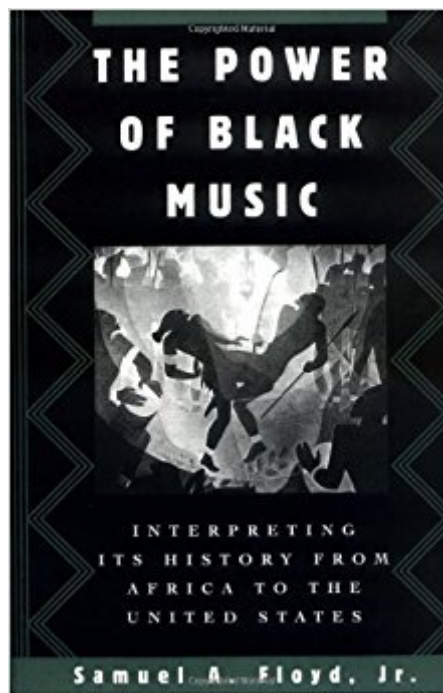




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# **The Power Of Black Music: Interpreting Its History From Africa To The United States**



## Synopsis

When Jimi Hendrix transfixed the crowds of Woodstock with his gripping version of "The Star Spangled Banner," he was building on a foundation reaching back, in part, to the revolutionary guitar playing of Howlin' Wolf and the other great Chicago bluesmen, and to the Delta blues tradition before him. But in its unforgettable introduction, followed by his unaccompanied "talking" guitar passage and inserted calls and responses at key points in the musical narrative, Hendrix's performance of the national anthem also hearkened back to a tradition even older than the blues, a tradition rooted in the rings of dance, drum, and song shared by peoples across Africa. Bold and original, *The Power of Black Music* offers a new way of listening to the music of black America, and appreciating its profound contribution to all American music. Striving to break down the barriers that remain between high art and low art, it brilliantly illuminates the centuries-old linkage between the music, myths and rituals of Africa and the continuing evolution and enduring vitality of African-American music. Inspired by the pioneering work of Sterling Stuckey and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., author Samuel A. Floyd, Jr, advocates a new critical approach grounded in the forms and traditions of the music itself. He accompanies readers on a fascinating journey from the African ring, through the ring shout's powerful merging of music and dance in the slave culture, to the funeral parade practices of the early new Orleans jazzmen, the bluesmen in the twenties, the beboppers in the forties, and the free jazz, rock, Motown, and concert hall composers of the sixties and beyond. Floyd dismisses the assumption that Africans brought to the United States as slaves took the music of whites in the New World and transformed it through their own performance practices. Instead, he recognizes European influences, while demonstrating how much black music has continued to share with its African counterparts. Floyd maintains that while African Americans may not have direct knowledge of African traditions and myths, they can intuitively recognize links to an authentic African cultural memory. For example, in speaking of his grandfather Omar, who died a slave as a young man, the jazz clarinetist Sidney Bechet said, "Inside him he'd got the memory of all the wrong that's been done to my people. That's what the memory is....When a blues is good, that kind of memory just grows up inside it." Grounding his scholarship and meticulous research in his childhood memories of black folk culture and his own experiences as a musician and listener, Floyd maintains that the memory of Omar and all those who came before and after him remains a driving force in the black music of America, a force with the power to enrich cultures the world over.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

African American music deserves but seldom gets as much attention from academics as from music critics. Floyd takes the rare scholarly approach to it and sets a standard for subsequent studies. The range of genres he discusses is comprehensive (it includes slaves' ring shouts, turn-of-the-century cotillion dances, jazz, R & B, etc.), and the connections he makes are particularly perceptive.

Drawing on the works of prominent cultural theorists, such as Henry Louis Gates, Floyd traces the key elements in the music's panorama to an aesthetic that is still clearly linked to African myths and rituals (one example he cites is call-and-response technique, which is pervasive throughout many stylistic categories). A midwesterner, Floyd attends to the historically important but frequently overlooked Chicago Renaissance of black cultural activity and to the influential composers from that city as well as to the more familiar Harlem efflorescence. Complementing the discourse are plenty of musical examples. Academics, critics, scholars, and fans alike stand to gain much from carefully reading this impressive work. Aaron Cohen --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"Diligently traces the history of Black music--its African influences and evolution."--Emerge"Dares to take on the whole span of black musical history."--Chicago Tribune"Important...An exceptionally erudite and thoroughly readable work."--I.S.A.M. Newsletter"Impressive."--Booklist

This book is a classic and seminal work researching Black Music. It is a must read for those interested in culture and history

I am thankful to Guthrie Ramsey who referred to this book in his book "Race Music", and made me buy it and read it. There is no doubt in my mind that this is a must for anyone interested in African American music. The book begins with the spiritual-mythological aspects of African life - and their musical expressions. He shows how these aspects were brought to America with the transplanted and enslaved Africans. Floyd generalizes these as "Ring Elements" - coming from the communal ring dance-song-drum of African culture. These elements are present, according to Floyd, in all African American music, sometimes to a great extent (gospel-blues) and sometimes to a lesser extent (composed music). Floyd moves along key points in African American history, and discusses their musical dimensions - the Harlem Renaissance, the Chicago Renaissance, and so on. I have read books on music by Amiri Baraka, James Cone, Nelson George, Albert Murray and Charles Kiel before I read this book. They were all great and illuminating, but I think this book takes things to another level. It makes a lot of bold assumptions that could be used for further research, and develops the language needed for the academic discourse on this amazing music.

Very wordy and hard to keep up with. Throws out a ton of names to the reader at a time and it's hard to keep up with what the book is saying.

Samuel Floyd has written a masterful study of the research and philosophy of Black Music, it's innovators and creators. Floyd is a true pioneer of black music research.

Very Helpful and enjoyable. I believe has helped me achieve an A in the course.

This book contains a lot of useful information. This is a go-to book.

I gained knowledge from reading this book, and I could relate completely. I am giving this book a four star simply because there was a lot of jargon that made some sections hard to read, if you are not a musician. Then again, it is a book about music. Here are some excerpts that moved me: "Through the history of black music in the United States, it has been through the repetition and revision of texts, through the interplay of black language and black music in a long chain of Signifyin(g) tropes, that African American peasants became and continue to be the poets in a land that initially denied them the right to be called artists of any stripe. But poets they have become, as makers of the spirituals and the blues, as creators of R&B and rock 'n' roll, and as composers of works for the concert hall. It is clear from the nature of their texts and their tunes that the makers of

this music--the repeaters and revisers of the musical derivatives of the ring--have privileged and honored the spirit of Esu as, for example, that spirit is personified in the redoubtable Harriet Tubman, who bid many thousands to come ride her train.." The only thing I can say is "preach brotha, preach!" - Big Sistah Pat

In the 1960s, gospel music became entertainment." Interesting! - Big Sistah Pat

Sometimes when "new" sounds emerge in jazz they are perceived as foreign to the black-music tradition and, consequently, are unacceptable to many critics, mostly white, who reside on the margins of the culture. For example, John Coltrane's sound was strongly criticized as being inferior, but was applauded and appreciated by listeners from within the culture." Ain't that some bull! De folks ise all dat matters!" - Big Sistah Pat

Reviewer's Note: This comment reminds me of how the mainstream critics hate Tyler Perry. Yet he is loved and supported by numerous regular folks in Black American society. The so-called critics have no value to the folks that support Tyler's productions. They determine what is worthy of their support, not self appointed outsiders. He speaks to them and aspects of Black American culture they can identify." In the late nineteenth century, the advertising of musical products became the primary means of developing, perpetuating, and communicating the negative images of black people in American society. The coon song was the vehicle for repeating these messages in American culture. The stereotypes perpetuated by these publications linger as both conscious and unconscious images of blacks in the memory of countless Americans." What fool said that images aren't powerful! -- Big Sistah Pat

Essentially and most fundamentally, the African-American musical experience is largely self-criticizing and self-validating. As such experiences unfold, for example, listeners show approval, disapproval, or puzzlement with vocal and physical responses to, and interaction with, events as they occur. African Americans serve critical notice on inferior music making either by withholding their participation or, as in New York's tough Apollo Theatre in the 1940's and 1950's, by addressing criticism directly to the performers on stage. The culturally attuned are aware when the notes and the rhythms do not fit the context and when the idiomatic orientation is wrong; they know when an act is a Signifyin(g) one, when it is effective, and when it is not". You got that right. You know how well you are doing right then by the audience response. We are going to let you know. - Big Sistah Pat

I would recommend this book if you have a strong interest in learning about the origins and the evolution of African American music in the United States.

This book is not an easy read, but it's worth it. It was written by a scholar for other scholars, but a lay person with patience will draw a great deal from the reading. It explains common threads -- basic components of African music-- in genres as diverse as blues, rock n' roll, be-bop, hip-hop, etc.

What's nice is that the author, a noted scholar and head of Chicago's Collumbia College Center for Black Music Research, lends in his narration some playfulness, invoking elements of the music in the text, with lots of eye-witness discussions of African-American musical events that allow the reader to feel like an observer. You'll emerge from the reading a little exhausted, but with a greater appreciation of black music in the U.S., and a better understanding of how your favorite type of black music, or in the case of rock fans, black music derivative, came into being. (Note: For those lucky enough to live in the handful of cities where Dance Africa is performed each year, reading this book would be a great idea before you attend the next performance.)

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