



# Music of the Common Tongue: Survival and Celebration in African American Music (Music/Culture)

*Christopher Small*

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In clear and elegant prose, *Music of the Common Tongue*, first published in 1987, argues that by any reasonable reckoning of the function of music in human life the African American tradition, that which stems from the collision between African and European ways of doing music which occurred in the Americas and the Caribbean during and after slavery, is the major western music of the twentieth century. In showing why this is so, the author presents not only an account of African American music from its origins but also a more general consideration of the nature of the music act and of its function in human life. The two streams of discussion occupy alternate chapters so that each casts light on the other. The author offers also an answer to what the *Musical Times* called the "seldom posed though glaringly obtrusive" question: "why is it that the music of an alienated, oppressed, often persecuted black minority should have made so powerful an impact on the entire industrialized world, whatever the color of its skin or economic status?"

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