Contemporary, Traditional American Music Influenced by African Roots, says Music Expert at UD

University of Dayton

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls

Recommended Citation
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls/10229

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marketing and Communications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in News Releases by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu, mschlagen1@udayton.edu.
CONTEMPORARY, TRADITIONAL AMERICAN MUSIC INFLUENCED BY AFRICAN ROOTS, SAYS MUSIC EXPERT AT UD

If asked to name African-influenced genres of music, many Americans would make the mistake of limiting their answers to blues, jazz and soul, said Mark Brill, assistant professor of music and ethnomusicologist at the University of Dayton. In reality, most American music has roots in African rhythms, Brill said.

“Almost every type of American music, especially in the 20th century, has a connection with and been influenced by African music: jazz, blues, Broadway, rock ‘n’ roll, funk, disco, rap and hip-hop; even country western and heavy metal,” Brill said. “Every style in the 20th century has had some representation or was, at some point, even dominated by African-Americans.”

A scholar of American music, Brill teaches courses in the history of American music, African-American sacred music, music of Latin America, American popular song, musics of the world, jazz and rock ‘n’ roll at UD. Africa’s influence on American and other music through generations and as we know it today began long before the slave trade brought Africans to America, he said.

“African music didn’t first leave the African continent with the slaves, but had been known throughout Europe and Asia — as far away as China — and as long ago as the 10th century B.C. by the Greeks. When the European slave trade began, African music did not go only to the United States but to many lands, where it evolved in a variety of ways and eventually found its way to the U.S.”

Thus the influence of African music on American music was both direct and indirect, Brill said. “On one hand, African rhythms led directly to quintessential American styles such as minstrel, blues and jazz, and to American instruments such as the banjo. On the other hand, African music also went to places like Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica and Brazil, where the music developed into styles such as salsa, mambo, rhumba, reggae and samba that eventually also made their to the U.S.

“African (not to be confused with African-American) music is still going strong, both in its traditional aspects and in its more modern, popular forms. In many respects, African music has come full circle since, after it served as the root for jazz, rock ‘n’ roll and other traditions, those styles in turn have returned to Africa and influenced the development of modern African music there.”

It continues to evolve as modern African musicians, using electric guitars as well as traditional instruments and styles, are in turn touring outside of Africa, representing yet another wave of influence on American and other music, Brill said. “This cross-pollination of styles and influences marks the true maturation of African music and its influence on much of the rest of the world.”

For media interviews, contact Mark Brill at (937) 229-3915 or via e-mail at mark.brill@notes.udayton.edu.