

THE MODERN TROMBONE IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH: SHOUT
BANDS AND THE AFRICAN AMERICAN PREACHER
IN THE UNITED HOUSE OF PRAYER
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The United House of Prayer was established by Marcelino Manuel da Graça (1881-1960), who is also known as Charles Manuel “Sweet Daddy” Grace, or “Daddy” Grace. He founded and developed the use of the shout bands which are charismatic gospel trombone ensembles within this church. This study explores the importance of shout bands and examines them from multiple perspectives focusing in particular on worship practices. Additionally, it examines rhythmic elements as the most important characteristic of music performed by these unique ensembles, rhythms that reflect the preacher’s personal timing and inflections that the trombones then imitate. The approach used here supports a deeper understanding of the United House of Prayer and of the trombone in church services of this denomination. Indeed, it ultimately establishes the trombone’s role in the United House of Prayer.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On the East Coast of the United States, a practice of using the trombone in services of the church known as the United House of Prayer for All People (henceforth “United House of Prayer”) has existed since 1919 and thus developed into a tradition. Shout bands, which are trombone choirs, are an important part of the worship service in the churches of this denomination.¹ Shout bands developed in Newport News, Virginia, first in the Catholic Church and then in the United House of Prayer. While these bands represent a tradition dating back nearly one hundred years, scholarly research has largely overlooked the use of the trombone in this latter religious denomination.

The United House of Prayer established by Marcelino Manuel da Graça (1881–1960), also known as Charles Manuel “Sweet Daddy” Grace, or “Daddy” Grace.² Grace founded and developed the use of the shout band within the church. This study explores the importance of trombone shout bands in Christian worship practices of the African American community in the southeastern part of the United States. Additionally, it examines rhythmic elements as the most important characteristic of music performed by these distinct ensembles rhythms that reflect the personal timing and inflections of the preacher in his sermons, ones that the trombones then imitate. The approach used here looks deeply into the United House of Prayer and how it nurtured the trombone tradition in its services. Indeed, it explains and compares the roles of the preacher and shout band in the United House of Prayer.

¹ Matthew A. Hafar, “The Shout Band Tradition in the Southeastern United States: Kenny Carr, Conversation with the Author,” *Historic Brass Society Journal* 15 (January 1998): 164.

² Waverly Duck, PhD, “Center on Race and Social Problems,” accessed August 18, 2014, <http://www.crsp.pitt.edu/person/waverly-duck-phd>.³ The United House of Prayer for All People for the Church on the Rock of the Apostolic Faith.

CHAPTER 2

UNITED HOUSE OF PRAYER: ITS HISTORY AND THEOLOGY

Like most Pentecostal denominations, the church's name³ draws from three specific texts in the Bible: from Isaiah 56:7, where God says, "Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people" (KJV); from Acts 4:10-12, where Paul the apostle writes, "be it known unto you all, and to all the people" (KJV); and from Ephesians 2:20, where Paul addresses fellow Christians as those "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (KJV). Christ was the cornerstone that Charles "Daddy" Grace, the self-proclaimed last prophet used to grow his congregation to over 3.5 million followers.⁴

The United House of Prayer was established in 1919 by Charles Manuel Grace in the city of Wareham, a suburb of New Bedford, Connecticut.⁵ "Daddy Grace" or "Sweet Daddy," as some followers called him, was a charismatic and controversial leader. His story begins with the claim, widely accepted as true within the United House of Prayer, that he raised his sister, Eugenia, from the dead.⁶ Allegedly, this miraculous event took place in New England; however, Grace's ministry was ineffective in this region of the United States. Due to the ineffectiveness of Grace's church in the Northeast, he moved south where the United House of Prayer ultimately found root in Charlotte, North Carolina, site of the original "Mother House."

There is speculation as to why this sect was so popular in the South. The most notable factors were the large lower-class population of blacks during the Depression and Second World

³ The United House of Prayer for All People for the Church on the Rock of the Apostolic Faith.

⁴ Marie Dallam, *Daddy Grace: A Celebrity Preacher and His House of Prayer* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 57.

⁵ Alexander Alland Jr., "'Possession' in a Revivalistic Negro Church," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 1, no. 2 (Spring 1962): 205.

⁶ Nathan Aaseng, *African-American Religious Leaders* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2003), 52.

War, and the drift created by the Southern Crusades (1936–1980).⁷ The movement known as the Southern Crusades involved the intentional industrial relocation of businesses to the Southern states, including Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina, in order to grow the South using multiple incentives.⁸ This mass movement to the South brought not only industries but also religion and theology. This included the teachings of Charles Manuel Grace.

The theology of the United House of Prayer centered around the need for personal salvation in light of impending apocalyptic doom. The church, however, promised deliverance from destruction through the last prophet, Grace, who offered intercession directly to God for the people. This was in accordance with the strict ethical code set forth by the United House of Prayer. Other ethical codes set forth by the church proscribed smoking, drinking, dancing, adultery, and any other form of debauchery.⁹

In Grace's church in Charlotte, North Carolina, before the Civil Rights Movement, the majority of his followers can be described as rejected, disenfranchised, and poor. Feeling like society's outcasts, these people found sanctuary in the United House of Prayer, where church services were designed to lift spirits and heavy hearts.¹⁰ Grace encouraged the freest forms of expression through music. The style of music was traditional gospel, incorporating choirs, congregational singing, hand-clapping, dancing, and other spiritual-emotional motility. Other

⁷ Alland, "'Possession' in a Revivalistic Negro Church," 205.

⁸ William P. Quigley, Janet Mary Riley, "Go South Young Man," review of *The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development* by James C. Cobb, 1993, 1 *Loyola Poverty Law Journal* 119 (1995); "Loyola New Orleans Law Research Paper," accessed October 11, 2014, <http://www.ssrn.com/abstract=2245844>.

⁹ Alland, "'Possession' in a Revivalistic Negro Church," 205.

¹⁰ Sherri Marcia Damon, "The Trombone in the Shout Band of the United House of Prayer for All People," (DMA diss., University of North Carolina Greensboro, 1999), 33.

musical elements included instruments normally heard in dance halls used to accomplish an emotional response in the worship services.¹¹

The power and outpouring of the Holy Spirit was evident in the United House of Prayer in the worshippers' experiences of personal salvation. The ministry of the Holy Spirit was at the core of the church's history and existence. This emphasis can be traced back to the Holiness movement at the turn of the twentieth century, which promoted the teachings of John Wesley (1703–1791), English evangelist and founder of Methodism. Wesley believed in the need for every individual to experience personal conversion, or new birth, which could only happen through the Holy Spirit's power. Wesley believed in the Spirit's power to transform the entire person, but it could happen only if the person was serious about transformation. This redemption served as a pivotal point for all Pentecostals.¹² Wesley believed God actively engaged with his creation, being everywhere at all times; Wesley's belief in personal salvation served as a commonality between many Protestants, including the Protestant African American church.¹³ In the United House of Prayer, the pastor or bishop enforced Wesley's spiritual philosophy through the emotional preaching of God's grace and warnings of imminent doom to those who reject salvation and the teaching.¹⁴

¹¹ Damon, "The Trombone in the Shout Band of the United House of Prayer for All People," 33.

¹² Kevin W. Mannoia and Don Thorsen, *The Holiness Manifesto* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 84.

¹³ Benita Brown, *Myth Performance in the African Diasporas: Ritual, Theatre, and Dance* (United Kingdom: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2013), 96.

¹⁴ Mannoia and Thorsen, *The Holiness Manifesto*, 84.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT IS A SHOUT BAND?

Within the United House of Prayer, the worship music in 1930 was beginning to take on a new genre known as “shout.”¹⁵ Beginning in Newport News, Virginia, and spreading quickly to Charlotte, North Carolina, the emerging shout music was a new religious musical style distinctive to the United House of Prayer. Shout band repertoire is extremely lively music that centers around the use of the trombone.¹⁶ Trombones considered on some accounts able to closely imitate the human voice; this gave rise to the trombone becoming prominent in the United House of Prayer. The first documented use of trombones in the United House of Prayer was in October 1938 in the *New Amsterdam* [New York] *News*.¹⁷

The term “shout” usually describes a particular singing style characteristic of the United House of Prayer and other African American denominations. Music in the United House of Prayer during the 1930s was in its infancy; it was voice-led using few instruments, heavily syncopated, and the accompanying voices were homophonic in texture. The new genre served as a medium that had the power to lift individuals to a higher emotional state as demonstrated on the following page. Through singing and shouting, the United House of Prayer embodied “joy in the house of the Lord.”¹⁸

Service music provided by shout bands, piano, and drums. In the worship services, the music produced by these instruments and instrumentalists moves the congregation into a trance-

¹⁵ Mannoia and Thorsen, *The Holiness Manifesto*, 62.

¹⁶ Dallam, *Daddy Grace*, 62.

¹⁷ Hafar, “The Shout Band Tradition in the Southeastern United States,” 170.

¹⁸ Nick Spitzer, liner notes to *Saints’ Paradise: Trombone Shout Bands from the United House of Prayer*, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, LC9628, 1999, CD.

like state, or a vortex of musical excitement.¹⁹ These musical-emotional states controlled by the pastor, who can start and stop the band with a simple hand signal. This is why shout bands are placed strategically in front of the congregation, where the preacher and band are best able to interact during the service.²⁰

Douglas Yeo, former bass trombonist of the Boston Symphony and currently a trombone professor at Arizona State University, noted this about trombone shout bands:

This is music-making that cannot simply be “pegged” into a single genre... It transcends labels because they understand that in order to communicate a message, all those performing must be of one mind, heart, and spirit. In this regard, Kenny Carr exemplifies one who has that remarkable ability to blend those performing with him on a single instrument. This is not a trombone ensemble; rather it is one voice made of many. Kenny’s trombone weeps, moans, cries, preaches, exalts and exhorts. He transcends all known pedagogy and uses his instrument as a tool that compels one to LISTEN ... Today’s trombonist cannot fail to appreciate the remarkable ability of Kenny Carr and the Tigers to move beyond technique immediately to the heart.²¹

Typically, shout band repertoire is in duple meter, up-tempo, and in a homophonic style. The leader or solo trombonist provides the melody and is accompanied chordally either by the other similar melodic instruments or by row trombones and baritone horn. The bass line for the ensemble is provided by the sousaphone and time by the rhythm section, which is composed of a trap set, crash cymbals, and washboard, or bass drum and snare combined with additional percussion. In the United House of Prayer, this current shout band make-up has been the standard since the 1960s.²²

¹⁹ Walter F. Pitts Jr., *Old Ship of Zion: The Afro-Baptist Ritual in the African Diaspora* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3.

²⁰ Alland, “‘Possession’ in a Revivalistic Negro Church,” 206.

²¹ Douglas Yeo, liner notes to *Make a Joyful Noise: Sound That Shout Band Brass: The Tigers Featuring Kenny Carr*, Kenny Carr, Tigers Records, Nixos 765481922424, 1998, CD.

²² Damon, “The Trombone in the Shout Band of the United House of Prayer for All People,” 46.

Shout band musicians speak of their training and abilities as spiritually derived. The ability to play the trombone is a gift given by God. For this reason, the main requirement within the organization is not formal training but a spiritual commitment.²³ One such member and example of the spiritual commitment represented in this organization is Edward Babb (1944), a senior leader of the McCullough Sons of Thunder of the House of Prayer in Harlem, New York. Babb did not study music formally and cannot read music. Babb states, “This is not boring church music, this is the true high-energy soul music. The sound is undeniably visceral and uplifting, designed to lend comfort and healing with enough volume to be heard in the heavens.”²⁴ Babb played the trombone with a fire-and-brimstone urgency that is usually seen only in preachers within the United House of Prayer. Babb speaks to the congregation using the medium of the trombone, moving up and down the aisles of the church with exuberant praise to his Creator. He extolled members of the congregation to embrace the music that the Creator gives and to let it move them.²⁵

No matter how intense the spiritual experience, the shout band member must nonetheless be able to grasp several basic musical concepts. These concepts are singing a melody back that is heard, playing the melody on the instrument, and internalizing the steady rhythmic pulse. Learning and performing without the aid of written-out music is of paramount importance for each musician. Playing without sheet music is known as “playing by ear.” Additionally, each

²³ Hafar, “The Shout Band Tradition in the Southeastern United States,”164.

²⁴ Susan Levitas, “What Is a Shout Band?,” accessed May 13, 2014, <http://www.art.endow.gov/Community/Features24/Babb3.html>.

²⁵ “United House of Prayer for All People McCollough Sons of Thunder Brass Band,” accessed January 31, 2015, <http://www.harlemonestop.com>.

member may be required to play all of the other instruments and their respective parts within the shout band at an acceptable level.²⁶

In the shout band tradition, rendering a melody and harmonizing to that melody “by ear” during a worship service performance is an essential skill. This skill is necessary, in part, due to the spontaneity of the service. The pastor, visiting preacher, or bishop may sing a song that is not in the shout band’s regular repertoire. Shout band members must listen to the song intently and be able to replicate it after hearing the melody once sung. If the song is not performed after it has been heard once, it is definitely expected after the second time. After the musicians learn the melody, they must quickly learn the harmonies and bass line. This must be accomplished while the singer performs the selection. The song is performed by the shout band after the singer has concluded. The shout band does not accompany the singer. Each shout band member must be a skilled listener and replicator to perform this task.²⁷

There are seven components to a shout band ensemble. The trombone solo, first tenor trombone, second tenor trombone, third tenor trombone, baritone horn, bass horn, and drums; these are the parts being performed.²⁸ In addition, the band has leadership roles that establish accountability among members. These role titles are band leader, trombone soloist, background leaders, run-man, baritone horn, bass horn, and the rhythm. In some United House of Prayer shout bands, other instruments are allowed to participate. However, this is not the norm.²⁹

²⁶ Levitas, “What Is a Shout Band?”

²⁷ Damon, “The Trombone in the Shout Band of the United House of Prayer for All People,”47.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Damon, “The Trombone in the Shout Band of the United House of Prayer for All People,”47.

The band leader must hear, sing, organize, replicate, and teach by rote all the different parts to each member of the band, including the rhythm section. The music is not learned by calling out note names or by reading music from a page, but by watching the band leader's slide motion and listening as he performs the melody and harmony for all the various parts. The band leader must also reinforce the need for the rhythm section to keep a steady pulse in rehearsals and worship services, especially when the congregation is moved to religious fervor. In addition, the band leader must maintain order by ensuring that rhythmic embellishments are played in time to stay with the emotional state of the worship service.³⁰

The band leader must formulate, organize, and establish a consistent model for keeping all melodies and songs in a structured system in order to teach the members of the ensemble. This is usually accomplished by recording the melodies on a recording device. Edward Babb, the band leader of the Sons of Thunder, commented that he "imagines" most of the music the band plays. He hums these melodies into a tape recorder and then composes a mental arrangement for each instrument. The arrangements are taught to the group at the shout band's weekly rehearsal at the church, generally on a designated weeknight.³¹

The band leader also teaches section leaders. Section leaders designate members whose purpose is to keep order and reinforce the direction of the band leader. In many cases, section leaders teach other members their parts. If any band members are late for rehearsal, the section leader is responsible for ensuring the training as well.³²

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Damon, "The Trombone in the Shout Band of the United House of Prayer for All People," 48.

The band leader or a background leader within the ensemble plays the main melody and call-and-response solos. The background chorus of the shout covered by the other players in the ensemble. The first, second, and third tenor trombones are usually the fundamental triad. Although for a richer harmony, a sixth, seventh, and ninth can be included. Emerging from the background chords of the shout band is a counter-background chorus known as “back-timing,” led by the run-man.³³ The run-man improvises a counter-spontaneous rhythmic line to the first, second, and third tenor line in a call-and-response style. The second and third tenor lines include the baritone horn. The run-man usually recruits one or two players from within the ensemble to play with him. He disseminates the counter-background line by singing the line to the recruited member. The new counter-melody performed in prime unison or triadic harmony. The run-man’s job supports the leadership from within the ensemble. While the leader performs and directs from the front of the band, the run-man maintains order behind the trombone soloist.³⁴

The baritone horn is the lowest of the tenor voices in the ensemble. It usually performs the fundamental notes of the chord along with the third tenor trombones. However, the role of the baritone horn can vary within the ensemble. For instance, the baritone may play solos or in an improvised call-and-response style; in some situations, the baritone may be allowed to perform the bass horn line in the absence of a bass horn, also called a sousaphone.³⁵

The bass horn is the fundamental component of a shout band. The sousaphone is the only instrument allowed to play the bass line within the ensemble. Only in the absence of a bass horn is a baritone allowed to perform the bass line. It is common practice that the tuba and bass

³³ Hafar, “The Shout Band Tradition in the Southeastern United States,” 164.

³⁴ Damon, “The Trombone in the Shout Band of the United House of Prayer for All People,” 49.

³⁵ Ibid.

trombone not be permitted to substitute for the bass horn.³⁶ A member of one shout band commented on the bass trombone, “the bass trombone is just like a baritone. They play low, but they do not play as low as a bass horn.”³⁷

Rhythm sections vary from one United House of Prayer shout band to another. Members of the rhythm section could be as few as one but as many as four. The drummer is considered the nucleus of the band. In addition to the drummer, the band may include a crash cymbal player, bass drummer, or tambourine player. The drummer’s job is to keep a clear and precise tempo while playing the correct rhythm. However, the focus is not on the drummer. The drummer must watch and yield to the band leader for all signals. The leader controls all signals, including tempo modifications; if the group needs to play faster or slower than the current tempo, the leader will signal the drummer to make the adjustment. He achieves this through eye contact or a specific movement from his trombone. He uses the same type of signaling to change the style or stop the music altogether. The drummer must move quickly to assist the ensemble in the transition, since these signals can come quickly.³⁸

The shout band leader usually stands in front of the band so he can be easily seen and heard over the ensemble. He typically uses the upper register of the trombone. He generally plays between the range of c^1 - d^2 and many times exceeds that during a performance. In contrast, “row” players play mainly in the bass staff.³⁹

³⁶ Damon, “The Trombone in the Shout Band of the United House of Prayer for All People,” 50.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 51.

³⁹ Hafar, “The Shout Band Tradition in the Southeastern United States,” 170.

Shout bands form a semi-circle around the band leader, who stands in front of the rhythm section. The bass horn sits or stands in the back of the ensemble. This allows the ensemble to hear the bass clearly and enables any members who are not familiar with a particular song to watch the band leader's slide positions and harmonize accordingly. The baritone positioned in the middle of the trombones. If there are additional instruments, they are positioned according to the part they play.

An essential component to the shout band performance observed in the first section of most songs. Section one thought of as a recitative, an amalgamation of the melody and its development during performance in front of a live audience. The soloist plays a slow, relaxed improvised phrase using elements of the melody, or an improvised selection in the same key of the song without using melody identifiers in the up-tempo duple song following the recitative. In the recitative, the soloist plays an improvised theme that serves as the call in the call-and-response. The response comes from the background tenors, who answer the call with the fundamental chords. This complementary merger that occurs between the soloist and ensemble allows the call-and-response to progress without sounding cumbersome.⁴⁰

The recitative seen in the poem titled "Listen, Lord—A Prayer" by African American poet James Weldon Johnson (1871–1938). In reading this poem of a worshipper addressing God in prayer in old-time black preacher style, one can see where the call-and-response pattern emerges. We see the pattern distinctively as the solo trombone plays the opening recitative during the speaker's intoned prayer. The preacher begins the call, which is followed by the response of the congregation shouting "Amen!" and "Hallelujah!" often accompanied by soft undertone singing by the congregation on the fundamental pitch. The preacher's physical

⁴⁰ Damon, "The Trombone in the Shout Band of the United House of Prayer for All People," 70.

charisma, antics, change in time, pauses for dramatic effect, and change in vocal tone and expression create an emotional atmosphere conducive for worshipping.⁴¹

In the worship services, the United House of Prayer's shout band provides the instrumental tapestry in the worship setting. While the shout band in the worship setting can be traced back to the early 1940s, three precursors predated the modern shout band and paved the way for the trombone to become the standard instrument used in the worship service in the United House of Prayer: tambourine bands, string bands, and mixed wind bands.

The tambourine band was the first type of group to form. This ensemble used a tambourine, which is a percussion instrument held in one hand and struck by the other. Metal rings fastened to the outer circle produced a secondary sound once the musician struck or shook the tambourine. The rings on the tambourine reinforced time. The tambourine bands accompanied the voices that sang the melody and did not overpower the singers.

Soon after, when tambourine bands joined by guitars, washboards, triangles, and other percussion instruments, they were transformed into string bands. As more instruments eventually became available to the church, mixed wind bands began to form. The mixed wind bands used the entire gamut of Western musical instruments for the worship service. However, the mixed wind band differed from its predecessor in that it could not accompany voices without overpowering them, which is also true of today's standard shout bands.⁴²

The early mixed wind bands were considerably different from their successors. First, the instrumentation varied depending on the instruments available at any given United House of Prayer church. An ensemble could consist of trombone, saxophone, trumpet, and percussion, or

⁴¹ James Weldon Johnson, *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* (New York: Viking Press, 1927), 10.

⁴² Damon, "The Trombone in the Shout Band of the United House of Prayer for All People," 34.

any variation or combination. The second difference was the repertoire. In the early United House of Prayer's church services, the age range of the singers participating in the instrumental music-making was between forty and eighty. A limited repertoire of songs passed from one generation to the next. Due to change in style and instrumentation within the context of an oral tradition, many pieces from the canon of the first United House of Prayer were lost. The final difference is the usage of the instruments within the worship services. In the early church, instruments were used with voices, which meant they performed in a quartet or small ensemble setting to play the unprinted music and support the voices. However, in some cases where there was no singing, the instruments were considered a medium for the worshippers. This gave rise to the mixed wind band and, ultimately, the modern shout band.⁴³

Two key figures were central to overhauling the instrumental music tradition in United House of Prayer: George Holland (1925–1993) and Robert Washington (1914–1997). George Holland credited with bringing the trombone to the fore with an unmatched trombone-playing style, while Robert Washington was the first to use the bass horn or sousaphone in the United House of Prayer worship service. These important artists performed together in the shout band in Newport News, Virginia. Holland was the first trombonist to begin playing in a style that resembled a preacher's style more than the typical trombone-playing style. Robert Washington recalls,

He [Holland] was able to create new tones, not so much in the positions as much as on his embouchure. In other words, he could play notes between the positions just by the way he used his embouchure, lips, in other words. In addition, thus he created a new kind of [playing]. I mean, you could not write George's music on a scale...because if you tried to do it in the positions, you'd miss some of the tonality. So it was positions plus lips that created the sound.⁴⁴

⁴³ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁴ Damon, "The Trombone in the Shout Band of the United House of Prayer for All People," 36.

The precursor to Holland's sound first heard during the Pentecostal revival of 1906 on Azusa Street in Los Angeles, California. The Pentecostal worship services brought highly charged jazzed-up sounds, along with sermons by charismatic preachers. The United House of Prayer shout bands regarded as a charismatic trombone ensemble featuring a type of enthusiastic New Orleans jazz style. Several commonalities exist between shout bands and Pentecostalism. Both developed in cities, featured racial mixing, involved an emphasis on the ministry of the Holy Spirit, challenged established musical styles, and remained slightly outside cultural mainstreams. Like Pentecostalism, the shout band's sound stands as a powerful symbol of African American spiritual traditions. The shout band sound is in part a direct result of combining the influences of Pentecostal revivalism with African American culture.⁴⁵

In the African American musical context, two unique elements in shout band music are call-and-response and implication and anticipation. In call-and-response, a two measure "call" is played by the shout band soloist and answered by a two-measure instrumental "response" from the rest of the shout band.⁴⁶ The call-and-response can occur trombone soloist to trombone soloist, trombone soloist to shout band, and section to section within the shout band. Another type of signifier happens in gospel music when the leader begins a new phrase while the other musicians in the ensemble are finishing an old phrase. This is known as implication and anticipation. The implication is achieved when the soloist is ready to start a new phrase. Both the audience and participants understand that the leader is ahead of the rest of the ensemble in the song being performed. The soloist manipulates the music by augmenting the rhythm, melody, or both in his improvised line, which allows the rest of the musicians to catch up with him. In this

⁴⁵ David W. Stowe, "Both American and Global: Jazz and World Religions in the United States," *Religion Compass* 4, no. 5 (May 2010): 316, accessed October 10, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2009.00212.x>.

⁴⁶ William Ferris, *Blues from the Delta* (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 2010), 53.

way, the soloist claims his place as leader and through signaling decides the direction the ensemble will take. Therefore, the shout band leader uses implication and anticipation as a communication tool to transition or repeat the present melody. These two musical elements create a shared interactive experience between the shout band and congregation.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Samuel A. Floyd Jr., "Ring Shout! Literary Studies, Historical Studies, and Black Music Inquiry," *Black Music Research Journal* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 56.

CHAPTER 4

THE PREACHER'S ESSENTIAL ROLE IN AFRICAN AMERICAN WORSHIP

The development of a persuasive speaker, singer, and instrumentalist is imperative in the African American community as well as other communities. The movements from spoken word to song are equivalent to those from preaching to rapping. The commonality contained in the rhythmic pulse, and the chanting of a discourse, the goal of which is to educate and move the listener to action.⁴⁸ The movements referred to can be found in the religious atmosphere in the liturgical services that use symphonic melding of speech, songs, body percussion, dance, as well as sermons.⁴⁹

The preacher in the United House of Prayer, being a persuasive speaker, usually begins his sermon with a joke or anecdote, but it quickly could escalate to a fire-and-brimstone message. In addition, the speaker can come to a sudden halt only to erupt into a loud “yeah” at the top of his range. Moving from one dynamic to its polar opposite happens without warning. The skilled preacher understands the importance of the dynamics he employs. The usage of persuasive speech tools allows him the ability to move people with influential inflections. Thus, the persuasive speaker is central to the African American religious and secular speeches.⁵⁰

Many African American preachers begin their sermons with a story from the Bible or from their own life. These stories from the preacher usually become a call-and-response between the preacher and congregation. These messages are full of phrases or riffs that are typical of the antics employed by a preacher and intended to elicit a response from the congregants. Some of

⁴⁸ Mary Arnold Twining, “I’m Going to Sing and ‘Shout’ While I Have the Chance: Music, Movement, and Dance on the Sea Islands,” *Black Music Research Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 3, accessed September 20, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/779319>.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Twining, “I’m Going to Sing and ‘Shout’ While I Have the Chance,” 3.

these riffs are “keep on keeping on,” “keep on fighting the good fight,” or “Jesus is on the main line, tell him what you want.”⁵¹

As the preacher interacts with the congregation, he can gauge his approval by the congregation’s emotional and spiritual outpouring. Vocal responses of “Amen,” “preach, preacher,” and “well, well, well” in songlike fashion ascend through a minor pentatonic scale, with each “well” louder than the one preceding it and upon the last “well,” a descending minor pentatonic improvised melisma. Similar to some African cultures, when a speaker or performer engages in skillful and entertaining storytelling of expected information, he can collect monies from the patron he entertains. The expectancy of storytelling behavior as seen in the African American church’s culture.⁵²

African American religious culture can in part be thought of as an oral culture. Oral cultures tend to share the idea of audience, which plays a significant role in all performances. One of those components of audience participation is approval or disapproval of the preacher. The approval or disapproval can be expressed in various ways, based partially on the following criteria: tempo, pitch, elaboration, exaggerations, and the relevance of metaphors to the audience. The better the preacher can eliminate the line between himself and the audience, the more the audience approves of his delivery of information.⁵³

In the African American church, certain aspects of the West African heritage have entered into its religious practices. Two of these elements are call-and-response and ritual dancing. Oral culture is the key link between the African American church and West African

⁵¹ Twining, “I’m Going to Sing and ‘Shout’ While I Have the Chance,” 4.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Cheryl Wharry, “Amen and Hallelujah Preaching: Discourse Functions in African American Sermons,” *Language in Society* 32, no. 2 (April 2003): 204.

culture.⁵⁴ In the African American church, the idea of expressing a sermon orally holds greater weight than the written word or sermon. In order for the sermon to be accepted in the traditional African American church, it must have, at the very least, the appearance of not being finished beforehand. A sermon must be constructed by preacher and congregation together to promote unity.⁵⁵

The art of preaching is an enduring and prominent event in the African American church, and call-and-response is the medium that solidifies the preacher's relationship to his congregation. This call binds the preacher to his congregants. When the preacher is preaching, the response is critical; it strengthens the bond, and without responses such as e.g., "Amen," "Yes, sir," "you sho' 'nuff preachin'" to signal the approval of the congregation, the preacher may feel a sense of separation.⁵⁶

Sometimes, this sense of separation can be caused by the preacher. The preacher can bring a sense of separation in a number of ways. The preacher might speak over the audience's head, bore the congregants, or state something that goes contrary to the congregation's belief. In any of these scenarios, the preacher's words will be followed by silence from the congregation. In the African American church, this silence is not viewed as a positive response; it usually indicates the opposite. If the call-and-response breaks down, unity between preacher and congregation will not be achieved.⁵⁷

In most African American churches, the audience's responses help move the formation of spontaneous sermons; it is a combined effort of preacher and congregation. Two main

⁵⁴ Wharry, "Amen and Hallelujah Preaching," 204.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

components are crucial to preaching in the African American church. The first is that the gospel must be presented in the language and culture of the people; and secondly, the gospel must speak to the people and their needs, in much the same way as Negro spirituals do.⁵⁸

The structure of African American sermons can be broken down into five sections. The preacher begins by telling the congregation how God provided his sermon. Second, the preacher identifies a theme, followed by a Bible quotation. Third, the preacher interprets the Scripture. Next, the sermon comprises a secular-versus-sacred conflict and moves between the concrete and abstract. The conclusion of the sermon is signaled through a physical response from the congregants, e.g. holy dance, crying, screaming, or any other manifestations. By leaving the sermon open ended, the preacher gives the congregation the opportunity to respond to the sermon.⁵⁹

This perceived connection between preacher and congregation is most telling in confirmation within the sermons, the same heightened style that emerges at the point of “elevation,” when preachers are said to begin receiving thoughts and words from on high. The sermon style moves from conversational to poetic. The next perceived elevation in the sermon takes place when the word patterns become short and cadence quickly. Immediately the phrases assume a distinctly melodic lilt, taking on tonal contours that lend themselves to a chant-like character. In the sermon, these features emerge distinctly when the preacher’s momentum is at its peak and the Spirit is said to take greater control of the preacher’s voice. At this same time, the Spirit often makes himself known in a variety of other ways: preachers crying out, deacons weeping, and mothers leaping into the “holy dance.” Once again, persuasive speech style and

⁵⁸ Wharry, “Amen and Hallelujah Preaching,” 205.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 206.

signifiers of the Spirit concur. The preacher and the congregation must first be prepared physically and spiritually for the “Spirit to show up” and make his presence known. This usually happens after the prayer and Scripture reading.⁶⁰

One of the most important aspects of African American preaching is cultural understanding and relevance to a particular congregation. The preacher must speak to the cultural background of his audience from various points of view, e.g., idiom, imagery, style, and worldview. Language is the most obvious marker of culture. Even if two groups of people speak the same language, a subset of cultural differences still exists. The hymn “Amazing Grace” demonstrates this point. The timing and body language are characteristic of African American culture. As Henry Mitchell explains, the third stanza in “Amazing Grace” has a specific meaning from the perspective of shared black experience: “through many dangers, toils and snares . . .”⁶¹

African American preaching has many parallels with shout band performance. Both deal with the effectiveness of communication, the proof of this connection is seen in every African American church that employs these same ideas in its church services. Storytelling is an essential component in African American sermons and shout-band playing. In *God’s Trombones*, Johnson points to the direct parallel between two African American performance practices. African American preaching is a history of the African American pulpit, just as shout bands are a history of the United House of Prayer trombone ensemble.⁶²

The Roman Catholics, Puritans, and Quakers were among the first to evangelize the African communities. However, the Methodists and Baptists introduced a worship style more

⁶⁰ Wharry, “Amen and Hallelujah Preaching,” 207.

⁶¹ Henry Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 5.

⁶² Johnson, *God’s Trombones*, 2.

conducive to the African American church. Baptist and Methodist worship styles were better suited to the African American community because they had little place for liturgy. Baptist and Methodist styles also focused on apostolic succession and the education of the clergy. Methodist and Baptist archives contain some of the first records of African American preachers coming from the latter two denominations.⁶³

In the Colonial African American church, preaching was one of the most respected endeavors, especially in the South. In some cases, this led directly to black preachers preaching to white congregations. However, this was merely due to a need for functionality and in many instances black preachers were severely restricted in terms of sermon content. Black preachers were used largely when white preachers were unavailable for white congregations. One of the most noted preachers during this time was Reverend Harry Hoosier, better known as Black Harry, considered one of the greatest black preachers during the American Revolutionary Period. He preached from the same platform as the founders of the Methodist church. Being a preacher during the Colonial period was considered a limited freedom for blacks.⁶⁴

Black preachers, according to Johnson,

[K]new the secret of oratory, that at bottom it is a progression of rhythmic words more than anything else. Indeed, I have witnessed congregations moved to ecstasy by the rhythmic intoning of sheer incoherencies. He was a master of all the modes of eloquence. He often possessed a voice that was a marvelous instrument, a voice he could modulate from a sepulchral whisper to a crashing thunder clap. His discourse was kept at a high pitch of fervency, but occasionally he dropped into colloquialisms and, less often, into humor. He preached a personal and anthropomorphic God, a sure-enough heaven, and a red-hot hell. His imagination was bold and unfettered. He had the power to sweep his hearers before him; and so himself was often swept away. At such times, his language was not prose but poetry.⁶⁵

⁶³ Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 99.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁶⁵ Johnson, *God's Trombones*, 5.

James Weldon Johnson, in 1927 during the height of the Harlem Renaissance (1918–1937), published a book of poetry titled *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Poems in Verse*. This book included sermons by African American preachers delivered during church services. These poems sought to show the oratorical virtuosity of the African American clergymen and increase the respect granted to them.⁶⁶

In *God's Trombones*, Johnson explained that he could not capture the old-time African American preacher's performance and message in all of their complexity, subtlety, and effectiveness. He notes that poetry is too limited a medium to capture the vigor of the church service. Poetry misses all the fervor of the congregation, all the "Amens," "Hallelujahs," and the undertone singing performed to soft accompaniment. Poetry misses the essential element of the preacher's personality, including the preacher's physical magnetism, gestures, and gesticulations, changes in tempo, pauses for effect, and all his tones of voice.⁶⁷ The seven sermons Johnson set to poetry were ones he recalled hearing in his childhood. The stunning performances so moved him that he wrote the first sermon-poem, "Creation." Johnson also stated that he was emotionally moved by the message of the preacher while attending a church service during his adulthood. What was notable about his emotional response was the fact that he was an agnostic. Johnson points to his role as a listener, which then fed his position as writer who identified oral culture as an inspiration and a source for literature.⁶⁸

Johnson cites several African American preachers he came to admire in his historical studies of the development of the African American church in America. Johnson believed this

⁶⁶ Anne Carroll, "Art, Literature, and the Harlem Renaissance: The Messages of God's Trombones," *College Literature* 29, no. 3, (Summer 2002): 59.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

made him knowledgeable about preachers, and gave more validity to his claim that preachers brought about the establishment of independent places to worship. These preachers were thought to be intelligent, highly skilled orators and even actors able to move their listeners.⁶⁹

Johnson emphasized that a preacher preached and warmed the words he uttered, speaking in a language that was different from the traditional dialect: a fusion of Negro idioms and Bible English. When Johnson wrote *God's Trombones*, he had to use a creative way of punctuating. Johnson used dashes to indicate and capture the preacher's use of tempo. The dashes indicated speeding up, slowing down, or dramatic pausing. Consider "Listen, Lord—A Prayer":

In the first stanza, "Knee-bowed and body-bent" performance practice could indicate slight slowing down between the words, which would have been filled in by the congregation. Johnson also wrote of the use of sound effects during a performance. The expulsion of breath that would have occurred at the dashes Johnson called a "decided syncopation of speech." This pause would have been filled in by hand claps from the congregation.⁷⁰

Lord--this morning--
Bow our hearts beneath our knees

In the second stanza,

Lord, have mercy on proud and dying sinners--
Sinners hanging over the mouth of hell,
Who seem to love their distance well.
Lord--ride by this morning--
Mount your milk-white horse,

In the fifth stanza,

And now, O Lord--
When I've done drunk my last cup of sorrow--
When I've been called everything but a child of God--
When I'm done traveling up the rough side of the mountain--

⁶⁹ Carroll, "Art, Literature, and the Harlem Renaissance," 63.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

O--Mary's baby-

When addressing sinners, his state of being, or the Lord, the dashes exist for interjection for the congregation to interact with the prayer. In the fifth stanza, this is very evident pointing to himself and also to Jesus at the same time. The last cup of sorrow, being called everything but a child of God, and traveling up the rough side of the mountain, all point to the biblical passage taken from Matthew 27:32-42.⁷¹

Johnson also went on to say: “The old-time Negro preacher has not yet been given the niche in which he properly belongs. He has been portrayed only as a semi-comic figure.⁷² He gives urgency to his project by explaining that the old-time Negro preacher was a rapidly passing phenomenon. The skills and characteristics of this national treasure would have been lost had a writer like Johnson not captured his persona on paper.⁷³

Under the leadership of the preacher, the shout band facilitates a spiritual rhythmic dance known as a ring shout. In this sense, shout can also be understood as physical movement. In a heightened emotional state, the worshippers in the United House of Prayer's congregation will dance, stomp, run, or proclaim a loud exhortation. For this reason, shout understood as movement describes a rhythmic holy dance seen primarily in the United House of Prayer and other African American church services.⁷⁴

Ring shouts are primarily defined as a fusion of counterclockwise dancelike movements, call-and-response singing, and percussion created by hand clapping and the beating of a drum-

⁷¹ Johnson, *God's Trombones*, 11.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (United States: Duke University Press, 2003), 365.

like rhythm by a stick on a wooden floor; this practice can easily be seen as African at its roots. Jonathan David comments that ring shouts are a tradition of singing and praying bands.⁷⁵ However, the tradition has morphed from its original movements and spiritual purpose as stated by James Weldon Johnson that ring shouts were neither truly spiritual nor religious. He considered them to be semi-barbaric, nothing more than remnants of primitive African dances. At best, ring shouts can be thought of as quasi-religious.⁷⁶ These rings shouts were constantly under scrutiny from within and outside the church to conform to socially acceptable norms. Ring shouts were used emotionally to arouse members of the United House of Prayer congregation. Some of these norms center around offerings or gifts to the pastor or bishop.⁷⁷

One example of a morphed ring shout found in the offertory ritual of Daddy Grace and William McCullough sitting on their elevated thrones. The congregation formed a large circle and danced to the accompaniment of a shout band, members shuffled forward swaying from side to side and dropped their offering in collection plates at the front. As a form of offertory musical chairs, people who ran out of money sat down while others continued.⁷⁸

There are also movements that happen when the shout band is performing. These choreographed movements are either left-to-right motion or back and forth. Left-to-right motion is like the movements in an African American gospel choir while the back-and-forth motion is accomplished by placing one foot in front of the body for better support of the body and instrument. This action produces a rocking sound. These motions used during rhythmic songs

⁷⁵ Jonathan Comly David, "On One Accord: Community, Musicality, and Spirit among the Singing and Praying Bands of Tidewater Maryland and Delaware," (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1994), 52.

⁷⁶ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 354.

⁷⁷ Brown, *Myth Performance in the African Diasporas*, 96.

⁷⁸ Brown, *Myth Performance in the African Diasporas*, 96.

that are not very fast. Fast velocity and very solemn songs are usually performed motionlessly.⁷⁹ Shout bands use a biblical text to support the use of the ensemble within the liturgical service. They are a central part of the church doctrine. Levitas states, “an emphasis on the direct, physical experience of the spirit.” Shout bands are a cornerstone of the United House of Prayer.⁸⁰

Ring shouts are spiritual rhythmic “holy dances” in which worshippers dance around in a circle. Participants gathered around in a circle and began walking around in a shuffle with their feet in proximity to the floor or ground. While these ring shouts are taking place, the participants are “jerking,” and “hitching” mainly in the shoulders. Usually, these rings shouts were accompanied by a spiritual song led by singers. Hand-clapping or knee-slapping often accompanied these songs. The “thud” on the floor was the underlying continuous rhythm. In addition to the dancing that was taking place, the singing would inject various elisions, blue-notes, and call-and-response devices with the feet hitting the ground serving as accompaniment for the entire event. There are several variations of ring shouts. However, several characteristics are common to all. Ring shouts fuse music and dance into one activity. The tradition is central to the cultural convergence of African traditions finding their expression in an American context.⁸¹

In New Orleans, African American worshippers used the ring shout at funerals in a way that combined characteristics of the song, dance, and preaching, in part to communicate with their ancestors. The counterclockwise movement directly derived from West African cultural traditions.⁸² Sterling Stuckey writes,

⁷⁹ Damon, “The Trombone in the Shout Band of the United House of Prayer for All People,” 55.

⁸⁰ Susan Levitas, “Who Started Shout? ‘Daddy Grace’ and The United House of Prayer for All People,” accessed September 27, 2014, <http://arts.endow.gov/Community/Features24/Babb5.html>.

⁸¹ Floyd, “Ring Shout!,” 50.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 51.

The Negro spiritual is central to the ring and foundational to all subsequent Afro-American music-making, he noticed in descriptions of the shout that, in the ring, musical practices from throughout black culture converged in the spiritual. These included elements of the call, cries, and hollers; call-and-response devices; additive rhythms and polyrhythms; heterophony, pendular thirds, blue notes, bent notes, and elisions; hums, moans, grunts, vocables, and other rhythmic-oral declamations, interjections, and punctuations; off-beat melodic phrasings and parallel intervals and chords; constant repetition of rhythmic and melodic figures and phrases (from riffs and songs would be derived); timbral distortions of various kinds; musical individuality within collectivity; game-rivalry; hand-clapping, foot-patting, and approximations thereof; and the metronomic foundational pulse that underlines all Afro-American music. Consequently, since all of the defining elements can be found in the ring shout.⁸³

⁸³ Ibid., 52.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

The shout band and the African American preacher are both an integral part of the worship service in the United House of Prayer. The shout band provides the musical tapestry for the preacher to preach to the congregants. The tapestry weaves screaming, shouting, call-and-response, and an invitation for the Spirit to be a part of the service. The preacher, who hears the prophetic word from God, responds in obedience to God by imparting the divine word to the congregation. The minister moves from praying over the congregation through all the phases of preaching. Once the “close” is reached by the messenger, the shout band is brought back to assist.

During the close, the congregation is invited to respond to the message from God’s prophet. The response by the congregation can take on several forms. It can be as calm as raising hands in the air in total submission to God or as lively as ecstatic running and screaming or speaking in tongues. Speaking in tongues is described as the holy language given by the Holy Spirit as evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4). Music provided by the shout band during this portion of the service is exciting and can last for hours. When the Spirit is moving over the congregation, time is not a factor in the service. This communal close observed in the Western African ring shouts.

The ring shout, which unites Western African religious culture with African American spiritual culture, is one of the earliest sacred practices combining physical movement with song. This communal devout practice allows for direct communication to God. The corporate link between each participant adheres to the Pentecostal doctrine in several ways. There is no set time schedule. The Spirit is allowed to move over the worshippers for an indeterminate length of time.

Next, the physical movement (holy dance or shouting) is an important part of the Pentecostal service. Finally, rhythm is the core of the ring shout. Participants use their bodies as percussion, whether by stomping the ground or hand-clapping. They are usually accompanied by a band, which allows a greater freedom in worship.⁸⁴

Another unifying link between the shout band and African American preachers is that both are an oral tradition. The messages given by the preacher are not written out completely requiring certain aspects of the message to be improvised. In many cases the pastor begins a message down one path and quickly changes to a new focus. In some cases, this change is communicated to the congregation. The congregation gives the minister permission to do this by the use of a spoken word or phrase. Usually the spoken permission word or phrase is “amen.” Or “let Him use you.” This response is crucial in unifying the speaker to the participants.

In the shout band tradition, the composition is not completely composed when it is performed. The melody or focus has been worked out in advance, but there is always a chance for the leader to improvise small embellishments as needed around the melody. However, in the back-timing segment of the composition the band leader, section leader, run-man, and bass-horn are given freedom to improvise in a call-and-response style. The rest of the section maintains order by repeating the same line stated at the beginning of the back-timing section. Order is restored by a signal from the band leader of the group.

The same restoring of order is distinctly observed by the preacher. When the worshippers are praising God, the responsibility falls to the preacher to signal the band to slow down the music to ease the enthusiastic praise. The worshippers usually stop dancing and slowly begin to sing with the shout band’s newer and calmer accompaniment. Sometimes the attempt to slow the

⁸⁴ Kip Lornell, *Exploring American Folk Music: Ethnic, Grassroots, and Regional Traditions in the United States* (Mississippi: The University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 150.

band may take several times because the Spirit is said to be moving strongly over the worshippers. The move over the worshippers is not anything written into the performance; it transpires spontaneously.

In the United House of Prayer, music is generally viewed as a gift given by God. This underlying theme is present in the shout band. For this reason, the United House of Prayer shout bands have the same sound and the same teaching concepts, in learning exclusively by the rote method. The band leader composes the songs, he knows each part, either he records it or has a recording of it; he realizes the harmony and understands the structure of the tune. He is actively involved in teaching the rest of the group. This is achieved by personally showing each player one by one, physically and audibly, what notes to play. First, he gives a performance demonstration of the melody and harmony using the rote method, and next he shows each member what positions to play according to their assigned part. The result is a synthesis of the physical, audible, and spiritual that works to the success of the ensemble.⁸⁵

The United House of Prayer shout band and preacher share the same antics which have their root in the Western African religious practices beginning with the prayer. Like the recitative, the prayer begins with an intoning that is a crescendo and diminuendo of the voice's intensity. The voice rises and falls between ordinary speech and wild yelling and many times a subito change from the highest vocal point to nothing but a soft-spoken monotone voice or no sound at all.⁸⁶ It was the prayer that directly prepared the way for the sermon to take place. The call-and-response is an essential comparison point not just between the African American

⁸⁵ Damon, "The Trombone in the Shout Band of the United House of Prayer for All People," 51.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

preacher and congregation but also between the trombone and shout band, which share a spiritual experience in African American culture.

Worshipping is an integral part of the Pentecostal experience, and that unique experience involves music. In the United House of Prayer, the worshippers are encouraged to make an exuberant noise to the Lord. In this denomination along with the voice came the introduction of the trombone into the worship service, this was not common in the early twentieth century. The introduction of the trombone, which imitated the preacher in the liturgical service, is said to have led to the spread and popularity of the United House of Prayer and the Pentecostal movement in general.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Timothy Dodge, *The School of Arizona Dranes: Gospel Music Pioneer* (United Kingdom, Lexington Books, 2013), 69.

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