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From Drum Beats To Beach Music: The Development of Music in South Carolina

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FROM DRUM BEATS TO BEACH MUSIC: THE DEVELOPMENT OF MUSIC IN SOUTH CAROLINA

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation with Honors from the South Carolina Honors College

May 2014

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Table of Contents

Table of contents.................................................................2

Summary...............................................................3

Abstract...............................................................5

Introduction..............................................................6

Native American Music..............................................7

Tribes of South Carolina.............................................11

British Colonization.................................................14

The St. Cecilia Society...............................................18

Slave Spirituals.........................................................22

Gullah Music..............................................................24

Blues and Gospel Music.............................................27

Jazz Music.................................................................28

Beach Music..............................................................31

“Let Honor Be Thy Name”........................................32

Conclusion..............................................................33

Works Cited...............................................................36

Appendix.................................................................37
**Summary:** South Carolina has been home to multiple musical genres that, throughout their history, have played direct roles in the development of a unique cultural identity. Each style of music has had a profound influence on the development of the musical character of the state, whether it is through vocals, instrumentation or general emotional capacity. A direct line can be traced through these connections, beginning with the Native American groups present and undisturbed in the area for thousands of years before the arrival of European explorers. These tribes held spirituality as the highest art form, and vocal traditions became a way to pass down sacred legends from generation to generation. The musicality of the voice was emphasized through rhythmic poetry, and instruments took on a secondary role to accompany an oral and aural religion. With the arrival of European settlers came the arrival of Western musical convention, particularly the idea of Western harmony. Tonal principles of the progression and connection between specific chords put an emphasis on the careful construction of musical ideas, and this new style of sophistication was widely practiced in the communities of early settlers. The influx of Western harmony began to manifest itself in Native American music with the introduction of new instruments, most notably the fiddle. This syncretism between old and new had a distinct hand in the development of the music of Appalachia; one of the most widely appreciated genres of folk music in the United States. As the British began to take firm control in South Carolina, Charleston began to emerge as the cosmopolitan center of the South, as prosperous planters and merchants were able to combine their wealth and power to encourage cultural patronage. This societal mix set Charleston apart from the more provincial Southern capitals, in which the wealthy elite were separated. The planters spent much of their time in Charleston, mingling with the upper echelon of society. The unfavorable climate in South Carolina sent planters from plantations to the city, and Charleston’s powerful upper-class created institutions to assert their artistic sophistication in the years surrounding the Revolutionary War. One of these establishments, the St. Cecilia Society, became the musical jewel of the South. Named for the patron saint of music, this concert series employed both amateur and
professional musicians to perform the works of fashionable European composers, including Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Haydn. The society measured its success on its ability to emulate European models while demonstrating the musical enlightenment of a newly formed nation. William Gilmore Simms, a South Carolina author and member of the society, was a natural choice when selecting the words for a South Carolina Honors College alma mater; a supplement to this project. While Charleston’s elite were attempting to establish social legitimacy, the culture of those that they enslaved was blossoming into one that would influence the some of the most prolific genres of American popular music. African rhythmic qualities combined with Christian principles gave rise to the “negro spiritual,” a style that uses hand-clapping, stomping and call-and-response singing to preserve rhythmic sophistication while lamenting hardships. The spiritual, which can be characterized as one of the first African American genres of music, had a unique history in South Carolina, as the isolated Gullah people of the Lowcountry were able to integrate more African influences into the music. Following emancipation, the economic and social situation for most African Americans was bleak, influencing a musical genre known as the blues. The blues introduced a set chord progression designed for improvisation, leading to the formation of gospel and jazz music. Jazz incorporated complex African rhythms, such as syncopation into the music, and South Carolina was a great incubator for the scene. The Jenkins Orphanage of Charleston trained young boys in the way of this music, and produced one of the most famous touring jazz bands in the United States, also inspiring composers in the Ragtime genre. As the rhythm and blues continued to grow out of the African American tradition, it became increasingly taboo for the white population to listen. White youths in South Carolina that were tempted by the irresistible sounds began to flock to coastal bars and restaurants that secretly specialized in playing R&B. From this, the term “beach music” was born, a genre in which the listeners acted as curators by picking popular artists that they felt embodied “southern soul.” The interaction between each of these genres has given South Carolina a rich musical culture that will be enjoyed for generations to come.
**Abstract:** This thesis examines musical genres present in South Carolina from the time of the Native Americans through 20th century rhythm and blues. Each style of music has combined musical elements over time to create the state’s rich cultural heritage. For thousands of years before the arrival of European explorers, Native American music put a high emphasis on the voice, as the absence of a written language facilitated a strong oral tradition. Free-flowing vocals with rhythmic accompaniment were relied upon to pass down sacred legends of the tribe, stressing vocal musicality as the highest art form. With the arrival of European settlers came the arrival of Western harmonic traditions, and Native American expressionism became overtaken by chordal relationships and careful formal construction. Along with harmonic ideals came new instruments, and their introduction into Native American culture inspired a musical blend that would influence the most prolific styles of American folk music for years to come. As the British established firm control in the colony of Carolina, Charleston began to emerge as the cosmopolitan center of the South, with mixed wealthy elite that supported artistic patronage. One of such establishments was the St. Cecilia Society, a concert series that became a way for a newly formed nation to assert cultural sophistication in the years surrounding the Revolutionary War. While the upper echelon of South Carolina society was attempting to establish musical equality with Europe, the culture of those that they enslaved was blossoming into a combination of African rhythms and Western Christianity. From this mixture, the “negro spiritual” was born; a style which is often credited as being one of the first African American genres of music. Following emancipation, South Carolina slave culture continued to inspire American cultural phenomena, including the music of blues, gospel and jazz. As African American musical influence continued to grow into the rhythm and blues, it became increasingly taboo for whites to listen, and the youth of South Carolina flocked to the coast, becoming curators of a new, aptly named Beach Music genre. Each one of these unique styles has had a direct influence in developing of the rich musical tradition that South Carolina has enjoyed for generations.
The state of South Carolina has a centuries-old, extraordinarily rich musical tradition, aided by generations of individuals who brought their distinct culture to a land that developed into a home. This cultural blend allowed for the growth of many different musical styles and flavors, all interacting with and influencing each other, while evolving into the great South Carolina genres of today. Since the beginning, Native Americans, whose religious rituals and interactions with The Great Spirit impacted their style of rhythmic poetry, laid the groundwork for American music. The tribes native to South Carolina, such as the Cherokee and Chicora, were no different, and their symbolic lyrics with free-flowing vocal sounds mixed with complex instrumental rhythms were a sound unlike anything heard before in the Western tradition. This unique and incredibly striking auditory experience was one that had great influence on the music of later settlers; most notably the Appalachian and Bluegrass genres following the British introduction of the fiddle to this area. The exploration and subsequent colonization of South Carolina not only introduced new inhabitants, but new music, as European settlers brought their knowledge of Western harmony to the New World. Along with that knowledge, instruments, such as the conveniently portable violin and guitar, made landfall with the explorers, and Western music began to flourish in homes of early Spanish, French and more steadfast English settlements. As British control strengthened and the colony of South Carolina was born, wealthy planters and merchants turned the port of Charleston into the premier cosmopolitan center of the South, and music turned from private, home entertainment to a celebrated, public art form. The St. Cecilia society of Charleston, formed in 1766 was one of the most sophisticated concert series in North America for over 50 years, emulating the British musical fashions of the time and introducing the works of prolific composers, such as Bach,
Beethoven and Haydn to South Carolina high society. While high society enjoyed the works of European composers, the culture of those that they enslaved quietly developing into a musical mix of African tradition with Western harmony that would influence some of the most popular styles of music throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, continuing on through present day. Slave spirituals and Gullah music are two of the most important musical styles that developed in South Carolina, and their sound was instrumental in the formation of jazz, ragtime, beach music and rock n’ roll. The mixture of each of these genres, all with distinct forms, in close proximity to each other, created the expansive musical tradition that South Carolina has enjoyed for so long, and will continue to enjoy for generations to come.

Long before Europeans settled in South Carolina, Native Americans were the dominant presence in the area. For thousands of years, specific groups, or tribes, lived off the land, hunting game and fishing, while establishing a vibrant culture without outside influence. Native American cultural aspects centered on the Earth as a spiritual realm, and art was practiced for spiritual purposes. Music played an essential role in Native American culture, especially for worship, which was seen as the highest art form that man could practice. Prayers were even often set to music. Religious rituals were very commonplace in Native American life, and music’s main function was to accompany these ceremonies. Native Americans believed music was given by the spirits to facilitate interactions between heaven and earth, and a strong vocal tradition was passed down from generation to generation. Charlotte Heth emphasizes this point in *The Concise Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, stating the importance of these traditions, and the reverence with which the tribes, still to this day, treat the music of old: “In some communities, musicians do not compose new pieces because of the revered origins of
age old songs. The Cherokee provide an example. Because music has a supernatural origin, the Cherokee do not formally compose songs, preferring to express their creativity through improvisation” (p. 315). For this reason, music was considered sacred, and was often used for healing and building connections within the community. Further emphasizing its connective powers, music was also played to accompany work, games and social gatherings. Each aspect of the music played had a very important spiritual significance, from the vocal lines and words used, to the instrumentation and overall phrasing structure of each work. Native American culture puts a high emphasis on words and storytelling, and the lyrics that they used in songs were no different. The words in Native American songs have symbolic meanings that invoke the power of the spirits in nature to grant blessings, such as a plentiful harvest, to the tribe while showing gratitude to the Earth. As written language was absent from the tribes in South Carolina until the 1800s, legends were passed down orally through song. Singers would often use invented sounds to convey a message if known words were insufficient. These sounds became synonymous with the stories in which they were used, and this musical language became commonplace in the sacred vocal tradition. Keeping with the traditional musicality of speech was a practice known as rhythmic poetry, in which vocal lines were spoken with a sense of regular pulsation that took the emphasis from pitched lines to those spoken with an emphasis on particular beats. Words had musical tendencies in Native American speech that did not need to be highlighted by pitch, and this rhythmic poetry gave absolute focus to the natural sounds of the words being spoken by the storyteller. Words were the building blocks for the legends of the tribe, and therefore played an absolute centric role in the art of music. Jeff Titon further emphasizes the centricity of the voice in native culture in *Worlds of Music*, saying
that “Native American music was almost entirely vocal and the instruments were chiefly used to accompany the voice” (p. 37). Chanting was also a common technique used in this type of music, which involved repeating specific patterns in time in order to further emphasize the spoken word. When pitch was used in Native American music, it was used in a way that is completely unrelated to any ideals of traditional, familiar Western harmony. Oftentimes, singers sang without any semblance of a specific key area, making the music very difficult to learn and perform. The lack of harmony in vocal music allowed for the focus to be put on vocal tension and release, which helps to convey the story. These songs could be sung as a solo or in groups, encouraging community through vocal interaction. This type of singing is one that requires immense practice, and therefore is ingrained in the minds of those charged with the task of passing the word to the next generation of performers and listeners. The mix of unusual rhythms and complicated vocals created a musical style with vocal emphasis that was, and continues to be, strikingly unique to a culture uninfluenced by the outside world.

Much like the voice, Native American instruments each had specific functions to communicate and convey the beauty of the spiritual realm. Although wide varieties of instruments were present in this culture, the most common and ancient were flutes, whistles, drums and rattles. Since these instruments were generally used for ceremonial purposes, most were made from natural elements in order to celebrate the Earth and its gifts. Flutes were made from river cane or the leg bone of a deer, and were played to accompany processions of chiefs or welcome visitors. However, the instrument was also used in everyday practice, such as encouraging success in a stickball game. Whistles were also common, and used much like flutes with more portability. Made from the smaller leg bone of a bird, their function was often to
produce war calls as a form of communication between allies during battle. Communicative purposes were just as important in the instrumental world as they were in the vocal world of Native American music. Drums and rattles were used for percussive purposes to add an underlying beat and rhythmic pattern to melody. The water drum, specific to the tribes of South Carolina, was unique in that it could be tuned; giving the instrument a percussive and melodic function. This interesting functional mix was made possible by a design that filled a hollowed out log with water, another natural element. The log was then covered with a tightly drawn hide, and the volume of water inside determined the pitch of the drum. Also, rattles made from gourds containing beans, corn kettles or pebbles created a different type of percussive effect from shaking, rather than beating. These were often decorated with feathers and rattlesnake rattles, showing their importance in the beauty of spiritual rituals. Other rattles were made of turtle shells, and were worn by women during dancing to produce a rhythmic accompaniment to the drumming and singing. These women were often referred to as “shell shakers.” However, men were the most prevalent in the art of accompanied dance. Males took the lead in traditional and spiritual dances, either dancing while accompanied by song or singing songs while simultaneously dancing. The traditional song and dance format was comprised of short verses sung four to seven times. These were the sacred numbers of many tribes in the area, and could be found in all elements of art. Furthermore, this format often consisted of a “call and response” system, in which one person leads while the crowd responds in short, musical phrases. This musical interaction further shows the importance of communication in Native American culture as a way to facilitate a spiritual interaction between Heaven and Earth.
The Cherokee and Chicora tribes were among the most prevalent Native American groups in South Carolina. These two tribes, along with the smaller Pee Dee and Catawba tribes, inhabited an area of South Carolina commonly referred to as the Upstate. Upstate South Carolina consists of the Appalachian Mountains, and the land at their base known as the Piedmont. In this area, the tribes were able to maintain and grow their rich cultures relatively undisturbed. This continued for thousands of years before the arrival of European explorers to South Carolina beginning in the early 1500s. One of the earliest known interactions between the Native population and European explorers came in 1521, when Spaniard Francisco Gordillo sailed to the Carolina coast from Santo Domingo. He and his crew sailed inland, and were met by the Chicora tribe in the surrounding areas of the Piedmont. Around seventy Native Americans were promptly kidnapped, enslaved and taken aboard a ship bound for Santo Domingo. The majority of the kidnapped Chicora died within two years, as they had no resistance to Spanish disease. However, it is recorded that one member of the Chicora tribe did survive, learned Spanish and converted to Catholicism. He was given the name Francisco de Chicora, and was taken back to Spain to tell the story of his people and culture. Peter Martyr, a court chronicler, took his account and penned what is now one of the earliest and most comprehensive written tales of early Native American life in South Carolina. This account came to be known as “The Testimony of Francisco de Chicora.” Chicora escaped in 1526 when he accompanied a Spanish expedition back to South Carolina, and his whereabouts became a mystery for the rest of his life. This contact with Spanish explorers no doubt had an influence on Native American culture. Spanish influence in Native American music can specifically be seen in the incorporation of traditional Spanish instruments, such as the guitar and mandolin, into
traditional musical styles throughout the next few centuries. Today, these foreign additions are extremely common in both traditional and modern Native American music. Another notable addition to Native American music in Appalachia came in the 18th century, with the introduction of the fiddle by Scottish and English traders in the area. Along with the traders came Moravian, Presbyterian and Baptist missionaries, who began teaching Christian hymns to the native tribes. Heavily influenced by these hymns and teachings, the tribes began to look for a way to record their language with written word. In 1821, a Cherokee by the name of Sequoyah invented a system of symbols that when put together could form Cherokee words. Sequoyah was able to complete the remarkable task of reducing thousands of years of Cherokee thoughts to eighty-five symbols representing sound. This system became known as Sequoyah’s Syllabary, which gave the Native Americans in the Upstate the power to record their language. Among the first books printed in Cherokee was a hymn book that showed the influence British settlers had on the previously isolated Native American culture. Although the written word revolutionized Native American storytelling, the tribes of the Upstate worked to keep oral traditions alive, as the song and dance culture of old was mixed with instrumental fiddle music and hymn styles to create a sound that would greatly influence nearby white Appalachian fiddle traditions throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. The music of Appalachia, which would also become heavily influenced by African American jazz, would eventually become one of the most syncretic and significant genres of American folk music to take hold in the southeastern United States.

The tribes inhabiting the Lowcountry of South Carolina toward coastal areas had, much like the Upstate tribes, lived in freedom to develop their culture undisturbed for thousands of
years. These coastal groups, consisting of the Edisto, Santee, Yemasee and Waccamaw tribes, became the initial natives that European explorers would come to meet as they sailed the coast, making their culture more vulnerable to elimination with each new settlement. Coastal areas are much more likely to be settled in the early stages of exploration, as terrain becomes more treacherous and unknown the further one moves inland. For this reason, coastal Native American tribes in South Carolina were in closer proximity to the settlers than their northern counterparts, allowing for more interaction and cultural exchange. Many of the tribes initially offered their help to European settlers, most notably the Edisto tribe, which aided French Huguenots in 1562 to establish a colony at Port Royal, in between present day Charleston and Savannah. Furthermore, the Waccamaw tribe, which inhabited the area around present day Georgetown, was the first to make contact with the Spanish at Winyah Bay in 1521, before they made their journey up the Pee Dee River to eventually meet the Chicora tribe. Another tribe to make contact with Spanish explorers was the Santee tribe in 1660, before fighting alongside the British during the Tuscarora War in 1711. However, not all tribes were able to live in harmony alongside the settlers. In 1715 the Yemasee tribe, angered by unfair trade practices and brutality against Native Americans, waged the Yemasee War. In this uprising, approximately one hundred British settlers were killed. The tribe was eventually defeated by Governor Craven, and the Yemasee fled to Florida. Because of warfare as well European diseases fostered by close interaction with settlers, the coastal tribes dwindled in number. Since the Lowcountry tribes were unable to survive and grow, the cultural effects that the Europeans had on Native American art in this area is unclear. These tribes were not allowed enough time to coexist
alongside the settlers for influences to be clearly felt, as the British gained a firm hold on the land that Native Americans had treasured for generations.

As previously mentioned, European powers each tried their hand in colonizing the Carolinas, some more successfully than others. The Spanish were the first to attempt a substantial colony in South Carolina in 1521, and following Francisco Gordillo’s capture and kidnapping of Chicora natives, Lucas Vásquez de Ayllón attempted to establish a colony at Winyah Bay, near present day Georgetown. However, unfavorable weather and sickness forced the party to return to Santo Domingo. Years later, in 1562, Jean Ribault and his group of French Huguenots attempted to settle Parris Island, but because of lingering Spanish power in the area, they were forced away. The most dominating and long-lasting presence in the Carolinas came from Great Britain, when the English explorer John Cabot staked claim to the area in 1497. The English made no effort to colonize during the period of Spanish and French exploration, and in 1629 a grant was given to Sir Robert Heath for the colony of “Carolina,” named for the British king, and all lands westward to the Pacific Ocean. Again, no settlement activity took place, and in 1663 the grant was transferred to eight of Charles II’s most loyal supporters, known as the Lords Proprietors. Under Lord Ashley Cooper, the Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina were drafted and a settlement was established in 1670. First established at Albemarle Point before being moved between the immodestly named Ashley and Cooper rivers, the settlement of Charles Towne would become one of the most prosperous and cosmopolitan cities on the Eastern seaboard. Throughout the latter half of the 17th century, English powers took a firm hold on the colonies, and South Carolina was no exception. With permanent settlements in the area, the colonists were able to establish homes and
communities in which culture was allowed to grow and flourish. Along with their English heritage came Western ideals, which included the principals of Western harmony. Before the arrival of Europeans, music on American soil was based completely on melody with no attention paid to harmony. Music was an emotional expression, and natives were masters of free-flowing improvisation. With the arrival of the Western world came careful attention to the construction of music, with the beauty of tension and release embedded in the progression and connections between specific chords. Furthermore, the introduction of European principles of counterpoint and polyphony placed greater importance on independent, interweaving voices, and new musical forms brought from Great Britain emphasized harmony. The wide range of forms included ballads, dance tunes, folk songs, parodies, comic opera, psalms, minuets and sonatas. Like Native American culture, music was used to accompany almost all areas of life, and these forms could be found in a wide variety of settings. From hymns in the church to operas performed in the theatre, music was heard throughout the colony of South Carolina as English traditional flavor took hold. Although music was mostly imported from Europe and not so much composed in the colonies before the revolution, American developments were felt musically before 1776. Because of the informal oral and aural exchange of music in the community, idiosyncrasies began to develop in traditional musical processes. Most colonists, no matter their background or musical education level, knew a large body of popular tunes. Many times, new words or alterations to the melody or harmony would take place over time, forming songs that often bore little or no resemblance to the original. Pieces that formed in this way were some of the first to be considered distinctly American in sound.
The settlers also practiced instrumental music, which quickly became one of the most popular pastimes for the colonists. The most prevalent instruments included the violin and the flute. Violins were found in all classes, as they ranged in price from very affordable to quite expensive, making them one of the most widely practiced instruments of all. For this reason, violins were imported from Europe in great numbers. Second in popularity to the violin was the flute. Two of the most common types of flutes present during this time were recorders, called the “common flute” or “English flute,” and fifes, which produced a higher pitched, shrill sound. Transverse flutes, also referred to as “German flutes” were common, and resembled the modern flute in that they were blown from the side. These instruments were lightweight and portable, making travel easy. With that ease came more opportunity for them to be played outside of the home, leading to communal music making and public, mostly amateur, performance. Also, these instruments were mostly limited to male players, as women were limited to instruments which helped with “maintaining reputation.” Women were limited to music making within the confines of the home, and for this reason were more proficient on stationary instruments, such as the harpsichord. Women also practiced a now extinct instrument, known as the English guitar. This instrument was a ten sting version of a Renaissance cittern, with a flat back and a teardrop shape that was tuned to an open C chord. This guitar was much smaller in size than the modern guitar, making it suitable for women to play, along with the harpsichord, in a private setting for family and friends. Other instruments such as drums, trumpets, trombones, French horns, cellos, clarinets, oboes and bassoons were also found in the colonies at this time, however, less frequently and in varying numbers. Amateur music making and concerts became commonplace, especially in Charleston which was
flourishing both economically and socially. Local musicians would often accompany dancers for jigs or minuets, and even perform ballad operas. Ballad operas consisted of compilations of familiar folk tunes with new words strung together with dialogue to create a comedic story. In his article, “About Early American Music”, David Hildebrand discusses the most popular ballad opera of this time in the colonies, The Beggar’s Opera: “The Beggar’s Opera was performed in the colonies as early as 1750 […] the colonists would bring home words and lyrics to the songs and play and sing them at home” (1). As life in South Carolina became more stable throughout the first half of the 18th century, time increased for leisure. This stability and time encouraged the pursuit of pastimes, and those who had the funds often sought to increase their status through musical knowledge. Charleston became an increasingly important center in the colonies, and musicians were able to make a living by teaching those who yearned for musical sophistication. John Ogasapian offers evidence of this trend in Music of the Colonial and Revolutionary Era, showing that newspapers advertised for music teachers regularly: “From January of 1732, when it began publishing, the South Carolina Gazette carried insertions by music teachers. John Salter (d. 1740), organist of St. Phillips Church, offered instruction in keyboard instruments. His wife ran a boarding house for young ladies where they were taught music by her husband” (p. 66). Ogasapian goes on to further assert that Charleston’s unique mix among the elite upper class encouraged economic prosperity that shifted this southern settlement into one of the foremost cosmopolitan and cultural centers in the New World:

The city’s unique social and economic situation provided an environment in which culture in general and music in particular could flourish at a level unimaginable in Williamsburg or Annapolis. Whereas Virginia and Maryland
tobacco planters’ lives and leisure activities centered in their country estates, except for brief periods in Williamsburg and Annapolis, the social and cultural world of South Carolina’s rice and indigo planters and their families centered in Charleston. Similarly, whereas Virginia merchants were concentrated in Norfolk, the colony’s seaport, South Carolina merchants had sumptuous Charleston mansions alongside the planters. Accordingly, while the Virginia planters lacked the occasion or inclination to associate with Virginia merchants and like contemporary English landed gentry came to consider them social inferiors, Charleston planter and merchant families socialized and intermarried. As a consequence, whereas Williamsburg and Annapolis remained somewhat provincial colonial capitals, Charleston became a cosmopolitan city-state, with a stable and wealthy population able to patronize theatres and concert halls and to maintain a goodly number of professional musicians (p. 66).

Charleston’s affluence and stable culture helped make South Carolina a leader in musical patronage in the colonies.

The most important example of Charleston’s high musical heritage during this time period was founded in 1766. Acquiring its moniker from the patron saint of music, The St. Cecilia Society became arguably the most significant and sophisticated musical phenomenon in all of North America until its end as a musical society in 1820. This private subscription concert organization became one of the shining cultural jewels in a land attempting to establish social and political legitimacy. High society in the colonies attempted to emulate European cultural
fashions, specifically the British, in order to show that, they too, were an enlightened people, capable of establishing a sophisticated civilization. Nicholas Butler illustrates this point in *Votaries of Apollo: The St. Cecilia Society and the Patronage of Concert Music in Charleston, South Carolina, 1766-1820*, an expansive look at his recent findings that illustrate the society as one of the most important concert organizations of its time: “The primary musical significance of the St. Cecilia Society’s first half century was its sustained patronage of sophisticated European musical culture during an era when the nascent United States was just beginning to develop its own identity [...] no contemporary musical phenomenon in this country matched the continuity or the level of organization demonstrated by the St. Cecilia Society’s long-standing series” (xiii). For this reason, the St. Cecilia society modeled its series on European concert organizations, most notably The British Academy of Ancient Music, and was the first of its kind in the Southern colonies. However, the society’s status as a private organization set it apart from series in Boston and New York, as Northern series were founded as public commercial ventures run by professional musicians. The St. Cecilia society was established as a private organization, incorporated and administered by gentleman amateurs who contracted with professional musicians. This arrangement allowed for an annual series of private concerts with a secure financial base, ensuring its survival beyond the initial generation of founders. Although most records were lost during the Civil War, recent efforts have taken place to resurrect valuable information regarding the history of this organization. So far, the search has yielded new knowledge that paints a fascinating picture of the society’s fifty-four year musical history. Among the findings is a list of two hundred member’s names, all prosperous planters, politicians, lawyers, physicians and merchants. This small sampling of members and their lofty
occupations signifies that the St. Cecilia Society was an organization only open to the upper echelon of Charleston society, and it was a high privilege to be invited to join. Again following a European model, membership was only available to men, and concerts were only open to members and their guests. Ladies were permitted to attend only if they were family or an invitee of a member. This exclusive scene further promoted the mixing of South Carolina high society, as they combined their wealth and power to propel Charleston forward as the premiere cultural center of the South. The St. Cecilia Society was one of the crown jewels of the city, and throughout its fifty-four year activity, forty-three seasons of regular concerts were held. The eleven years of inactivity stemmed from financial complications that lasted from autumn of 1788 to the spring of 1790, and periods of warfare, specifically the American Revolution and the War of 1812. The society never owned or built its own performance space, and according to records, hired eight venues in Charleston to hold the concerts. Four of these spaces still survive today and include the Great Room at the Exchange Building, the Long Room of McCrady’s Tavern, South Carolina Society Hall and the first South Carolina Statehouse, which now serves as the Charleston County Courthouse. Performers ranged from amateur musicians to hired professionals, and much like the British subscription concerts on which it was modeled, the core of the St. Cecilia society’s early orchestra was drawn from its membership. However, as the treasury grew, the society began to advertise for local professionals and recruit through private channels. In 1771, as popularity grew, the advertising expanded throughout the American colonies, even reaching as far as London. Contracts lasted from one to three years, and by the time of the American Revolution, the orchestra of the St. Cecilia society included amateurs and professionals from England, the Dutch Republic, France, Germany, Italy and the
West Indies. This international phenomenon was augmented further following the Revolutionary War, with French musicians fleeing to Charleston in the wake of the Haitian Revolution. In 1793, the Charleston Theatre was opened with a resident orchestra. The St. Cecilia Society enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with Charleston’s theatre community, often employing their services throughout the theatrical musicians’ off-season. The performers were predominantly male; however, ladies would occasionally perform as instrumental or vocal soloists. The repertoire selection for each season followed the European musical fashion of the time, in order to project the same level of sophistication in a newly formed nation. Most commonly, the society observed the trends in London, and would program works by composers who were being featured in the British capital. Among the composers whose works were heard in the St. Cecilia series are Johann Christian Bach, Ludwig van Beethoven, George Frederic Handel, Joseph Haydn, Leopold Kozeluch, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ignaz Pleyel, Johann Stamitz and many others. French composers, such as François Adrien Boieldieu, were commonly performed following the aforementioned influx of French musicians in the early 1790s. Although many musicians residing in Charleston at the time composed original music, the St. Cecilia society made no effort to encourage a local musical style or to program works by local composers. The society measured its success on its ability to replicate European concert series, and such works would have been seen as far too provincial to be played. The series’ final season was held in 1820, as attitudes of the Enlightenment Age decreased enthusiasm for this private assembly. Further adding to the series’ hardship was the Charleston Theatre’s touring circuit that began in 1817, depleting the pool of musicians from which the society drew and tampering with the fragile symbiotic relationship that had existed between the two
organizations. The Panic of 1819 was the final blow, as the economy unraveled and forced the society to cease its concert tradition for the final time. The St. Cecilia society continues today as one the oldest and most exclusive social institutions in the United States. Because of the loss of administrative records in the Civil War, much inaccurate information has been published about the St. Cecilia society, and its importance as one of the most significant musical institutions in all of North America has been widely overlooked. Recent efforts, especially those performed by Nicholas Butler in *Votaries of Apollo*, have reconstructed the grandeur of the St. Cecilia society, silencing critics who have, for decades, dismissed the concert series as a “feeble imitation” of European practices.

One member of this exclusive society was Charleston native William Gilmore Simms (1806-1870), a leading South Carolina novelist and poet whose works, much like the St. Cecilia Society, have been overlooked by historians. These works were highly esteemed by the masses throughout his lifetime, but decreased in popularity following the Civil War and his subsequent death. His close friend and contemporary Edgar Allen Poe went so far as to proclaim Simms as “the best novelist that America had ever produced.” Simms is remembered today among literary scholars as a major force in antebellum Southern literature, and the University of South Carolina started The Simms Initiatives, which is on pace to become one of the largest online databases of any single author in the world.

While the high society of South Carolina attempted to elevate their status as the premiere cosmopolitan center of the South, the culture of those that they enslaved was flourishing, and would eventually develop into one of the most significant and unique musical
identities that the world had ever seen. Beginning in the 15th century, Africans were kidnapped and sold into slavery in rapid numbers, many of whom landed on South Carolina soil following the Middle Passage. Forced into a new world and struggling to retain their African heritage, slaves formed a strong bond with one another, which developed into a homogenous slave identity. This identity fused elements of their tribal African culture with Christian ideals, as forced conversion was a common practice in the colonies. This unique blend of two completely separate cultures created a way for slaves to quietly express themselves in veiled ways and lament their situations without alerting their masters. Songs and enthusiastic worship became an outlet for slaves to preserve their cultural heritage while still voicing the grievances and humiliations that they suffered. Furthermore, John Boles explains in his text Black Southerners: 1619-1869 how song was one of the only cultural art forms that slave-owners allowed, seeing music as less of a threat than reading, writing or technology: “Whites recognized the importance of music to blacks and seldom interfered with slaves’ singing or making music […] planters realized that contented slaves were less troublesome and productive” (p. 147). Slaves were prohibited from learning to read or write, as the white population feared that the power of the written word would inspire the communal transfer of thoughts and lead to uprisings. Therefore, American slaves adopted a strong oral tradition, and would pass down stories, prayers and laments through music, much like the Native Americans. Enslaved Africans adopted many elements of the Christianity into their culture, as the religion emphasized the importance of family and cooperation amongst each other as a community. Christianity also spoke to the plight of the suffering, which was highly relevant to the situation in which they found themselves. As Christianity became increasingly important in the lives of African slaves, their
culture began to evolve and reflect the new influences. One of the most important song styles to emerge from this blend was the spiritual. Commonly referred to as the “negro spiritual,” as the genre was present in both white and black cultures during this time, the style was derived from spiritual songs which Ephesians 5:19 describes as “singing and making melody in your heart to the lord.” This emotionally charged song form was integrated into slave culture, and numerous traditional African vocal and rhythmic elements were added. From the moment enslaved Africans arrived in the area, there were systematic efforts made to “de-Africanize” and purge them of their native culture. While some Christian ideals were embraced, there were still efforts among slaves to preserve tribal culture, and secret religious services were held. These rituals often involved spiritual possession, speaking in tongues, shuffling in a counterclockwise direction, communal shouts and chanting. These traditions greatly influenced the development of the spirituals, as call and response, shouting, raising of hands and traditional praise phrases all are deeply rooted in the music.

Drumming and percussion was an extremely important element of African culture, and members of tribes would often use drum beats as a means of communication. Communication between slaves was especially feared by the white population, and therefore drums were banned from many plantations. Slaves were intent on conserving this rhythmic sophistication, and clapping and stomping became a replacement for drumming. Spirituals were often sung in the fields as “work songs,” and their rhythmic component helped to keep the pace for whatever task they were trying to complete. Vocal multi-part harmonies were also integrated into these spirituals, and the songs would often convey the messages of overcoming struggle, faith and hope. Christian influence can most clearly be seen in the lyrics of spirituals, as they would often
reference symbolic Biblical images that reflected their hardship, such as Moses and the Israelites’ Exodus from Egypt. Slave composers would take material from older hymns and Biblical stories and aurally refresh the music by adding new melodies to creatively alter the material. These stylistic differences were a way to set this music apart as distinctly theirs, as ownership was something that slaves had been staunchly denied. Spirituals most often possessed a duality in their lyrics, as they communicated Christian ideals while also expressing the hardships of slavery. Frederick Douglass underscores this emotional expression in his autobiographical slave narrative *My Bondage and My Freedom*: “The songs of the slaves represented their sorrows, rather than their joys. Like tears, they were a relief to aching hearts” (p. 77). Although most spirituals expressed religious faith, some may have also served as socio-political protests veiled as assimilation into white American culture. Many scholars have asserted that some spirituals may have alternative interpretations. For example, “Wade in the Water” could contain explicit instructions on how to escape a plantation through water, while avoiding a scent trail and detection by bloodhounds. Furthermore, “The Gospel Train” and “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” may have been instructions on how to reach the Underground Railroad. Spirituals served a variety of purposes, and this music was a rare combination of religious, emotional and physical experience all expressed through blended forms of song. Because of this unique mix, “negro spirituals” are often described as one of the first uniquely African-American musical genres.

Gullah culture was one that specifically evolved among the slaves on South Carolina rice plantations. The term Gullah, used to describe this group of slaves and their descendents, most likely referred to the African country of Angola, where their ancestors originated. The Gullah
people were able to preserve much more of their African heritage than those enslaved elsewhere, because of the geographic location and climate of the Lowcountry. This area of South Carolina was rampant with diseases such as yellow fever and malaria during the summer and early autumn, causing the white plantation owners to retreat inland for most of the year. African slaves were immune to these diseases, and therefore could survive and withstand the climate. Slaves were left in the care of white overseers, and this was often the only contact they had with white culture. This isolation allowed for their African roots to take a firm hold, and the development of their culture remained deeply connected to their African heritage. Gullah oral traditions of language and music reflected this as well, with music heavily based on complex rhythms that mimic African drum beats with loud stamping and shouting. African religious rituals were more openly practiced, and Gullah “ring shouts” involved shuffling in a circle while ecstatically clapping and stomping, creating a transcendent rhythmic experience that emulated an African spiritual possession. While most slaves in other areas were forced to assimilate and abandon African traditions almost completely, the Gullah people were able to create an undisturbed community where their culture could flourish, creating a fascinating glimpse into African culture on the South Carolina coast. William Pollitzer stresses the importance of Gullah musical culture in *The Gullah People and Their African Heritage*, showing that this music was an emotional outlet that perpetuated their African roots: “Music from Africa was retained among the Gullah because it expressed feelings of joy or of grief, promoted physical and spiritual well-being, provided escape from drudgery, molded the young, and fostered a sense of community” (p. 157). Gullah music is one of the finest examples of African syncretism in America, and many of these cultural traditions are still present today. Gullah
slaves and their descendants had enormous influences on musical genres as well, one of which is the Blues. Following the Civil War and after emancipation, freed men and women struggled to find work and make a new life for their families. These difficult times inspired changes in the music of the African American community, as hardships and instability were reflected in a new style of music that emerged. The blues, as the genre came to be known, was greatly influenced by the spirituals, field songs, shouting and chanting of their enslaved ancestors. This melancholy sound is characterized by blue notes that, for expressive purposes, are sung or played flat and gradually bent in relation to pitches of the major scale. Originally, there were few common characteristics that made up a specific blues genre. This new style of music was rather an extension of the spiritual and field song to a musical expression without accompaniment or harmony. This extension developed into simple solo songs heavily laden with emotional content. Many African elements could be heard in the early blues; most notably the melismatic vocals and nasal tones which can be traced to the music of West and Central Africa. As the genre grew in popularity, the incorporation of the blues note led to more structure and eventually a blues scale. With this blues scale came the incorporation of specific chord progressions into the music; and a chord progression unique to the genre was born. These chords were often unchanged, and individual singers would improvise over this form. The twelve bar blues is one of the most famous forms in this genre, and is a standardized progression of I, IV, V and tonic seventh chords. Instruments were also a largely present in this genre, with the piano, banjo and guitar all playing major roles in the improvisation. Although the Mississippi Delta is generally credited with being the main center for the cultivation of the blues, the South Carolina Lowcountry and its influences were also a considerable force in the
development of the blues. Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, a Gullah descendant often called “The Mother of the Blues,” was one of the earliest known professional blues singers.

Another genre that draws direct influence from Lowcountry slave culture is Southern gospel music. Although gospel music draws on many of the same influences as the blues, specifically spirituals and shout songs, its message is one of hope. The gospel style began to rise in the early 20th century, with its establishment as a legitimate genre generally believed to be around the year 1910. The style is extremely vocally heavy, and when the genre first developed, used few instruments or none at all. Southern gospel music expresses personal and communal faith regarding Biblical teachings, and gives a Christian alternative to the mainstream secular music of the time. The Reverend Thomas A. Dorsey, “the father of black gospel music,” is a Gullah descendant, showing the considerable effect that Lowcountry spiritual culture had on this genre. Gospel music grew immensely in popularity throughout the 20th century, and is now one of the most widely listened to styles of music in the United States.

Charleston served as a great incubator for all types of music; however, one of the most prolific musical genres that South Carolina has ever influenced is jazz. Born out of the blues, jazz music’s key element is syncopation, as it stresses the off beats with complex built in rhythms. The genre keeps with the tradition of specific chord progressions, and is a combination of European harmony and forms with African syncopation, polyrhythm and improvisation. This syncretism, created an infectious sound that accompanied a roaring United States culture for decades, and is reminiscent of the blended elements that characterized slave culture in the South Carolina Lowcountry. One of Charleston’s most important contributions to the jazz scene
was the Jenkins Orphanage Band. The orphanage, founded in 1891 by the Reverend Daniel J. Jenkins, a businessman and Baptist minister, was opened after Jenkins’ multiple encounters with African American children living on the street. After organizing a home for the young children, Jenkins began to take in donations of musical instruments and hired local Charleston musicians to tutor them. The orphans’ newly formed band debuted in the streets of Charleston, and was the only black instrumental group at the time organized in South Carolina. The band gained such a reputation that parents began to send their children to the orphanage to learn music. The children became proficient on multiple instruments and learned to read music with extreme talent. Originally, the boys were not taught jazz, but rags, a related genre. Ragtime can be thought of as a combination of European march forms and rhythms descended from African polymyrhythm. Charleston influenced this genre, as composer Eubie Blake was inspired to write the “Charleston Rag” after watching Gullah children dance in the dockyards. This would eventually evolve into The Charleston, an extraordinarily popular dance style throughout the early 20th century. Jack McCray states in Charleston Jazz that the Jenkins Band played a direct role in the development of this dance craze, learning to “swing” on their own in the dormitories: “At Jenkins, printed scores were used, and bandmasters taught musical literacy. Residents weren’t taught jazz, but oral history accounts indicate music students “swung” on their own time, especially at night in the dormitories [...] The popular 1923 song ‘The Charleston,’ composed by James P. Johnson, was inspired by observing Charlestonians and Jenkins musicians dancing movements called geechee, a colloquial term applied to South Carolina Gullahs” (pp. 27-28). After switching from ragtime to jazz music, the orphanage continued to build its reputation, and orphanages across the country began to emulate their
style. One of which included The Colored Waif’s Home Brass Band, where a young trumpeter named Louis Armstrong got his start. The Jenkins Orphanage Band began to tour throughout the United States and England wearing Citadel uniforms, raising money in support of their home. The band made it as far as Vienna, and was invited back stateside to play in the inaugural presidential parades of Theodore Roosevelt and William Taft. The band even made it to Broadway, portraying themselves in the play *Porgy* by Dubose Heyward, who would later go on to collaborate with George and Ira Gershwin to create *Porgy and Bess*, an incredibly famous American opera based on Gullah culture. Revenues began to decrease beginning in the depression era, and touring eventually ceased following the death of Reverend Jenkins in 1937. The Jenkins Orphanage gave thousands of children a second chance for a better life, and can count many notable jazz musicians as alumni, including William “Cat” Anderson, Jabbo Smith and Freddie Green. Furthermore, Dizzy Gillespie, one of the most famous jazz musicians of all time, also hails from South Carolina. Born in Cheraw to parents Lottie and James, Gillespie was provided instruments as a young child, and became a self taught trumpet aficionado by the age of twelve. Gillespie earned a music scholarship to the Laurinburg Institute in North Carolina, where he played for two years before accompanying his family on a move to Philadelphia. With this move his career began to take off, and Dizzy Gillespie is often counted as one of the best (if not the best) jazz trumpeters in history. His virtuosic playing was marked by huge interval leaps and immensely high notes played on his trademark bent trumpet, which inserted wit into his complex rhythmic and harmonic solos. Dizzy Gillespie’s contributions to jazz were immense, and although his time spent in South Carolina was short, his early influences were able to help shape him into one of the most famous jazz trumpeters that the world has ever seen.
As the most popular musical styles in the United States continued to grow out of African American tradition, it became increasingly taboo for white youths in South Carolina to listen to the genres. Therefore, beginning in the late 1940s, white teens flocked to the Carolina coast to visit establishments that specialized in playing the R&B sounds that were gripping America. This mass exodus to the coast was how the term “beach music” was coined, and a new genre was born. One of the first businesses to capitalize on this trend was the Tijuana Inn, located in Carolina Beach, North Carolina and owned by Jim Hanna. Other bar, restaurant and hotel owners took note, and eventually beach music spread south through the Grand Strand of South Carolina. Continuing through the 1950s and reaching its peak in the 1960s, the style has no single musical characteristic. What makes beach music especially interesting is that its defining qualities are very ambiguous and murky. The white youth in South Carolina acted as the curators of the genre, handpicking bands and songs which sounded appealing at the time, and placing them in the beach music category. Brendan Greaves echoes this idea in his article “Beach Music: History and Myth,” explaining that listeners could choose freely from the abundance of African American artists coming out of areas such as Detroit and New York City: “As African American sounds continued to develop through the 1960s, fans, disc jockeys, and other listeners took on curatorial roles, ascribing the Beach Music label to songs and artists from all over the country and establishing standards with which to develop this canon” (p. 3). Looking at their selections, it is clear that controlled, nuance singing was more agreeable to their idea of “southern soul” than the shout singing, which characterized the emerging genre of Rock N’ Roll. Listeners and fans of the style would therefore choose popular R&B bands, such as The Temptations and The Tams, which fit this style. The Shag was a dance that would often
accompany the music, eventually becoming the state dance of both North and South Carolina. This style of music, specific to the Carolinas, lets listeners act as curators of the genre, and fans popularize bands that they deem to have the quality of “southern soul.” For this reason, it possesses a mystery and romantic allure that Carolinians love to claim as their own. Beach music suffered a decline in popularity in the 1970s with the rise of disco, but re-emerged in the 1980s and continues to be a present day staple that South Carolinians enjoy both on and off the beach.

In the course of researching the development of music in South Carolina, it seemed appropriate to pay special attention to the state’s Flagship University, being one of the main homes and proponents of South Carolina’s unique cultural heritage. When looking at the University’s own musical heritage, it is natural to gravitate first to its alma mater, “We Hail Thee Carolina.” Written in 1911 by George A. Wauchope, an English professor at USC, and set to the music of Jonathan E. Spilman’s “Flow Gently, Sweet Afton,” “We Hail Thee Carolina” is a stirring and beautiful expression of the pride that students feel as a part of such an institution. The music itself is reminiscent of a style that is especially prevalent in the religious culture of South Carolina, brought by the English settlers and known as a hymn. This song structure, Christian in origin, is derived from psalm singing and is designed to be sung in a simple, metrical form. Hymns are meant to unify the congregation through direct ideas and a genuine spiritual quality. The structure is usually strophic in form, meaning that the same tune is repeated with new words, or verses, sung each time around. This form of music is one that has survived from the early settlers of South Carolina to the present day. Although not specifically religious in nature, “We Hail Thee Carolina” possesses these qualities and was successful in its mission to unify the
Carolina community through song. In 1977, the University of South Carolina established the South Carolina Honors College, which serves to enhance the University as a whole, while also setting a higher standard for select students. Because of this dual purpose, it seemed appropriate to compose an alma mater that highlights this special relationship, intending to give students of the Honors College musical unity without separating them from the larger institution. “Let Honor Be Thy Name” is designed as a musical extension of “We Hail Thee Carolina” to highlight this close relationship. Given the historical importance of William Gilmore Simms to the University of South Carolina, it seemed only fitting to use words adapted from his poem, “The Land of the Pine,” as lyrics for the alma mater. “Let Honor Be Thy Name” is in the same key as “We Hail Thee Carolina,” and begins with the same note on which “We Hail Thee Carolina” ends. “Let Honor Be Thy Name” follows a similar, steady tempo as its predecessor, and the two forms are almost identical, with a repeating melody separated by a countermelody with new, climatic material at the end. The two have a distinctly hymn-like sound, and “Let Honor Be Thy Name” is meant to sound as an extension of “We Hail Thee Carolina,” rather than a separate piece. A score for “Let Honor Be Thy Name” can be found in the appendix, and it is hoped that this alma mater might help Honors College students unite and celebrate their special place as members of a community that both serves and enhances the University of South Carolina.

The musical history of South Carolina is one that can be traced back thousands of years, with each culture adding its own sound and tradition. This unique sonic syncretism began with South Carolina’s earliest inhabitants, the Native American tribes, who with their vocal emphasis created rhythmic poetry with spoken language. Using songs to pass down spiritual legends, the
Native Americans used the voice in a sacred role, and vocal music became the highest art form with instruments taking on secondary significance. With the arrival of European settlers, came the arrival of Western harmony, and new instruments, most notably the fiddle, began to integrate into Native American tradition, playing a major role in the development of Appalachian music. As the settlers (most notably the British) took control of the Carolinas and Charleston gained in wealth and influence, European musical traditions gained greater prominence. Wealthy planters and merchants moved in close circles, and were able to combine their power and wealth to distinguish the settlement from its more provincial neighbors. As the settlement developed into a city, cultural institutions began to rise in popularity. One of these institutions, the St. Cecilia Society, became one of the most celebrated concert series in North America for nearly fifty years, measuring their success by their ability to emulate European musical establishments. Through the St. Cecilia society, citizens of the newly established United States of America showed that, they too, were able to appreciate the serious music that was being played throughout Europe with the same level of sophistication. Among the society’s notable members was South Carolina poet and author William Gilmore Simms, whose words can be found in the newly composed South Carolina Honors College alma mater, a supplement to this project. While the high society of South Carolina was celebrating European traditions, the musical culture of the enslaved African population was thriving. This culture developed into a mixture of Christian forms infused with complex African rhythms and vocal customs that grew out of the fields. These “negro spirituals,” as they came to be known, had a direct hand in influencing some of the most prolific genres in American history, such as blues, gospel and jazz. With their musical contributions, African Americans helped America achieve musical
independence from Europe. As the African American genres grew in popularity, it became increasingly taboo for the whites to listen to rhythm and blues, and the Carolina youth began to flock to the coast to frequent institutions that secretly specialized in playing this music. With this mass exodus to the shore began in the 1940s, the term “beach music” was coined, a murky genre in which listeners are able to act as curators for those groups they believed embodied “southern soul.” The development of South Carolina’s rich musical heritage can be directly attributed to each of these cultural styles. The complex interaction among different ethnicities has created a rare and beautiful musical mix that is specific to the generations of those who have called South Carolina a home.
Works Cited


words adapted from "The Land of the Pine"
by William Gilmore Simms

Let Honor Be Thy Name

Let not the soul of its loveliness die
Let me forever be, a

Let not the soul of love die
Let me forever be,

Let not the soul of love die
Let me forever be, a

Let not the soul of love die
Let me forever be,
bloom on thy tree Oh Ca-ro-li-na! Let ho-nor be thy name