

WORSHIP STYLES

Music Ministers Speak

Fred Hammond, Deitrick Haddon, Mary Mary—these are not gospel artists your grandmother would select—or would she?

Walking into a church to see young men and young ladies dressed in baggy gear and excitedly rapping might be unnerving to some. One can walk into a church and find ladies and gentlemen clad in flowing, colorful outfits dancing to the traditional bellow of “Mary Don’t You Weep” or jazzed up versions of old favorites such as Hammond’s “Jesus Be a Fence Around Me.”

Praise and worship, especially in the form of gospel music in the African American church is changing. There is an ever-increasing presence of gospel rap and jazz, gospel drill teams, and even Christian cheerleading—all in the name of Jesus. Some say it’s to accommodate worldliness. Others say it’s to reach an ever-changing generation.

Yea and Nay

Parishioners often engage in heated debates related to how Christians should worship. Critics are quick to point out that tunes and styles are alarmingly similar to those found outside the church. Proponents see these new ideas as a chance to reach those who will have nothing to do with artists like Andre Crouch or The Canton Spirituals. Detractors say the methods take away from the message. Supporters say that the church is losing the young to the world, and that only by providing substantive alternatives will the church be able to keep them engaged.

“I think [that] those who have a progressive mind will grasp it [new worship styles],” comments Donta Adger, Minister of Music at Word and Truth Church on Chicago’s far South Side. Adger notes that his church is in the process of implementing praise dancing and this is the first of varied new forms of worship that will come to Word and Truth. Paraphrasing the Apostle Paul to illustrate the need for the church of today to adapt to the changes occurring around it, Adger says, “I became all things to all men so that they’d be saved.”

Aaron Sledge, Praise and Worship Leader at Monument Center of Life in Calumet City, Illinois, agrees. “A lot of our parishioners are in tune with the move of God. God said He would do new things in the earth. I feel you have to be in tune with God to flow or to become receptive to the ‘new move of God.’”

Donta Adger



New Worship Styles Aren't Only for African Americans

Some of the churches located in the African American community are not exclusively African American. Take Anointed Word International Ministries in Markham, Illinois, for instance. The church name suggests that the worship services do not consist solely of traditional African American hymns, quartets, and choirs. Eric D. Clopton, Minister of Music at AWIM, notes that there are Hispanic and Indian members among the African Americans and that diversity in

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worship is key. Clopton says that the style of worship is not important. “As long as the Word is rightly divided [when interpreted], whether it’s popular or not is irrelevant.”

New School versus Old School — The Concerns

Supporters are still concerned about this new move and tread carefully as they introduce new things to their congregations. Adger is strongly opposed to a popular trend that implements worldly songs into worship. Clopton is concerned with the quality of music that is used to worship the Lord. Sledge’s belief is that the people of God will be open to change: “I feel like it is broadening people’s minds and allowing them to take God out of the box or out of the four walls we’ve built around Him. He’s so much bigger. His ways are so much different and creative than what we imagine. We as saints feel like if it is not



Aaron Sledge

packaged a certain way or served on a certain type of platter it is not of God. The Bible says His ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts.”

Quelling the Debate

The ministers interviewed for this story feel that there is no need to argue about the new worship forms taking shape in the African American Church. Adger summarizes, “If we really draw close to the God we talk about, we’ll never miss what God uses as the times change—even if it’s unfamiliar.” Sledge’s advice to those who disagree with him is to not discuss it if they are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with what is going on. “Seek God,” he says, “and ask Him to reveal His ways and His plan to you.”

Clopton notes that his opinions are his own. “It may not be right or wrong, or even my preference. As long as the heart is right when offering praise and worship to the Lord—in any form—the sincerity will come across. As long as you can usher yourself and others into His presence, that’s the whole point.”

By Tasha Lynette Clopton