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Music Cultures

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**Slavery, Opression, and Religion**

Music of Restraint

Throughout history, music has been used to pass the time in many ways, but some of the most soulful and meaningful music has came about through religion, slavery, or opression.

Middle Eastern chant and the Quran, America slavery and the blues, and pan music and the the people of Trinidad were all musical styles born of restriction or oppression. These musical styles were not only born of similar situations, but they all brought considerable joy to the culture that invented them.

As described in Jeaninne Reamy’s [A Brief Historical Background of Steel Drums](http://www2.isu.edu/stdorg/special/csdb/history.html), the steel drum or pan was basically invented when slave owners banned the types of drums already present in their culture. Thereafter, left behind oil drums were cut and used to make crude instruments. It was shortly thereafter found that the drums could be dented to tune them. Today, this denting is a highly sought after skill, and pan music has evolved into some of the most upbeat and recognizable musci around.

In Ed Kopp’s [A Brief History of the Blues](https://www.allaboutjazz.com/a-brief-history-of-the-blues-by-ed-kopp.php), Kopp describes the origin of the blues stating:

*The blues originated on Southern plantations in the 19th Century. Its inventors were slaves, ex-slaves and the descendants of slaves—African-American sharecroppers who sang as they toiled in the cotton and vegetable fields. It's generally accepted that the music evolved from African spirituals, African chants, work songs, field hollers, rural fife and drum music, revivalist hymns, and country dance music.*

Kopp also goes on to describe the blues as an emotional outlet for struggle and pain, but also a joyous release. The blues as we know it today has inspired several other genres, including Jazz. Clearly though, this musical style was brought about by long days of toil in oppressive conditions.

As for Middle Eastern chants, and readings of the Quran, it is debatable whether this IS music. This is because many middle east religions do not allow music at all. Still, to the western ear, these chants sound remarkably musical. For example listen to [Bandar Bin Khalid](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7cXdYed9vIgn4TN-FhM3sQ)’s recitation of [Mohammed ayoob](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ku3CJdRtbgI) to see a beautifully musical chant that of course “isn’t music.”

In each of these cases, it’s clear to see that there is a people yearning to be happy and express themselves through music. It is as though a life without music isn’t possible. The music sort of wants to ‘get out.’ In each case, an incredibly soulful and genuine sound has arrisen from opressive scenarios.

**Sources**

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Reamy, Jeannine. “Steel Drums History.” Accessed May 28, 2017. http://www2.isu.edu/stdorg/special/csdb/history.html.

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