African American Music: American and Beyond

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**How Gospel’s Golden Age Grew from Older Styles**

When I first started learning about gospel music, I thought it was always its own separate thing. But actually, the more I read, the more I realized that gospel especially during its Golden Age was built off earlier styles like spirituals, blues, and even jazz in some ways. It didn’t just come out of nowhere. It kind of grew from what was already there and just became more powerful and expressive over time. In many ways, gospel music became a melting pot of earlier genres, blending history and emotion to create something that truly resonated with people's hearts.

One of the biggest parts gospel took from older music is the spirituals. These songs were sung by enslaved people and passed down through generations. They didn’t have instruments most of the time, so it was really all about the voice and rhythm. People would sing in a call and response style, which means one person would sing something and the rest would answer back. Gospel music kept this exact pattern, especially in choirs. It’s not just someone singing aloneeveryone is involved, and that makes it feel stronger and more full of emotion.

Then there’s the blues influence. Now, I used to think blues and gospel were totally different. Blues talks about sadness and life struggles, while gospel is more hopeful and faith-based. But actually, gospel kind of uses the same feeling. Like, the way singers bend notes or really stretch out certain words to show emotion, that comes from blues. A big example is Thomas Dorsey, who started out making blues music, then switched to gospel. He basically mixed both worlds together and helped start a whole new style. What’s fascinating is how the blend of pain and hope in blues perfectly complements the message of redemption in gospel.

Jazz also had some influence, mostly in how gospel groups started using more instruments and rhythm. Even though gospel didn’t go all in with jazz solos or big bands, it still picked up that energy. The beat, the clapping, the movement it all started to feel more alive and exciting. People like Mahalia Jackson would sing with so much power, and even though she was singing gospel, you could hear those other styles in the way she delivered the music.

To me, what’s really interesting is how gospel during this time didn’t try to erase what came before. It took all those older styles and made something new with them. It still had the faith and the church feeling, but it also had the pain, the hope, and the strength of earlier music. That’s why it hit so hard for people.

So overall, gospel’s Golden Age wasn’t just a new type of music out of nowhere. It was like a mix, a blend of spirituals, blues, jazz, and real life experience. That’s what made it so powerful. It didn’t just sound good it meant something.

**Reference:**

Breckenridge, S. L. (2023). African American Music for Everyone (3rd ed.). Kendall Hunt Publishing.