The Ethics of Style
Timothy Rommen

in “Mek Some Noise”: Gospel Music and the Ethics of Style in Trinidad

Published in print: 2007 Published Online: May 2012
Item type: chapter

This chapter proposes an analytical model to provide both theoretical grounding and methodological justification for its use within Full Gospel Trinidad. It outlines the theoretical basis for and the practical applicability of an analytical paradigm referred to as the ethics of style. It suggests that the ethics of style, when coupled with and balanced by a careful application of several archetypes of Caribbeanness, provides a powerful approach to thinking about music in this Trinidadian context that clears space for analysis which takes seriously the importance of the divine in the lives of those searching for communion with one another.

“Mek Some Noise”
Timothy Rommen

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This ethnographic study of Trinidadian gospel music engages the multiple musical styles circulating in the nation's Full Gospel community and illustrates the carefully negotiated and contested spaces that they occupy in relationship to questions of identity. By exploring gospelpso, jamoo ("Jehovah's music"), gospel dancehall, and North American gospel music, along with the discourses that surround performances in these styles, the book illustrates the extent to which value, meaning, and appropriateness are continually circumscribed and reinterpreted in the process of coming to terms with what it looks and sounds like to be a Full Gospel believer in Trinidad. The local, regional, and transnational implications of these musical styles, moreover, are read in relationship to their impact on belief (and vice versa), revealing the particularly nuanced
poetics of conviction that drive both apologists and detractors of these styles. The book sets the investigation against a historical narrative and introduces a theoretical approach that the book calls the “ethics of style”—a model that privileges the convictions embedded in this context and which emphasizes their role in shaping the terms upon which identity is continually being constructed in Trinidad. The result is an extended meditation on the convictions that lie behind the creation and reception of style in Full Gospel Trinidad.

Reenvisioning Ethics, Revisiting Style
Timothy Rommen

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This chapter brings the discussion of the ethics of style full circle. It proposes several ways that musical change and musical practices themselves might be reenvisioned and rethought in light of the ethics of style by offering a close reading of a Baptist church in Point Fortin, Trinidad. It attempts to reconnect the ethics of style to individual congregations to illustrate the important role that these local instantiations of the Full Gospel community fulfill in the Trinidadian gospel music scene.

Transnational Dreams, Global Desires
Timothy Rommen

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This chapter analyzes the rise of North American gospel music in Trinidad, investigating some of its connections to transnational and neo-colonial processes and cosmopolitan dreams along the way. It suggests that the historical trajectory of North American gospel music was essentially contemporaneous with the emergence of gospelypso. It discusses the ways that transnational and neo-colonial issues are often discussed with and through the ethics of style in order to demonstrate the powerful counterprocesses that Trinidadian Full Gospel believers put into play, both in discourse and through musical practice.
Introduction
Timothy Rommen
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This introductory chapter explains the coverage of this book, which is about gospel music and the ethics of style in Trinidad. This book explores music and its roles in the lives of Full Gospel believers in Trinidad and examines how musical change occurred in the process of creating a dialogue between current gospel music and normative practices within church services. It also considers the role that performance context plays in shaping the various registers of style, a process which then feeds back into the ways that style is configured in ethical terms through the community's discourse.

Jehovah's Music
Timothy Rommen
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Item type: chapter

This chapter examines the musical style called jamoo coined by Ras Shorty I. It suggests that this idiosyncratic approach to gospel music offers insights into the possibility of other ways of thinking about music in Trinidadian Full Gospel contexts. It explores the life and music of Ras Shorty I in order to have a better understanding of how the ethics of style might be brought to bear on analyses of the racial imagination and the poetics of conviction in Trinidad.

Epilogue
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Item type: chapter
This chapter sums up the key findings of this study about gospel music and the ethics of style in Trinidad. It highlights the nationalism of gospelypso artists, the determination of gospel dancehall artists, the studied ambivalence of jamoo performers, and the global vision of musicians pursuing North America gospel. It suggests that each style offers a very different approach to the evangelical concerns of Trinidadian believers, and each promotes a unique sense of what can or should constitute worship.