

an important means of the field hands, and as such, often commanded a higher price on the market. Because the mood of the workers and the work to be done dictated the timing and rhythm of the music, the leader had to intuitively determine what to sing. Reminiscent of the bards in far-off Africa, he improvised and created lyrics and melodies as needed.

So, too, were messages disseminated in this fashion. Whenever Harriet Tubman was in the area, a special song was sung: Dark and throny is de pathway Where de pilgrim makes his ways; But beyond dis vale of sorrow Lie de fields of endless days.

Specifics, as to meeting places and departure times, might be extemporaneous verses added to work, secular or religious songs to alert potential runaways.

Other songs that served to inform listeners that there was an escape plot being planned were: *Steal Away To Jesus; Oh, Sinner, You'd Better Get Ready; Good News, De Chariot's Coming; and I Hear From Heaven Today. Follow The Drinking Gourd* alluded to the Big Dipper constellation as a

way of traveling north. Although both slave and free man had been exposed to white church music, it often was too stilted or unsatisfactory to express their needs. Noticing the dichotomy between the master's Sunday piety and his godless manners from Monday to Saturday, the southern black was even more attuned to a need for music and rhetoric that not only nourished his soul, but also helped to dispel the malaise of slavery.

Richard Allen of Philadelphia (1760-1831), who is chiefly noted for organizing and heading the first congregation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church was acutely aware of this. He collected hymns that he believed would appeal to his black congregation. *A Collection of Spiritual Songs and Hymns Selected from Various Authors by Richard Allen, African Minister*, was printed by John Ormrod in 1801. Because Allen's counterpart in the South at that time had little or no access to a hymnal for his "congregation," it may be assumed that he or his lead singer was the composer of many religious songs.

It should be noted that long before white men entered Africa as slavers, explorers, or missionaries, there was a widespread

belief in a Supreme Being, and each village had its "minister" or priest. This allowed for an easier transference in the New Land, not the admonitions or forces of the white master. Here, in the United States, ministers enjoyed the same leadership role as did those priests in Africa. This helps to explain why many insurrections were instigated or led by religious men. Two of the more famous were Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey.

Thus, out of the merger of the slaves' songs from Africa and their experiences in the New Land, came a form of music about which much has been written: The Spiritual. Recognized as a form of communal communication, this music served to bind a people as does all folk music; for folk music is a music that reflects the tastes and feelings of a community rather than individual emotions.

The spiritual's close relationship between the singer (slave) and Jesus might be explained by their commonality: both had been "buked (rebuked) and scorned," tortured in some manner, and forced to accept unjust, heavy punishment. This is why He is the deity most often mentioned in the spiritual: He was deemed most sympathetic



A traditional slave celebration of many southern plantations produced a music that was to have a domi-

nant influence upon American musical expression. The

group and created songs for the human heart." He further states that the "purposes" of the spiritual are to:

1. Give the community a true, valid and useful song
2. Keep the community invigorated

The "Jubilee

3. Inspire the uninspired individual
4. Enable the group to face its problems
5. Stir each member to personal solutions and to a sense of belonging in the midst of a confusing and terrifying world
6. Provide a code language for emergency use

Recognizing the inherent danger for foment that the slaves' religious services (or any form of assemblage) and the singing of spirituals presented, they were banned in some areas of the South as early as the 1830's. Most particularly did the black Methodists come under fire, for they had acquired considerable strength and were thought to be behind the Vesey plot. So, too, were drums prohibited due to the fear that they would be used as means of communicating information. To circumvent this, meetings had to be held in the woods at night, or in a secure building with guards posted. Singing was done into a glass or pot filled with water to absorb the sound. Whatever the inconveniences were, they were not enough to prevent the need from being fulfilled.

In the South during the earlier decades, entertainment for slaves on the plantation was chiefly offered by individual instrumentalists (mostly fiddlers or banjoists) with the group joining in with singing, dancing, or "patting." The latter was a method where the feet were tapped, as well as the thighs and shoulders, by the hands in an intricate and precise syncopated rhythm (more recently known as "hamboning").

In New Orleans, there was a section of the city called Congo Square (since renamed Beuregard Square). Here, on Sundays or holy days, whites who were tourists or locals, came to watch the "wildest dancing." The slaves would congregate by tribes to form circles where they would perform a dance or "shuffle" that was peculiar to West Africa. Hours would go by, with any who fell from exhaustion quickly replaced by another. Of course, the chief instrument, similar to the banjar or banjo was made from a calabash. The instrumentalists were within the ring. "Incessant chanting and

the exciting music. . . .", according to an 1808 report, created a state of frenzy within the parti-
½ pants. This same report stated that at sundown, " . . . the city patrols show themselves with their cutlasses, and the crowds immediately dispersed." "According," Langston Hughes mused, "some musicologists believe that jazz was born before sunset in Congo Square. Certainly the basic beat was there all day long."

Such entertainment for slaves was chiefly limited to the exotic city of New Orleans, with its largest black population in any American city; for one-third of its inhabitants, about 12,000 were black. It also had a peculiar caste system based upon color and status: free or slave.

The free people (creoles of color, as they were known) and free blacks of unmixed "parentage" indulged in more sophisticated or genteel pursuits. Perhaps to clearly delineate their status, they eschewed the more African-inspired music for the European variety. In almost every household there was a piano and some member(s) was able to acquit him/herself well enough to entertain family and friends. Voice lessons were also taken to indulge the petted young ladies of these middle class creoles.

At the white balls, opera houses and theaters, sections were often set aside for the blacks, and they were almost always filled to capacity. So seriously did many music lovers and accomplished instrumentalists view their music, that the Negro Philharmonic Society was formed with over 100 members. It served a double purpose; the one just stated, and it prevented those who truly found racial discrimination distasteful, from having to attend segregated performances at the white theaters. In addition to performing at concerts in their own building, the Society acted as booking agents for visiting performers.

Some of the members also formed the basis for the orchestra for the *Theatre de la Renaissance* which was for "free coloreds." Several residents of the "Paris of the South", as New Orleans was called, achieved recognition beyond their city.

Picayune Butler was a virtuoso banjoist whose career began in the 1820's and was known along the entire length of the "The River," as the Mississippi was affectionately known. He acquired such consummate skill that he was invited to become a participant in a competition in New York City in 1857. Contemporary writers reported that had he not broken two strings during the contest, he would have been declared the winner. Even so, despite this handicap, he acquitted himself admirably on the required sets of schottische, reel, waltz, polka and jig. It is alleged that he was the composer of many of the songs that white minstrels performed on stage. So popular was he, that an anonymous minstrel (white) wrote a song in his honor: *Picayune Butler's Come To Town* for inclusion in a published collection of songs of the minstrelsy in 1858.

A common form of advertising wares was for street vendors to go through residential sections of town calling out the various attributes of their product and encouraging potential customers with original verses to their recognizable "theme song."

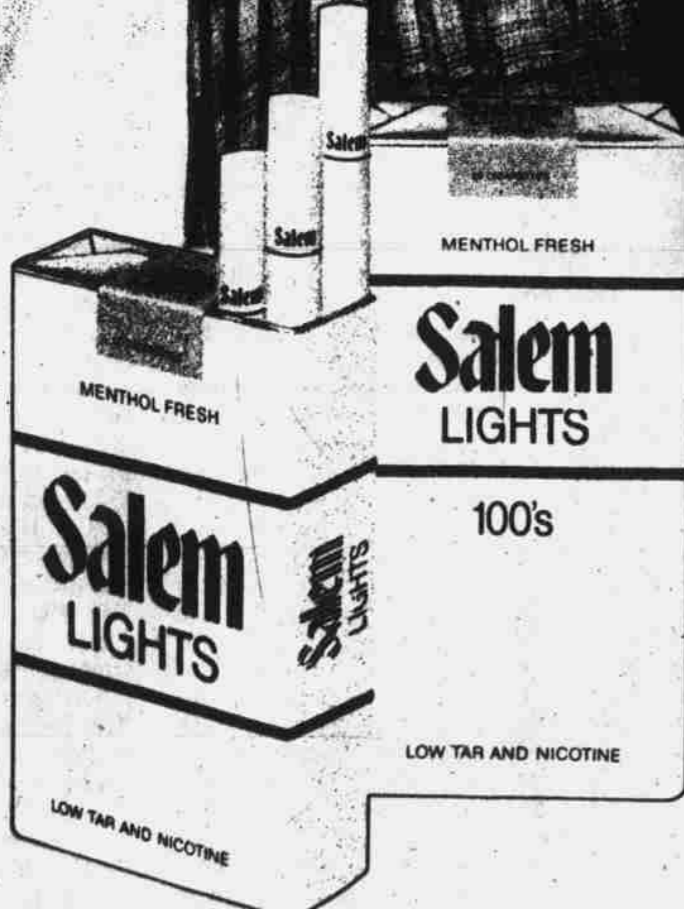
Signor Cornmeal was such a vendor. Reputed to have a wide vocal range, and enjoying tremendous popularity, his given name is unknown, but his stage name was obviously adopted from his vocation. He was saved from anonymity because he was the first black to perform on the stage of a white theater anywhere in the United States. The event took place at the St. Charles Theater in New Orleans in 1837.

Opening his program with his own song, *Fresh Corn Meal*, he followed that with popular songs of the day. So enthralled were his audiences by his voice, and presence, that upon his death, it has been said that the entire city mourned him.

As noted earlier, classicists were an important thread in the fabric of music that cloaked the free black in New Orleans, and the Negro Philharmonic Society was the weaver.

Richard Lambert, along with Constantine Debarque, became a permanent director of the Society in

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