever restricted areas were allowed to them. Despite prohibitions on learning to read and write, they knew who they were, where they were, what their situation was and what was being done to them. Each generation carefully instructed the next in all that could be remembered of the inherited knowledge. Slavery may have taken away the entire material culture, the social and political institutions, but music, dance and oral poetry, folk tales, and above the essence of the African world view, its spiritual and metaphysical temper, survived. Thomas L. Webber expresses it poetically and precisely: 'The culture of black people under slavery in America can be likened to a

deep river. Having as its source a great African well-spring, this ever-moving, ever-changing river had by the 1850s a distinctly American appearance. As it flowed and deepened through its new land it both adapted to the contours of the American landscape and reshaped each bank it touched. It never lost its African undercurrents. For its people it was a healing river. Its waters refreshed them and helped them escape the torturous American environment. To the oppressed slave his culture was like a deep river; to immerse oneself in its water was to commune with one's own cultural identity.'[24]

Of the early music of the black slaves little is known; with a very few exceptions, those whites who left any written record were unable to find in it anything more than a weird and barbarous noise, generally used to accompany what seemed indecent, even lascivious dances. Such perceptive accounts as have come down to us are mainly from the Antilles, where, the blacks being in the majority, more African ways remained than on the North American mainland; nonetheless, they are suggestive of what might have been taking place there also. Thus, one Richard Ligon, an Englishman who may himself have been a professional musician, wrote in 1653 of encountering on Barbados a slave called Macow, 'a very valiant man', according to Ligon, making himself a *balofo*, or African xylophone, which Ligon seems to have thought he had invented for himself; in Martinique in 1694 a French monk saw not only a set of African-style drums but also a four-stringed instrument which was called a *banza*, with a long neck and a body covered with skin. What must have been the same instrument, more or less, was reported also in the English-speaking colonies under the names *banshaw* and *banjil*. The same French monk also reported that some of the slaves on Martinique were proficient on the violin, so that acculturation was clearly under way in both directions by the late seventeenth century.

Of how the process of acculturation began there is practically no record. But if we keep in mind that music and dance were as important as speech to the Africans as a means of communication and self-definition, then we can deduce something about the process from a similar process of linguistic adaptation that was going on at the same time. The

slavers' policy in the British territories of splitting up tribal and linguistic groups would have meant that communication, not only with the masters but also among themselves, was for the slaves a problem of prime importance. There is evidence that the language which formed the initial medium of communication was neither English nor any pure African tongue, but a pidgin (trade language) that had earlier evolved in West Africa for the purpose of trade among the various peoples as well as with Europeans; it would have incorporated elements of a number of African languages as well as of English. In America individual African languages would have fallen rapidly into disuse for want of any extensive speech community, to be supplanted by this pidgin, at first limited to the most practical matters, but gradually taking into itself words and constructions from the one language of which everyone had experience, English, while retaining the simplicity of syntax which marks a pidgin and which characterizes, without any loss of either expressiveness or flexibility, both West Indian and black American speech today. The initial pidgin, in fact, rapidly became a creole, or true language of mixed origin, probably in the space of a generation or two.

Remembering, too, that it was not just brute physical labour that was required of the slaves but also skills and even organizational abilities, from blacksmithing to the nurture of the master's children, it becomes even clearer that, however much the masters might have desired it, there were not two separate societies permanently divided from one another, but only one, of which one segment became increasingly dependent on the other, not just for work on the cash crops, but for practically all the skilled manual work that it needed. This dependence was symbolized by the passing of the creole from the mouths of the slaves into those of the masters and their families, a fact upon which shocked visitors from Europe and from the north often commented.

The new creole would have developed in a somewhat different direction in the slave quarters from the way it did in the big house, owing to the slaves' success in preserving some kind of autonomy when out of the masters' sight; different demeanour and modes of address, especially towards

members of the extended family (the vulnerability of families to disruption through sale made the development of extended family ties, often to people who were not blood relatives, an essential source of emotional and social stability), while African or African-style words and expressions, often 'translated' into English, became part of the private language of the blacks simply because a different social and emotional situation required a different vocabulary and usage from that used in the presence of the whites.

As far as music was concerned, there would have been fewer outside pressures towards the formation of a creole, since, in the eyes of the masters, music and dance were of little significance in the productive process which was the reason for the slaves' existence, and little attempt was made to control them. Perhaps the most important external pressure was towards the discontinuation of drumming; the masters feared, probably rightly, that the drums would be used as signals for insurrection. Other, less emphatic, ways of marking rhythm had to be found. This had the probable side-effect of hastening the destruction of the old religious rituals, since, as John Storm Roberts puts it, 'when the drums were silent, the old gods came no more.'[25] It is for this reason that drumming is a less central, less autonomous art in North American than in Latin and Caribbean Afro-American music; the art of drumming had virtually to be re-invented in modern times.

Another external pressure towards the absorption of European ways of music making was the reward that could come to the slave from the ability to play a European instrument in the European manner. There is abundant evidence that many slavemasters encouraged their slaves to play, and even supplied them, not only with instruments, but even with instruction, in order that they might provide entertainment and dance music on the often remote plantations; it was a matter of prestige to have slaves who could perform in this way, and skill on fiddle and banjo, as well as on flute, clarinet and even French horn would enhance a slave's saleable value (there is a hint of conspicuous consumption about this, for the slave would have to be withdrawn from productive field or house labour, a luxury which only the wealthier could afford).

For the slave himself, or herself, it could be a great advantage since it would mean relief from other duties in fields or house, and even bring a measure of respect and status; the memorable figure of Fiddler in Alex Haley's *Roots* vividly epitomizes such musicians. As Dena Epstein says, 'These obscure musicians at times achieved what would have been professional status if their earnings had remained in their own hands. Many of them earned a reputation for excellence that extended for miles around. Some had homemade instruments, some store-bought ones, but most were encouraged by their masters to play for the dancing of their fellow-slaves as well as for white visitors or dancing parties.'[26] Nothing, in fact, about the Peculiar Institution, with all its inconsistencies and irrationalities, its gross cruelties and occasional mercies, is quite so peculiar as the variable treatment it accorded to slave musicians. One reads advertisements for runaways who had taken with them nothing but their violin, clarinet, flute or even French horn, while descriptions of festivities at Christmas and other seasons include accounts of bands of '3 fiddles, 1 tenor and 1 bass drum, 2 triangles and 2 tambourines', or a band of two violins and a bass,[27] and, most extraordinary of all, Gilbert Chase mentions one Sy Gilliatt, body servant to the Governor of Virginia in the late eighteenth century, who was also official fiddler to the state balls at Williamsburg: 'He wore an embroidered silk coat and vest of faded lilac, silk stockings and shoes with large buckles. He also wore a powdered brown wig, and his manners were said to have been as courtly as his dress'.[28] This, of course, was not much out of line with the servant status of musicians up to the end of the eighteenth century in Europe; Gilliatt's contemporary Josef Haydn might have been seen in similar livery at the Esterhazy court. And in any case it represents once again the increasing dependence of the society of the masters on what the blacks could provide for them.

But there must have been also pressures from inside the slave society itself towards a creole music no less than to a creole language, and for much the same reasons. The linguistically heterogeneous 'crowds' of Africans who left the slave ships must have been equally heterogeneous musically, even if, as we have noted, they were linked by common

attitudes and concepts. Given the strength of the urge to make music and to dance which would if anything have been increased by their predicament, there would have been a strong need to find, or to evolve, a common musical, no less than spoken, language. In this fluid situation, the consequence, not only of the absence of a common idiom, but also of their forcible removal from those social situations in which they were accustomed to make music, the adoption of at least some of the idioms of European music which they encountered would have acted as a stabilizing influence, as well as a means of coming to terms with their present plight. And in any case, European concepts of scale and melody, European instruments and even European concepts of harmony, were not so far removed from them that a fairly rapid rapprochement could not take place. And so a creole music would probably have developed in parallel with the creole language, with the European scales modified by less rigid notions of pitch, its foursquare rhythms enlivened by injections of African additive rhythms and polyrhythms, European choral textures by call and response.

I shall leave to a later chapter a detailed discussion of the forms that the slaves' music making took, and look now briefly at the musical inheritance which the white immigrants brought with them to that New World which, unlike the enslaved Africans, they could approach with at least the hope of building a new life. The great majority of those who came to the British colonies were, naturally enough, from the British Isles, and it is their language, their culture and their music that has left the greatest impression on American culture from that time.

Histories of music tell us that the England the first colonists left behind them was in the last days of what has been called the Golden Age of English church polyphony and the madrigal, while the continent of Europe was seeing the first flowering of opera and of Baroque instrumental music. Many of the early colonists, not only those wealthy and aristocratic people who became the major landowners and ruling class in Virginia and the southern colonies, but also the Pilgrim Fathers who came to New England in the 1620s, whose background was from the emerging English middle class,

were, as the first governor of the Massachusetts colony said, 'very expert in music'. Despite the abundance of musical skill and knowledge in England, however, neither the elaborate polyphonic church music nor the madrigal, nor, for that matter, the developing instrumental music, was transplanted into the colonies. This was not just a matter of a lack of established communities or of those surplus resources and leisure that are necessary for the growth of a 'cultivated' tradition, though clearly that had much to do with it; it was also actively discouraged by the Puritans of New England, who insisted for their worship on simple settings of the psalms translated into rhyming verse, as often as not in ballad metre, while in the southern colonies only the most perfunctory of attention was paid by the early settlers to religious observance.

Over half of those who came to North America during the colonial period came as indentured servants, having sold themselves into what amounted to slavery for a limited period in return for their passage; we may assume that those who came in this way were members of the lower orders of English society, and that they brought with them their repertory of songs, ballads and dances, as well as the psalms and hymns that were common to all classes. And even they were not necessarily lacking in musical skills and even in literacy, since both were common among all classes in England at that time; as A.L. Lloyd points out, all of the servants whom Samuel Pepys employed during the nine years when he kept his famous Diary in the 1660s were musical performers and sight readers, while playwrights of the time would often in their plays attribute, even to servants and picaresque characters, the ability to read music. 'It would be interesting,' says Lloyd, 'to know the rate of musical literacy among the lower classes in the decisive folk song period between 1550 and 1850. We might find that at many moments it was a good deal higher than in the present day.'[29]

Lower and upper classes, then, would seem to have shared a considerable repertory of vocal and instrumental music besides the psalms that they sang together in church, and much of that repertory has remained remarkably unchanged for perhaps three hundred years, or even longer, in the remoter reaches of the United States. In the valleys of the

Appalachian Mountains in the early years of this century the English folklorist Cecil Sharp claimed to have found more British ballads and other folksongs than in the whole of England; many of the British ballads are of considerable antiquity, and have survived many centuries of oral transmission with remarkably little change. The ballad, of course, tells a story, and if that story is to make any sense its internal continuity must be preserved, and the fact that such a large repertory of traditional song is narrative in form tells us something of the inherent nature of the way of making music which the white settlers brought with them.

By contrast with this extensive and long-enduring repertory, practically nothing — a few doubtful examples only — of the actual songs which were brought from Africa by the slaves has survived, despite the fact that first-generation Africans were to be found in America right up to the time of Emancipation. That this is so is clearly due in some measure to the disruption caused by the experience of slavery and the necessary adaptations I discussed earlier, but it points also to a difference in attitude between European, and especially northern European, and African musicians, towards their musical material, a difference which has had a significant effect on the course taken by Afro-American music.

The European folk musician usually thinks of him or herself not as a creator of songs, but as a transmitter. As Henry Glassie says, 'the usual folk singer is no more creative than the usual performer of pop or art song; both share in the Western tradition of the performer as repeater, of the performer as distinct from the audience during performance so that the performance amounts to a presentation requiring authority. He is true to his source, taking pride in the fact that the song is being sung as it was when he learned it. With varying degrees of success he attempts to hold the song steady . . . The commonplace folk performer, his audience and fellow performers do not strive for change; they interact in a system of frequent repetition and reinforcement to prevent it.'[30] This agrees with a comment by Cecil Sharp, that 'the traditional singer regards it as a matter of honour to pass on the tradition as nearly as possible as he received it'.[31] Small changes occur over time, owing to lapses of memory and misunderstandings,

but both singer and audience have a strong sense of the identity of a song and feel their responsibility to it, to preserve so far as they can its integrity. People do compose new songs, of course, but it is not a common occurrence; Glassie, in his sensitive and sympathetic study of the composer of the anti-integrationist song *Take That Night Train to Selma*, says that 'creative people like Dorrance Weir are uncommon in European-American communities like his.'[32] He points out also that 'The commercial recordings of the twenties and thirties, which are still [1970] played, have done more than influence Southern Mountain music; they have offered acceptable standard texts and melodies — less efficient than the standard texts and melodies of the art musicians because they continue to involve oral-aural channels — and have rendered the repertoires of contemporary Southern Appalachian singers largely predictable.'[33]

The mention of art musicians reminds us, however, that what we find in the European and Euro-American folk tradition appears to be not very different from the attitudes found in the art, or classical, tradition of European and American music, that is to say, an emphasis on the identity and the integrity of a music-object, an assumption that the power of original creation is rare, a clear-cut distinction between those who perform and those who listen (we notice Glassie's use of the word 'authority' for the performer's relation to his audience), and, where and at such times as it is available, the use of written notation for both words and music, as a means of preservation and transmission — though, as we shall see, it is only in the classical tradition that notation has taken over as the medium through which the very act of creation takes place. That these characteristics are found in some degree within the folk tradition as well, may point to a kind of 'set' which lies deep in the minds of Europeans and which may have to do with the scientific-materialist temper of our culture. We have seen, too, that they are alien to the African temper, and the history of Afro-American music can be seen from one point of view as a succession of accommodations between these two opposing sets of values.

It happened that the first white settlers, in the early seventeenth century, came to America at just the time when

the modern tradition of classical music first came into being, with its central concept of music as a drama of the individual soul, and its central expressive technique of tonal harmony as the vehicle for that drama. I have written at length in an earlier book on the meaning of tonal harmony,[34] and do not intend repeating it all here, but some observations on tonal harmony, which, as we shall see, passed in various ways into Afro-American music, need to be made. Tonal harmony is essentially the arranging of chords, usually triads and their derivatives, in temporal succession in such a way as to create meaning, the listener being led forward in time, his expectations frustrated and teased, but ultimately satisfied by the final cadence in the home key. The composer's art lies largely in lacing conventional and predictable chord progressions with surprises, either dramatic or witty, which are caused by the insertion into the sequence of a chord which, while unexpected, can be shown to stand in a logical (that is, syntactical) relationship with those which preceded it. This kind of harmonic drama is used both on a small scale, over a span of seconds, and on a large one, which may be a matter of an hour or more. Large-scale planning is central to classical symphonic and chamber music, with its long-range contrasts, even conflicts, of keys; these are generally fought out to a resolution in the final sections, representing a final solution to the emotional and spiritual conflict in the soul of the protagonist. This final solution is equally devoutly wished for by the audience at a symphony concert, as is shown by the storm of applause which breaks over the heads of the performers the moment they come to the end of their drama. That in African societies such a final solution is not regarded as an option is something I have already discussed; resolutions are temporary only and must be negotiated anew with each new life situation, and in any case, in traditional African societies resorting to head-on conflict to resolve an opposition was not a favoured course of action, but an admission of social failure.

Since the European musician's responsibility is to his drama and to its resolution, he can afford, and indeed needs, to structure his musical performance over a long time-span, whether through the devices of tonal harmony or the narrative

progression of a ballad, or indeed an opera, knowing that no matter how the audience responds he is going to finish the performance as planned. The African musician's primary responsibility, on the other hand, is to the occasion and to those taking part in it, and he will adapt his performance to enhance the occasion as it develops. He may well plan what he is going to do, but he will certainly not adopt any technical means that are going to commit him to a course of action regardless of its effect on the listeners or on the occasion.

We may, then, sum up the different attitudes underlying European and African music making in these terms. The European tends to think of music primarily in terms of entities, which are composed by one person and performed to listeners by another. These entities, pieces or songs, which the musician regards as his primary reponsibility to reproduce and to hand on as nearly as possible as he received them, are fixed in their over-all identity (some variation within that identity may be possible), and in starting to perform a piece a musician commits himself to finishing it, regardless of the response which it elicits (within limits, of course — the audience may not permit him to finish, although the conduct of conductor and orchestra during the tumultuous 1913 première of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* in Paris suggests that it is difficult to stop a really determined musician). It is thus useful for the musician to be able to notate a piece or song, and, to the extent that pieces tend to be treated as permanent objects with an existence over and above any possible performance of them, the tradition as a whole is inclined to be conservative, with new pieces added slowly if at all. Performers and listeners seem to like to play and to hear familiar pieces. The ability to create a new musical entity is thought of as rare, and the ability to perform not very widespread either, while the line between creators and performers, on the one hand, and listeners on the other, is always clear. Composition and performance are separate activities, and the composer dominates the performer as the performer dominates the audience.

The African musician, on the other hand, thinks of music primarily as action, as process, in which all are able to participate. In so far as musical entities exist at all, they are regarded not as sacrosanct, but rather as material for the

musicians, whose primary responsibility is to the listeners and to the occasion for which they have come together, to work on. Hence there is as a rule no final form for a piece, rather a constant state of development and change. A new musical entity can come into existence on the instant, and disappear equally instantly once the occasion for it is past. Composition and performance are thus part of a single act which Europeans call improvisation but others call, simply, playing. Notation, if it is used at all, is limited in its utility, since a fully-notated piece defeats the aim of responding to the progress of the occasion. Change is constant and rapid, with new pieces appearing and disappearing with kaleidoscopic speed, though there remains a residuum of pieces and songs that people continue to enjoy playing and singing — but even these will disappear without regret once they have outlived their social usefulness.

When Africans and Europeans encountered one another in the Americas, the first as slaves and the second either as masters or as despised underdogs, in many cases scarcely better off than the slaves, these musical practices underwent profound modification on both sides to give us that kind of music we call Afro-American. It changed, not once and for all, but in a continuous process of accommodation according to the shifting relations of people of African, European and mixed descent, but the two fundamental sets of attitudes have remained remarkably stable and resistant to social, economic and technological change — inevitably, since if music has any meaning at all it must be as the medium through which assumptions about relationships are explored, affirmed and celebrated. Before continuing with the account of the ways in which the two cultures interacted, we need to discuss this more fully.

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