

CUSTOMSFORGE'S

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Issue #20

ABOUT US

CustomsForge is a website created in 2014 by the Rocksmith community to make their own songs, communicate more easily and enjoy the game all together

Currently we have more than 45,000 charts made by the community, and have more than 350,000 members.

We welcome thousands more each month

WELCOME

Welcome to CustomsForge's monthly newsletter, where you can find the latest news about CF and Rocksmith 2014 Remastered.

BLM

Black Lives Matter | Music Edition

Black musicians/bands

Chuck Berry – Johnny B. Goode
Little Richard – Lucille
The Jimi Hendrix Experience – Castles Made of Sand
Ray Charles – Hit the Road Jack!
Prince – Purple Rain
James Brown – Living in America
Ike & Tina Turner – River Deep Mountain High
Lenny Kravitz – Are You Gonna Go My Way
B. B. King – The Thrill is Gone
Stevie Wonder – Sir Duke
Aretha Franklin – Rock Steady
Tina Turner – What's Love Got To Do With It
Muddy Waters – Still A Fool
Miles Davis – So What
Gary Clark Jr. – Bright Lights
Marvin Gaye – What's Going On
Whitney Houston – You Give Good Love
Otis Redding – (Sittin' on) The Dock of the Bay
Robert Johnson – Sweet Home Chicago
Louis Armstrong – What A Wonderful World
Thin Lizzy – Got To Give It Up
Ben Harper – Burn One Down
Wilson Pickett – Mustang Sally
Body Count – This Is Why We Ride
Beyoncé – If I Were A Boy
John Lee Hooker – One Bourbon, One Scotch, One Beer
Living Colour – Cult of Personality
Etta James – Tell Mama



Rocksmith 2014 Remastered logo



Civil rights march on Washington, D.C. Film negative by photographer Warren K. L.

Black Music

How far back can you trace a group's influence in culture? We can look back at the Greeks for the development of democracy and rhetoric. We can look at the British for the creation of some of the most influential works of literature in history and, today, we look at how black people influenced the musical landscape in the USA.

The cradle

We should start by examining the first home of black music: Africa. Music in Africa serves as a way to pass down stories to younger generations, as steps in rituals or religious ceremonies and as a way to just sing and dance along. Because of the diversity of African cultures, we will divide them by regions:

- **North Africa and the Horn of Africa:** Home of the ancient Egypt and Cartage, North African music includes the music of ancient Egypt to the Berber and the Tuareg music of the desert nomads, all of which have greatly influenced Middle Eastern music. In fact, **they even use similar modes called *maqamat*!** We can also include the music of Sudan and of the Horn of Africa, the music of Eritrea, Ethiopia,



Photographer: Jackson David

“It was the slaves that were taken from Africa which spread their music to the rest of the world”

Djibouti and Somalia. Despite being similar, they still have interesting differences. For example: **Somalian music uses five tones per octave instead of seven like a heptatonic scale does, and Ethiopian music uses a fundamental modal system called *qenet*, with four main modes: tezeta, bati, ambassel, and anchihoy.**

- **West, Central, and Southern Africa:** As pointed out by the ethnomusicological pioneer Arthur Morris Jones (1889–1980), the rhythmic principles of Sub-Saharan African music traditions constitute one main system. **This means that most traditional African music has one purpose: Being functional.** There are specialized songs for:
 - Working
 - Accompanying childbirth
 - Marriage
 - Hunting
 - Political activities
 - Warding off evil spirits
 - Paying respects to good spirits the dead and the ancestors.

These songs are exclusively performed inside their intended social context and most of them are associated with a particular dance.

Musicologically we can distinguish between:

- **The Eastern region,** which includes the music of Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Malawi,

Mozambique and Zimbabwe as well as the islands of Madagascar, the Seychelles, Mauritius and Comor. The region's indigenous musical traditions are mostly in the mainstream of the sub-Saharan Niger–Congo-speaking peoples, but many of these have been influenced by Arabic music and also by the music of India, Indonesia and Polynesia.

- **The Southern region:** Includes the music of South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana, Namibia and Angola.
- **The Central region:** Includes the music of Chad, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia, including Pygmy music.
- **West Africa:** Includes the music of Senegal and the Gambia, of Guinea and Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone and Liberia, of the inland plains of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, the coastal nations of Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Gabon and the Republic of the Congo as well as islands such as Sao Tome and Principe.

The instruments

African music is highly rhythmic, so it's no surprise that **singing techniques like melisma** (the singing of a single syllable of text while moving between several different notes in succession) **or yodelling** (repeated and rapid changes of pitch between the low-pitch chest and the high-pitch head register or falsetto) **are common in order to induce a certain trance in the listener**. However; **there are five types of instruments aside from vocals:**

- **Membranophones:** These are the drums, including kettles, clay pots, barrels, rain sticks, bells and wood sticks.
- **Chordophones:** These are stringed instruments like harps and fiddles.
- **Aerophones:** This is another name for wind instruments. These can include flutes and trumpets.
- **Idiophones:** These are rattles and shakers.

- **Percussion:** These can be sounds like foot-stomping and hand-clapping.

Most of these instruments generally have symbols or picture carved out to represent ancestry and may be decorated with feathers as well.

In contrast to polyphony in Western music, **the instruments here are used to enhance the polyrhythms which are so common in sub-Saharan music. This is also the reason why most of these instruments are focusing on making hard-hitting, dry sounds** instead of the more mellow and soft sound of other string or wind instruments present in the western world.

Taken by the neighbours

So, how did African music influence the rest of the world? Well, it was the slaves that were taken from Africa which spread their music to the rest of the world. **In the United States of America, we can look at the 18th century for the first time African-Americans created a music genre.** We are referring to **spirituals**, a music genre which imparted **Christian values while also describing the hardships of slavery**. Its name comes from the term "spiritual song", from the King James Bible's translation of Ephesians 5:19: "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord". Spirituals differed from gospel in the dancing (also known as "the shout") and the changed melodies and rhythms of psalms and hymns. Speeding up the tempo, adding repeated refrains and choruses, and replacing texts with new ones that often combined English and African words and phrases were common practice. **While spirituals eventually faded out of the public's conscience, gospel didn't**, and today it an important part of many black communities.

In the 19th century, African-American music joined the mainstream with blackface minstrelsy. These were popular shows with skits that depicted people of African descent. These were racist, but the inclusion of African music familiarized society with it. **Banjos** (of African origin) **also became popular and the Second Great Awakening**, a Protestant religious revival, **led to a rise in Christian revivals and pietism, especially among African-Americans.**

Their music kept spreading after the Civil War and in the last half of the 19th century, a new stage emerged: Barbershops! Who would have guessed that quartets would find their place in barbershops and then the whole country, since these four-part, close-harmony singing events were recorded and then sold across music shops.

The first musicals written and produced by African-Americans debuted on Broadway in 1898 with a musical by Bob Cole and Billy Johnson. The Drury Opera Company was founded in 1900 by a man called Theodore Drury and, although he used a white orchestra, he featured black singers in leading roles and choruses. This company lasted eight years, and it marked the first black participation in opera companies.

The 20th century is rather well known by most people. This time saw the rise of blues and jazz. Regular readers of this newsletter will remember how in issue 13th we talked about WWI music, and how ragtime and jazz came into existence in this period of time. While I won't repeat that issue's contents, I will mention one thing I left out at the time due to formatting issue. **Their original classifications at the time were known as "race" music, which** had positive connotations in the African-American press since that **implied that they were played by people who fought for equal rights.**

The very first reported Blues show was in 1916, on Ashley Street in Jacksonville. The performer was Ma Rainey, and she and Bessie Smith were the forerunners of this new style. **Minstrel Shows picked up on this new genre of music and spread up and down the Mississippi River.**

During the war and up to the 30s many immigrants arrived to the north, and it was in one of these towns, called Detroit, were Rhythm and Blues (R&B) was born. It was here that *swing* picked up a faster beat, brass and left out many instruments. The record company which made possible the distribution of R&B records was called "Motown", and stars like Ray Charles or Ella Fitzgerald once debuted with it. In fact; it was here when in 1961 an eleven-year-old kid recorded his first song. His name was Stevland Hardaway Morris, also known as Stevie Wonder.

African-American musicians in the 1940s and 1950s were developing rhythm and blues into this little genre called rock and roll. It's most prominent exponents included Louis Jordan and Wynonie Harris. However; I said little because **it wasn't until white musicians such as Bill Haley and Elvis Presley popularized it, playing a guitar-based fusion of black rock and roll with country music called rockabilly.** Rock music became more associated with white people, though some black performers such as Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley had commercial success.

By the end of the 1940s, other African-Americans were determined to concertize as professionally trained classical musicians the post-World war II era. Included in this group was Henry Lewis, who emerged in 1948 as the first African-American instrumentalist in a leading American symphony orchestra, the first African-American conductor of a major American symphonic ensemble in 1968 and an early "musical ambassador" in support of cultural diplomacy in Europe.

In October 1942, Billboard made its first hit list for African-American music with the "Harlem Hit Parade", which was changed in 1945 to "Race Records", and then in 1949 to "Rhythm and Blues Records". Ironically, cover songs of African-American hits were common and would usually top the charts, but the original artists were relegated to their African-American audiences.

The 1950s also saw doo-wop style become popular. Doo-wop was a vocal group harmony with different vocal parts, nonsense syllables, little or no instrumentation, and simple lyrics. **Gospel was secularized, which gave way to soul,** which together with R&B became a huge influence for *surf*.

In the 1960s, the British Invasion knocked many black artists off the US pop charts, although some continued to do well. Soul music still remained popular among black people through highly evolved forms such as *funk*, which is a danceable version of jazz, R&B and soul.

In 1964, the Civil Rights Act outlawed major forms of discrimination towards African-Americans and women and, by the end of the decade, black people were part of the

psychedelia and early heavy metal trends. We can mention a man known as Jimi Hendrix, who revolutionized the world of electric guitar.

In 1975, Smokey Robinson published the album *A Quiet Storm*, which gives name to a radio format which originally consisted of four hours of melodically soulful music that provided an intimate, laid-back mood for late-night listening, which was the key to its tremendous appeal among adult audiences. It became so successful that in a few years nearly every station in the U.S. with a core black, urban listenership adopted a similar format.

Street jive from the 1970s developed into *Hip Hop*, which became popular between block parties in the Bronx. DJs began isolating and repeating percussion breaks while themselves MCs began rapping over them.

In the 1980s, popular music was forever transformed and united races, ages and genders, eventually leading to successful crossover black solo artists, **thanks to the king of pop: Michael Jackson.** Hip hop spread and diversified itself. Some genres that came from it are: Techno, Chicago House, Miami Bass, post-disco, Dance, Go-Go and Los Angeles Hardcore Hip Hop. **Rap exploded in 1986 thanks to Run-D.M.C.'s *Raising Hell* and the Beastie Boys' *Licensed to III*.** Both of them mixed rock and rap, which appalled to both audiences and the golden age of hip hop flourished. Fun fact: The guitar in *Sabotage* by the Beastie Boys is actually a bass.

While hip hop enjoyed worldwide popularity in the 1990s, it proved to be short lived, since gangsta rap from the likes of the N.W.A **and g-funk took over.** Of course, the man who embodied the themes of the urban black male bravado while combining them with the social awareness and sensibility of a poet was Tupac Shakur.

R&B stayed popular through the 80s and 90s, with groups like Blackstreet, TLC and En Vogue being highly successful. However, soul evolved into two new trends:

- ***Hip hop soul* consisted of hip hop beats with soul vocals.** It is quite auto-descriptive and we can highlight Mariah Carey, D'Angelo and Raphael Saadiq as some of the best exponents of this genre.

- **On the other hand, *neo soul* was described** by African-American studies professor Mark Anthony Neal as "everything from avant-garde R&B to organic soul ... a product of trying to develop something outside of the norm in R&B". It **combined organic elements from classical soul with live instrumentation, accompanied with a much more "conscious-driven" lyrics** which talked about love, politics and societal issues.

When talking about the 2000s onward, the road becomes blurry. We cannot accurately pinpoint yet what are the trends of the modern worlds because not only are we experiencing them in real time, they are also much faster and short lived. Despite that, **we can safely say that R&B and pop became inseparable** since musicians like Rihanna, Usher and Beyoncé blurred the lines by increasing R&B's popularity while making it solo artist focused.

Aside from that, **the last recognizable trend was trap and mumble rap in the 2010s**, and who knows when they will end.

An uncertain future

So far, things are looking pretty good for black musicians. Their music is appreciated around the world and we can only speculate on where it'll go from here. Trap seems to be evolving with bands like Black Punk fusing trap's lyrics and vocal style with metal's instrumental and we can find more and more punk/indie black bands like Meet Me @ The Altar.

As an end note, let's go back to the cradle once more. Africa's music scene is still evolving. **Incredible bands** like The Brother Moves On, Tinariwen or Mdou Moctar **find critical acclaim, but a giant problem halts their success: Piracy.** In Africa, the only legal music download site is called MusikBi, which doesn't allow for streaming and is limited by internet speeds. Although the situation seems to be improving thanks to Sony opening an office in Nigeria (effectively creating a legal source for obtaining music), and copyright lawyers achieving some victories, the laws are still rarely applied and, as such, we should make an effort to support this groups. Buy their music if you enjoyed it and remember: **The fight for equality isn't confined to the USA. If you are willing to purchase a brother's music there, do so in the rest of the world.**



CustomsForge's profile picture in all social media accounts.

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Charter's tip of the month: "Use the Amplify effect in Audacity to make the volumes of the audio files used consistent"
– **JamesPrestonUK**

Website Updates

If you see a dead link, make sure to report it! Please remember that the website depends on donations and any amount helps!

Moderators & Server Admin

We are looking for some moderators and a server admin, if you are suited for these positions then follow the link at the bottom of the page.

CFSongManager

Did you know CustomsForgeSongManager is a tool to (amongst many, many other things) repair older CDLC files and add Dynamic Difficulty to CDLC that may still be missing it?

PATREONS

An extra special shoutout to all of those who supports us with a couple bucks every month. You may not realize it but your kindness helps us more than you can imagine.

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