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African and African-Influenced Sacred Music

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Introduction

This bibliography is intended to introduce readers to resources on the musical traditions of African religious expression in Africa and throughout the diaspora, defined in this case as North and South America and the Caribbean. It is intended as part of a celebration of the publication of John S. Mbiti's groundbreaking book, *African Religions and Philosophy*. In his book, Mbiti seldom mentions specific musical practices, commenting only that "[m]usic, singing and dancing reach deep into the innermost parts of African peoples, and many things come to the surface under musical inspiration which otherwise may not be readily revealed."¹ This bibliography attempts to cover the efforts of individuals who have answered Mbiti's unspoken challenge to interpret music in a religious context, using historical, ethnomusicological, or theological methodologies. It includes everything from ethnographic studies of single groups, churches, or denominations, to cross-diaspora comparative studies.

In Africa, spirituality, music, and dance are so closely interrelated that it is sometimes difficult to identify studies that focus on traditional African music in a purely religious context. Most discussions of music are found in anthropological studies of particular peoples or groups, which are too numerous to note in this bibliography. Instead, an effort has been made to single out writings that deal specifically with religious music, in Africa and throughout the diaspora. The bibliography is organized geographically by region, but the first section consists of general reference books that the reader can consult to find discussions of specific countries and topics, or citations to more resources. For example, the two discographies cited cover recordings of nearly a century of African American religious music. Some venerable yet classic reference books are included so that it is possible to study the evolution of the scholarship on African diasporic religious music.

The bibliography does include articles, because in some cases they provide either the most concise or the only description of music in a particular religious context. The books included are most often ethnomusicological studies of particular religious groups or churches, or collections of essays. Biographies and biographical studies have been excluded as a category, although this means that some books considered to be classics are not included. Two in particular should be mentioned: Michael W. Harris's *The Rise of Gospel Blues: The Music of Thomas Andrew Dorsey in the Urban Church* and *We'll Understand It Better By and By: Pioneering African American Gospel Composers* edited by Bernice Johnson Reagon.² Beyond these classics, there are simply too many biographies, especially in American gospel music, to include them all. Two strictly musical studies are included in the Latin and Caribbean section because they speak directly to the importance of musical practice, especially drumming, in two African-derived religions — Vodou and Santeria. Finally, a few comparative studies that attempt to make connections between religious

¹ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Oxford ; Portsmouth, N.H. : Heinemann, 1990), 67.

² For more information, see Michael W. Harris, *The Rise of Gospel Blues: The Music of Thomas Andrew Dorsey in the Urban Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) and Bernice Johnson Reagon (editor) *We'll Understand It Better By and By: Pioneering African American Gospel Composers*. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992).

musical practices throughout the diaspora, or that speculate on these connections, have been included at the end.

No effort has been made in the sections on Latin America and the Caribbean and on Africa itself, to isolate the books that deal with Christian traditions. Resources on indigenous African practices (including trance), Latin American and Caribbean syncretic religions, and Jewish and Christian religious practices can be found in one rich mix, with the hope that the reader will be inspired to use these resources—and their bibliographies—to explore further.

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