

# Christian Roots of Modern Music

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# About

It is common knowledge that the Christian church has been the center of music for most of the time of our era. But did you know that roots of modern music start with the Christian church as well? This book takes you on a journey from the early church music, to the development of the chant, through classical music, and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where you will discover the beginnings of gospel, blues, jazz, rock, R&B, electronica, and hip hop. I hope you enjoy reading this book and find the information interesting!

# Contents

Early Church music

The rise of the chant

Classical music

Rock music

R&B and hip hop

Electronica

The very root of modern music

Jazz

Blues

## Early Church Music

Mathew 26:30 says that Jesus and disciples sang a hymn or a psalm (depending on which translation you read) as they went to the mount of Olives before Calvary. Early church witnesses such as Pope Clement I and Tertullian testify that such singing of psalms without instruments indeed accompanied the early church services. Psalms are songs you can find in the book of Psalms in the Old Testament. The early church appears to have sang those Jewish psalms during the first century. In the rare cases, when they used instruments, the instruments came from Jewish synagogues. Those cases were rare for two reasons. One is that some churches did not approve of instruments. And the second one, is that some churches simply didn't have any musicians to play those instruments. When musically talented Jews converted to Christianity, they brought along the instruments they played at the synagogue, and played them in church.<sup>1</sup> There really was no harmony (division into parts). No obvious rhythm either. There was only a melody, and even that was not very complicated, just gradual swings in melody, everything mostly in one tone.

There was secular Greek music at the time. But it was really bad. Our western ear, would not be able to stand it. They used completely different scales and there really was no symmetry or real patterns in the music. That's why early Christian musicians realized they were not going to go with that music. There were attempts to make something out of it, but since the 2nd century, the leaders of Christian music completely tossed away those styles and moved in a completely new direction.<sup>3</sup>

2nd century church music gave rise to what is called antiphonal music, which is when two choirs repeat phrases after each other in a call-and-response fashion. According to a Christian historian, Socrates of Constantinople, antiphonal music was introduced by Ignatius of Antioch (died in A.D. 107), who saw, in a vision, how two choirs of angels sang a song in a call-and-response fashion. Ignatius figured, since angels sing that way, so should the church.<sup>2</sup>

## The Rise of the Chant

Here is the earliest known hymn. It was written around the end of the third century, and unearthed in 1918. It's called the Oxyrhynchus hymn

.. Let it be silent, Let the Luminous stars not shine, Let the winds (?) and all the noisy rivers die down; And as we hymn the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Let all the powers add "Amen Amen" Empire, praise always, and glory to God, The sole giver of good things, Amen Amen.<sup>4</sup>

Moving on to the 5th century. The period from the 5th-9th centuries was the time of development of different chants in different parts of the Roman Empire. In Rome, there was the Roman Chant, in British Isles - the Celtic Chant, in Spain - Mozarabic, in Gaul - Gallican, and Italy - Old Roman, Ambrosian and Beneventan.

Gregorian Chant has been officially endorsed by the church in the 6th century. It was called that way, because Pope Gregory I is considered to be the father of it. Most likely, however, Pope Gregory I simply gathered all of the previous chants into a singing book. His slogan was: "One Empire - One Church - One Chant ". With time, they gathered enough chants for

monasteries to sing every day - around 9 chants per day, 7 days a week, and even more on big holidays. Initially, monks had to learn all the chants by heart, because music was not being written down on paper yet. It took several years to learn all the chants. But eventually they have developed a system of writing these chants on paper; both words and music were written in big books, around which the monks gathered to sing. Modern music notation comes from those monasteries. Those five lines on score sheets came from the Gregorian Chant. Gregorian Chant was the beginning of melody and rhythm as we know it today. In those times, the only place you could have learned to sing, was in church. People who wanted to learn to sing, went to church and joined a choir. <sup>3</sup>

As with all music, it can be used in different ways. In the 20th century, Gregorian Chant was used by some secular and even satanic bands. So it doesn't just happen to techno or rap.

## **Classical Music**

As I was saying, Gregorian chant was church music of the 6th-9th centuries. The chant music was written down in one musical line. But after some time, musicians began experimenting with splitting the music into several lines, and assigning different voices to each line. This gave rise to what is called the Organum (two or three lines moving together but independent of each other). That was the beginning of harmony. Then, they came up with majors and minors. The concept of the center of melody, tonality, emerged.

Secular music appeared around 12th century. Those centuries were the times of the Renaissance, the rebirth of Greek culture. There were no iPods, no CD players, no cassette players, not even record players at that time. The only people who were able to listen to music, were wealthy people who could afford to hire a musician or a band to come and play at their parties. And all musicians were church musicians. So what happened was these church musicians played church music in church and then played non-church music, or secular music, at the parties of wealthy people. When we are speaking of secular music at this point, it wasn't anything anti-Christian per say, rather songs with lyrics on everyday matters, instead of lyrics about God.

16-18th century was the Baroque Era. That was the time of opera and concerto. Opera was developed during the late Renaissance. It first appeared at the banquets of wealthy people, and was a mixture of Greek theater and singing. Eventually, this music went to the masses. People were beginning to listen to "classical" music, as opposed to "popular" music. Concerto was a combination of one or several vocals and a full ensemble of musical instruments. There was a shift from listening to choir music to instrumental music. Again, most of this beginning "secular" music was written by church musicians. Those were the composers whose pieces were played in churches for centuries.<sup>5</sup>

Well, everybody knows classical music had church roots. But what about today's music?

## **Rock Music**

To begin, we'll talk about the most widely used genre in CCM, rock music. Anybody know who

was the father of rock music? Right, Elvis Presley. But did you know that Elvis Presley attended a Pentecostal church until the age of 18? No, he was not a Christian. He attended church, but he made a choice to “gain the whole world and lose his soul”. Just like today, there are a lot of artists in the secular music scene who came out of church (i.e. Britney Spears, Eminem to name a couple); so it was with Presley. If you listen to the biographies of many of the big names in secular music, they would go something similar to: “Grew up in church, learned how to sing there, but then somebody promised her big money, and she was gone doing secular music”.

Presley learned to sing gospel music from the singers in his church. People who studied his music, noticed that it was 50% like gospel music. People who attended early rock n' roll concerts said: "Wow, this sounds just like a revival event." I was browsing the music section at WalMart once, and I came across one CD, titled something like: “the Spiritual Collection of Elvis Presley”. By the way, this is not a commercial of Presley's music. If you knew about some of the things he had said about Christ, you would lose the desire to listen to his music. It's just interesting how, when you study the roots of all these different music genres, you become convinced more and more, that God is the Creator of all music. The devil can only pervert what God created. You've probably seen secular rock concerts, where people start jumping at each other, and going crazy. But you don't see that at Christian rock concerts. I need to point out that there's a difference between the rock n' roll Elvis played and today's rock music.<sup>6</sup> So I'm not saying that 60's gospel music sounded like today's rock music. We're only talking about the roots here.

Rock music has not been accepted by the church for a long time. There were several failed attempts to introduce it to church music. But eventually, around 2000s, they succeeded. The church accepted rock music. And accepted full scale. It seems like today, every song on Christian radio is rock, and every song played at Christian churches in America is rock. To people who like that kind of music, it's like: YES! finally decent music in church. But to people who have different tastes, it's like where's all the multitude of other music genres in Christian music?

## **Other Music**

We were saying that rock n' roll music has roots in the gospel music. Now let's talk about the history of gospel music for a little bit. In the words of Wikipedia:

“One can pursue the “roots” of gospel music through the academic discipline of ethno-musicology (going back to Europe and Africa), through a study of the 2,000-year history of church music, and through a study of rural folk music traditions, but for practical purposes, gospel music as we know it began in the late 19th century. Its two roots were the mass revival movement (starting with Dwight L. Moody, whose musician was Ira D. Sankey) and the Holiness-Pentecostal movement.” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel\\_music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_music)).

Prior to the meeting of Moody and Sankey, there was a history of camp revival meetings. These meetings were accompanied by gospel hymns. There were really no requirements to

play a certain instrument at these meetings. Whoever wanted to participate musically, just brought the instruments they had and played.

Thomas Dorsey is considered to be the father of gospel music.<sup>7</sup> Initially, his music was not accepted by churches, because they said he mixed Christian hymn, with blues, which was considered devil's music. We will touch on the roots of blues later on, and talk about how much of a secular or not secular of a music it was. James D. Vaughan, one of the pioneers of gospel music, was first to establish a professional traveling quartet, founded one of the first radio stations in Tennessee, and founded the first record company in the South. Blackwood Brothers Quartet Gospel group invented the idea of a traveling music tour bus. Elvis Presley later admitted that he indeed took the idea of a traveling quartet from Blackwood Brothers. So the whole idea of modern bands and traveling bands is not so secular either.<sup>8</sup>

## **R&B**

R&B is the 80s music. But it continues to be very popular today. Where did it come from? It came from blues, hence the name Rhythm & Blues. Again quoting Wikipedia: "Blues is the name given to both a musical form and a music genre created primarily within the African-American communities in the Deep South of the United States at the end of the 19th century from spirituals, work songs, field hollers, shouts and chants, and rhymed simple narrative ballads."<sup>9</sup>

## **Rap/Hip-Hop**

Rap originated somewhere in Africa. It goes back to African traditions of story telling and Southern preachers trying to elaborate on gospel teachings. It became popular in NY city among Jamaican immigrant youth. Some people say that rap originated from New York gangs. But that's not true. Gangster rap, as they call it, is a branch of rap that came out in 1990s; because gangsters discovered that this form of expression was a good way to express anger over politics and other matters. Many people said rap would never get through to be mainstream music. But boy were they wrong. Today, both rap and hip hop individually beat even rock music in popularity. And it seems to be the most international music, implemented by most countries in the world in a multitude of languages.

Hip hop is what helped rap go mainstream. It's an urban version of rap. It gave rap a melody. If you study the history of electronic music, that is exactly what it did. Producers took rappers and got them to rap to electronic music. Hip hop music itself really came out of funk music and jazz. We will talk about the roots of those later on. Today's hip hop gets more and more melody. Sometimes it's hard to tell the difference between pop, R&B, and hip hop, in today's music. And they learned to make pretty catchy tunes. Can hip hop be bad? Of course, if written by people whose every other word is a cuss word.<sup>10</sup>

## **Electronica**

## Techno

Techno is the music of technology. The only reason it appeared, was because people started using technology to make music. Even though all modern music uses technology, with techno, presence of technology is apparent. This music appeared with the appearance of first synthesizers. A lot of times, the term "techno" is applied to all dance or electronic music, since all electronic music is technology based. In reality, there are many different styles that are similar to each other. But we'll talk about the specific sub genre of electronic music called "techno". Techno was born in 1986 in Detroit. The style was developed by three African-American college students, known as Belleville Three: Derrick May, Kevin Saunders, and Juan Atkins. Some people say techno originated in Europe. And there's a lot of truth to that. You can't say that the Belleville Three really invented this music. When you study the roots of the different musical genres, you become convinced that everything comes out of something else. Even the so called "fathers" of the major music branches did not invent those musical genres. They just built on the work of hundreds of others before them.

Techno is a mix of European synth-pop and American music genres of soul, funk, electro, and disco. How did those three college kids invent techno? Well, they listened to this late-night radio show from Midnight Funk Association by DJ Mojo, also known as "Electrifying Mojo". DJ Mojo played funk music just to be different from every other radio station, that played disco. In the 80s, disco was the only thing you could hear on the radio. DJ Mojo played European groups.<sup>11</sup>

As happened with the Gregorian chant and rock music, when the music gets into the wrong hands, it could get pretty destructive. When one of the originators of techno came to Europe and visited one of their clubs, he was shocked. His music was simplified to the minimum and listened to under drugs. That's how this music got the name of "ecstasy music". Club DJ's figured if you give people some ecstasy, you don't even have to work hard, people would dance for hours and think its cool. In the late 90s, there was a movement called "intelligent techno"; with an attempt to restore techno to its original intent. Techno was designed to be the music for the mind, but some people make it into ecstasy music.

Now, very briefly on the genres leading up to techno.

## Funk

A few weeks ago, when I started doing even more research in this area, I went online to see where does funk music come from. I was not going to be surprised if I found out it had church roots as well. And guess what? Funk music is a mix of soul music, soul jazz, and R&B.<sup>12</sup>

## Soul

Soul came out of gospel and R&B.<sup>13</sup>

## **Synth-pop**

Synth-pop and all electronic music came out of classical music, if you take it far enough. Probably, the most influential man in the development of electronic music was Karlheinz Stockhausen. He was a composer of classical music, and started experimenting with electronic music when music technology was invented. What's interesting is that he received his first music lessons from Franz-Josef Kloth, a protestant organist of Altenberg Cathedral. Stockhausen wrote both religious and secular pieces. Olivier Messiaen was his instructor at the conservatory. Olivier was an organist at the church of Trinity in Paris, and wrote only religious pieces.<sup>14</sup>

## **The Very Root of Modern Music**

During the Second Great Awakening, under the leadership of Dwight Moody, African-American slaves were active participants in the musical part of tent revivals. At these tent meetings, songs were not sang from psalm books, rather, they were invented on stage. There, these songs were first called "spirituals".<sup>15</sup> Dwight Moody met a very talented musician once. His name was Ira Sankey. They started doing tent revivals together. Moody was preaching, and Sankey was responsible for music. When Sankey was asked what role music played in the revival, he answered, "If I can get people to worship God with their mouths, soon they will worship him with their hearts".<sup>15</sup> Singers like Elvis Presley and many others admitted the influence of this movement on their music.

When slaves were brought from Africa, their masters brought them to church to teach them Christianity. And these slaves did accept Christianity. Masters quickly realized that these people were more musically inclined than white people. So they let slaves remain after church services for the "nights of worship". At first, they sang the way they used to in Africa, gathered around in circles and danced... for hours. White pastors looked at that, and said: "that's not the way they ought to sing in church, we can see that these people have extraordinary musical talents, but we need to teach them how to worship God correctly." So they decided to teach slaves how to sing. Dancing was banned, and the songs were changed to resemble more the style of hymns. Those songs were called, "Dr. Watts". Dr. Watts was an English minister who began to write spirituals to the genre of hymn. Slaves loved Dr. Watts hymns. When they were given freedom, they began traveling across the country with their songs, singing and selling their records to feed themselves. Their shows experienced great popularity, because they really had great talent in music. And even today, who starts the music? Black people. Some sang in church, some sang at concerts and made records, some did both. With time, they started adding more energetic rhythms to their music; and that's how today's highly rhythmic music developed.

Spirituals gave rise to gospel music, as well as blues and jazz.<sup>15</sup>

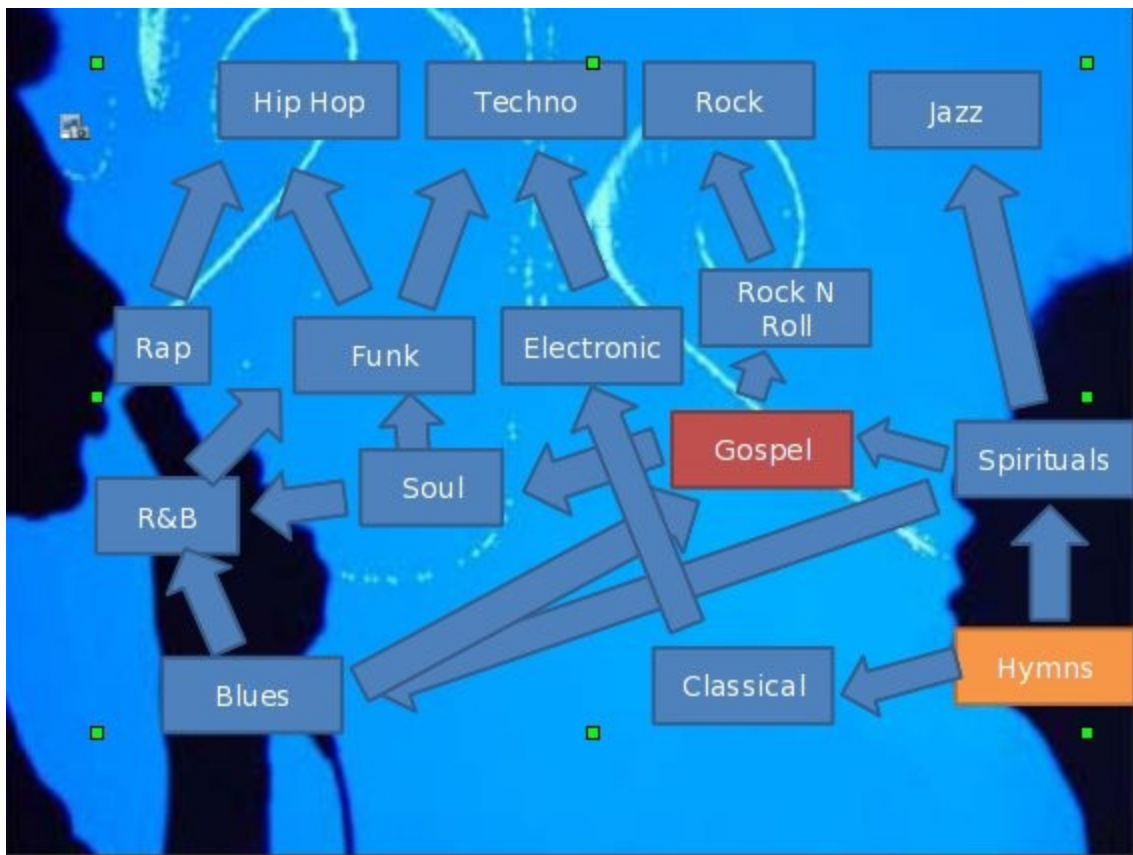
## **Jazz**

If you go very far, jazz began as music at church funerals. Later, secular musicians took that music, and made their own version of jazz. Jazz became "bar music". But initially, it comes out of spirituals.

## Blues

Blues originated on plantation fields of the South, where African-American slaves were working. Early secular blues musicians admit to have been introduced to the style, by being around those plantations.<sup>15</sup> There are various theories on the origins of blues. What's interesting is that when you look at Christian sites, they say blues has strictly secular roots. When you look at secular sites, they actually admit blues has religious roots. But everyone would probably agree that early blues was a secular counterpart of spirituals. Same music, taken from the church, but with secular lyrics laid onto it.

Here's a chart that outlines the connections between various musical genres and their roots.



## Conclusion

Well, the purpose of this little ebook was not to defend or condemn any musical genre. The purpose was to show the influence church music had on the development of modern music. We have seen that every musical genre can be used positively and can be used in a damaging way. What Christians often don't realize is that God is the source of creativity. And the people of His church are the first in-line to receive that inspiration for musical creativity. As a church, we have forgotten that in the past couple of decades. Often, we try to catch up to the secular music, we try to sound like them and look like them. We think they set the standard for music, forgetting that they got the inspiration from us, and simply had the money and time to perfect the technical and business aspects of producing music. It's time for church music to stop following secular music, like Christian musicians of the second century did, and begin our own, independent development of music. And you know what? We don't even need to come up with totally new musical genres to begin with. Genres built upon our music are already out there.

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