

Gospel Music And Funk Rock - History And Development Drummers Guide

Gospel Music brings the tradition of Blues into the music of the African American Baptist Church. It took the form and name of "Gospel Music" (originally called "Gospel Songs") in the early 20th century through the efforts of a single individual, Thomas A. Dorsey. Born in Villa Rica, Georgia in 1899, Dorsey learned to play piano as a youth in the African American Baptist Church. As an accompanist for such famed Blues singers as Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith, and after seeing Charles A. Tindley perform at the National Baptist Convention, he became inspired to compose church music with a Blues influence. Though these new sounds were initially rejected by the Baptist establishment, Dorsey continued to promote his music. After several years of Dorsey's struggling to find acceptance by the church, other singers and musicians such as Mother Willie Mae Ford and Lucy Campbell also began to promote Gospel Music.

This, along with Dorsey's persistent efforts, finally led to Gospel Music's acceptance. By 1932, Dorsey had established The National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses, an institution which continues to flourish today. By the time of his death in 1993, Dorsey had written over 800 songs, spanning the near century of Gospel Music's existence. Originally sung by large choirs, in the 1930s Gospel Music began to emphasize the solo vocalist. Inspired by Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Gospel singer Clara Ward sang Gospel Music in nightclubs, creating a wider audience; she soon received attention from the recording industry. Her 1950s hit, "Surely God Is Able," is credited as Gospel Music's first million selling record.

By this time, several Gospel singers such as Mahalia Jackson and James Cleveland had emerged as national stars along with such notable Gospel groups as The Caravans and The Soul Stirrers. During the 1950s, Gospel Music and its musicians, along with blues performers, began to create the beginnings of Rhythm & Blues. Composers such as Ray Charles, Little Richard, and Sam Cooke (The Soul Stirrers), and later musicians like Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett (The Violinaires) and Ashford and Simpson (The Followers) all created music with strong Gospel overtones. In the last quarter of the 20th century, Gospel continued to thrive in both the secular and sacred worlds, particularly in large ensembles and choirs within the African American Baptist Church.

Contemporary artists include Sweet Honey in the Rock, The Blind Boys of Alabama, Al Green, Shirley Caesar, Marion Williams, and Yolanda Adams along with Christian pop recording star, Michael W. Smith. As always, time keeping is the most important task for the drummer. Supporting the lyrical message of the vocalist requires a drummer to remain in the background virtually at all times, making simplicity another important component of Gospel drumming. The ones presented here are the most practical choices. Tempos can range anywhere from slow ballads (quarter note = 50 beats per minute) to fast gallops (quarter note = 280 beats per minute).

Though not technically an established style, the term "Funk Rock" describes music that can be classified as Rock incorporating elements from Funk, such as syncopated rhythms and percussive horn lines. Bands and artists such as Earth, Wind and Fire, The Commodores, Michael Jackson, and Sly and the Family Stone could all be included in both the Funk and Rock genres. As opposed to the above Funk styles, Funk Rock usually has fewer ghost notes, a steady back beat, and an emphasis on bass drum displacement (syncopated bass drum, displaced from the standard strikes on 1 & 3). The practical tempo range for Funk Rock is similar to Ghost Note Funk at quarter note = 92-126 beats per minute.

About the Author

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