SOUL MUSIC

The Negro could not ever become white and that was his strength; at some point, always, he could not participate in the dominant tenor of the white man’s culture. It was at this juncture that he had to make use of other resources, whether African, subcultural, or hermetic. And it was this boundary, this no man’s land that provided the logic and beauty of his music. (Jarrett 80)

“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” -Mark 8:38, verse from Holy Scripture reveals the significance of the soul in man’s life. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (4th edition, 2000) defines soul as: A sense of ethnic pride among Black people and especially African Americans, expressed in areas such as language, social customs, religion and music. All put together, the animating, vital core of African American life is their culture.

’Soul’ defined by Stephen. E. Henderson “as a condensed expression of the unconscious energy of the black experience”, was intended to name the essential, authentic and ineffable quality of blackness. Every aspect of African American life was referred with the adjective ‘soul’; theirs was ‘soul food’, ‘soul music’ because their soul was African and heart was American. To demonstrate that they are not animals and animals do not think of a soul, Du Bois entitled his collection of essays as The Souls of Black Folk. Toni Morrison argues in Playing in the Dark, the Africanist sensibility is a central shaping force in American literature.

The Souls of Black Folk announces in its very title that “other world” nonsense will not be countenanced. A nation, a FOLK manifold in spirit (note the plurality “soul” captured by its s) will be the subject of the black
spokesperson’s narrative”, comments Arnold Rampersad in *Art and Imagination of WEB Du Bois*. In his *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B Du Bois rightly stated that African Americans are ‘Oasis in the dusty desert of dollars’, a glaring contrast to the urban industrial soulless society of America, African Americans’ music was of great emotional intensity and had a cathartic effect. With their indigenous music, they have proved to the world their inherent skills in innovation, improvisation and that they have proved their difference in life and literature.

If race definitions still dubbed the African Americans as sub humans it is the height of paradox that they came out with the finest of arts- their ‘soul’ music. Even as they set foot on the Atlantic shores they sang and gave vent to their sorrow. Their thirst for freedom, rebellion against subjugation, their protest – everything was given expression in their music. Music is the finest form of expression of the harmony of the human soul. Naturally their music powerfully pronounced their 'difference' to the world. It is ironical that the whites who considered everything about African Americans inferior were astounded by their musical sensibility and attempted playing it. The white world with notes and masters for music was enchanted by the spontaneity and originality of African American music. They spoke, cried, communed with God, protested and got liberated through music. The black music, from the earliest days of field hollers and shouts, has been the essence of their humanity and their resilience. William H. McClendon observes, “Blacks [1] did not and never have needed to find themselves and learn of their humanity in order to produce music” (101). Music came spontaneously to them. “Music is inbuilt in the African American people’s soul. They sing everything, not leaving their personal joys and sorrows, and even communal trials and tribulations” (qtd in McKay 105).

This chapter SOUL MUSIC examines how the music in the African blood that is seeped in their soul has rejuvenated the dead ‘self ’ caused by
racism, and furnished an identity and gets shaped in the form and content of their writings. Ishmael Reed traces out the flowing of African music into America and how its influence is inevitable that it has blended with Euro American music.

Jes Grew spreads through America following a strange course. Pine Bluff and Magnolia Arkansas are hit; Natchez, Meridian and Greenwood Mississippi report cases. Sporadic outbreaks occur in Nashville and Knoxville Tennessee as well as St. Louis where the bumping and grinding cause the Gov to call up the Guard. A mighty influence, Jes Grew infects all that it touches. - Ishmael Reed, Mumbo Jumbo

Separated from their languages and history, African Americans somehow managed to preserve something of their culture through the only medium available to them- music, which was originally limited to voice, rhythm and closely associated with dance. As slaves they came chanting and singing into America even while in bondage. As a race they proved to the world that they can sing even when sorrowful as if they have been victorious over their plight as blacks.

Eileen Southern in her *The Music of Black Americans: A History* traces the origin of the African American folk songs and her study begins with the idea that the Africans always claimed their nation to be one of dancers, singers and story tellers. The predominance of music in their lives is mentioned in all the accounts of Africa. Moreover, it is said that they had an appropriate music
for every activity and the most important quality of their music was that it was “functional.” Southern points out that this tradition “. . . of using music on all occasions and of classifying the music according to its function is reflected in the slaves’ plantation songs” (2).

As the great composer and band leader in jazz orchestras Duke Ellington¹, a pivotal figure in black music, who believed in music beyond category, said, “Everything, and I repeat, everything had to swing. And that was just it, those cats really had it; they had that soul. And you know you can’t just play some of this music without soul. Soul is very important”. (qtd in Tucker 371) Music was inseparable from the hearts and souls of the African Americans that it even influenced their body language.

A brief survey of African American music and its characteristic features would throw light on the present day. The African American music, displayed in different forms such as the Spirituals, Seculars, later as the Blues and Jazz, has given vent to the black people’s resistance in the repressive living conditions in America. The black people’s day-to-day affairs and their quest for liberty are given release through their music and therefore the music is almost part of their souls and entwined with their emotions, experience and in short, their existence. Most of the writers whose major mission was to relate the lives of the black folk in the racist America naturally felt more inclined to go to these indigenous folk musical forms than to any other Euro-American forms, to create what could be termed African American literary genres.

The African Americans’ looks, habits, language, climate totally estranged them in the new land. All steps taken to bring assimilation into an American identity miserably failed. As a counter reaction their ‘difference’ got conspicuous. Their spirituals related to the creator, blues expressed their heartache, Jazz protested with loudness proved to the world their difference. Blues was their cultural matrix as Baker proclaimed. Baker asserts black music is a
marker of its culture in his *Blues Ideology*, “Any black poetry and music of African American culture and their various forms, techniques, devices, nuances, rules and so on are identified as fundamental structural referents in the continuum of black expressive culture” (78).

Among the folk songs the earliest is the Spirituals. Lena McLin, Chicago music teacher in Chicago, is supposed to have defined Spirituals as the songs where the slaves related their woes to God and in their Gospels in which they shared it with each other. In fact the Spirituals and the Gospels are also spoken of as oblique references to the dismal conditions caused by slavery. Those who could not protest openly had to choose these mild forms. W E B Du Bois in *The Souls of the Black Folk* claims that “The songs are indeed the siftings of centuries; the music is far more ancient than the words, and in it we can trace here and there signs of development” (380). The accompanying music is certainly the everlasting symbol of the slaves’ dignity, their will to survive against all odds and also of their sanity even in the most deplorable conditions.

In *Modernism and The Harlem Renaissance* Baker posits, “I define the Afro-American spiritual as synonymous with the African mask here because DuBois’s narrator seems so patently self-conscious in his repeated use of “Sorrow Songs” or spirituals as masterful repositories of an African cultural spirit (Baker 58, 60). The form of the spirituals is stunning as a fusion of American and Western Hymns.

Alaine Locke calls Spirituals as African Americans' ‘great folk gift’ ranked among the classic folk expression in the whole world because of their ‘simplicity, their characteristic originality and their universal appeal’ (21). W E B Du Bois acclaimed ‘spirituals as the rhythmic cry of the enslaved blacks, music indigenous to America and the spiritual heritage of the Nation’ (21). Being religious in nature, moving and emotional, they expressed hope, deliverance from bondage and suffering. Above all, spirituals had a great
psychological and therapeutic value for the demeaned slaves. Norton Anthology states that the spirituals “offered them much-needed psychic escape from the world of slavery’s restrictions and cruelties” (Mckay 5).

Gospel songs gave black women a public prominence in church that they seldom enjoyed elsewhere in black America. Music offered freedom to those who pursued it - the promise of freedom and money. Gospel music’s deep connection to religious faith often transported both performers and audiences. Trances, speaking in tongues and ecstatic emotional outbursts often accompanied the gospel music and services. This music could and did change lives.

Gospel music which has its roots in the black oral tradition, utilizes a great deal of repetition. As majority of the blacks were unable to read, the repetition of the words provided them the opportunity to participate in worship. Hymns and sacred songs were lined and repeated in a ‘call and response’ fashion. Repetition and ‘call and response’ enabled the singer and the choir to achieve an altered state of ‘trance’, and strengthen their communal bonds. That is why their art is always participatory and these two features are profusely used by writers in all genres.

They relied on hand clapping and foot stomping for rhythmic accompaniment as poverty constrained the reach of instruments. Guitars and tambourines were rare phenomenon. The words “chapel of melody” appear in “Of the Meaning of Progress” as a sign for Fisk University. In “Du Bois” Harold Bloom writes:

To me Jubilee Hall seemed ever made of the songs [spirituals] themselves, and its bricks were red with the blood and dust of toil. Out of them rose for me morning, noon, and
night, bursts of wonderful melody, full of the voices of my
brothers and sisters, full of the voices of the past. (150)

The Spirituals turned into secular Blues in the “Blues-originating land” – the plantation south. What began as field-hollers and shouts were transformed into the spirituals and, divorced from the spirituals and religious reference, they became the secular Blues. Elijah Wald says in his *The Blues: A Very Short Introduction*, “Blues is a genre at heart of American Literature” (9). This “music about God and Bible was sung during work time, play time, and rest time as well as on Sundays at praise meetings” (McKay 5). Leroi Jones (Baraka) in his *Blues People* speaks of the Blues as the beginning of the “American Negroes”, for, that is when they became part of the American experience. According to him:

Even though its birth and growth seems connected finally to the general movement of the mass of black Americans into the central culture of the country, blues still went back for its impetus and emotional meaning to the individual, to his completely personal life and death. Because of this, blues could remain for a long time very fresh and singular form of expression”. (Jones, LeRoi 101)

Baraka implies each black woman/man is the entire race and culture. Thus:

The intensity personal nature of blues – singing is also the result of what can be called the Negro’s “American Experience” The insistence of blues verse on the life of the individual and his individual trials and success on earth is a manifestation of the whole western concept of man’s life, and it is a development that could only be found in an American black man’s music. (Jones, Le Roi 102)
Later, as the slaves travelled north, the blues too travelled with them and with musical sophistication and western instrumentation the Jazz was born. The folk Seculars and the Spirituals, and the Blues and the Jazz, exhibit some of the salient features of West African music like the use of vivid imagery, personification and choice of “forceful and direct” language. The most obvious poetic structure in the folk seculars and the Spirituals is the “call – and response” form. This originated from the West African music. The presence of leader and a chorus in their singing formed the A-B response. Sometimes the first line was repeated twice by the AAB pattern. This way of singing is otherwise known as the antiphonal singing technique. The same technique followed by the slaves led to the shaping of the call- and – response form in their verses and in prose too.

Above all Black Music stands as a strong cultural identity – an ethnic identity to prove their pride and difference and became an integral part of their life, culture and literature. Naylor and Bambara have utilized all these forms in their works which proves their ties with the cultural past. As late as 2003, one anonymous source explained: “Music is shared freely between races and cultures and is the great equalizer”. (Anonymous, Ebony). From a cultural point of view African American music has greatly enriched not just America but global society. Torn from the culture that created it, it has been re-envisioned and reinterpreted in a variety of new contexts, driven by its beat and by the feelings of rebellion and freedom it inspires. The music exists as a paradox. Created in a segregated and exploitative society, it remains a triumphant artistic achievement. The relationship between African-American musical and written texts is that they give voice to protest – from moan to rage, from endurance to celebration, from vernacular to written to rap. From a historical perspective musical genres and period writings can be divided as: a. Spirituals of the Antebellum Writing, b. Work Songs, Prison Songs, Ballads, and Songs of Social Change heard during Reconstruction and New Negro period, c. Blues, Jazz, and Gospel which heightened during Harlem
Renaissance. Rhythm and Blues to Rap which dominated Civil Rights Era to Black Arts and beyond.

But it is impossible to make a clear distinction between chronological order of Black music and Literature, as the impact of music can never be time bound. The twentieth century writers reinvented the qualities of their music in literature. Langston Hughes enumerated the beauty of spirituals and was the first to use them in his work. The Spirituals and Blues of Hughes gave inspiration to all subsequent African American writers to have their unique tradition in form, style, techniques and matter.

Du Bois' interpretation of slave songs as the voice of protest reinforced music as a form of protest.

The subversive nature of slave spirituals interpreted as a code for slave meetings and escapes raises the issue of figurative language, providing a pathway to analysis of not only the songs as literary texts, but the literature of the course as well. The pounding rhythms replicate the content in work and prison songs like “Po Lazarus”, and then reoccur in poems like Sterling Brown’s “Southern Road”, the jazz rhythms and twelve-bar blues structures are found in the poetry of Brown and Langston Hughes; and those forms tighten and repeat in Hip Hop and Black Arts Movement anger. The intersection of gender and race in the blues of Bessie Smith and songs like “You May Go but This Will Bring You Back” sung by Zora Neal Hurston are fine examples of protest element manifesting in music established in literature and later developed into “protest literature”. (101)
As Bernard Bell has stated, music along with religion, humor and language are “cultural forms that enable blacks to repress and sublimate hardships as they pursue a better life for themselves and future generations” (Bell 130). For African Americans, music is more than a journey into their past; it is a journey of the heart of what America is all about. Jazz as a combination of African and European musical elements evolved as a fitting metaphor of the miscegenation between black female slave and white master-the American experience. The legendary Greek figure Orpheus was said to have possessed magical powers capable of moving all living and inanimate things through the sound of his lyre and voice. Over time, the Orphic theme has come to indicate the power of music to unsettle, subvert, and ultimately bring down oppressive realities in order to liberate the soul and expand human life without limits. The African Americans have changed the styles of their music rapidly. Blues took different dimensions as rural blues, boogie woogie, rhythm & blues, rock & roll, rap, hip hop and Jazz tradition moved from ragtime, swing, bebop, cool, soul jazz, free jazz, jazz fusion, new jazz, swing and so on. This process proves how they negotiated with their difference. The liberating effect of music has been a particularly important theme in twentieth-century African American literature.

Writers such as Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, James Baldwin, Nathaniel Mackey, Sherley Anne Williams, Ann Petry, Ntozake Shange, Alice Walker, Gayl Jones, and Toni Morrison found and treated music as a mystical, shamanistic, and spiritual power that can miraculously transform the realities of the soul and of the world.

Naylor and Bambara like most of their contemporaries have transmitted the characteristic features and the nature and quality of their music into their writings. Spirituals and Blues are embedded in their works to pour out the heartache of their characters or as a solace when the hot waves of stark realism tortured them mercilessly. Jazz techniques are employed by the writers in their
experimentation and innovation in forms of their works. Their music, the most indigenous of their arts, has played a vital role in shaping and stamping their identity and establishing their pride before their oppressors who could only repeat and reproduce the musical notes on the paper. The whites began to admire the black music and started using it. “You’ve taken my blues and gone”, writes Langston Hughes. African American music has been an amazing cultural achievement, synthesizing African and European culture, and defining the American identity. The music shared freely between races and cultures was an equalizer articulating their ethnicity in the case of African Americans.

The richness of African American novel relies on its hybridity from the tradition and vitality derived from the sediment of the indigenous roots of black American folklore and literary genres of the Western world. So holistic approach to novel becomes a socially symbolic act, examining it as rewriting of their survival strategies with their vernacular, music, and religion by which black Americans as an ethnic group came to consciousness of themselves and celebrated their quest for personal and social freedom and wholeness. Their works have a quest for authority, autonomy and originality. Their themes and subject were a blend of historical, ordinary and empirical experience and residual oral forms.

In *The Women of Brewster Place*, Naylor renders the predicament of her only male (major) character of the novel. Ben’s lamentations of his past, his lack of manhood, hence his loss of power as a husband and a father is juxtaposed with spirituals. This technique used by Naylor makes her prose ‘lyrical’. Most of the Black writers’ adaptation of dialect or vernacular makes their language musical – their prose mostly becomes poetic. Ben’s narration is an excellent example of songs and poetry woven in prose.

An alcoholic but a kind janitor, Ben in the Brewster Place, is a representative of the African American men and his dilemma in the society
because of his lack of wealth, political power and prestige enjoyed by their white counterparts. Maxine L Montgomery rightly points outs “Naylor uses the account of Ben’s southern sharecropper experience as a historic frame accounting for the anonymity - that the men in the community endure in the welfare system” (14). Ben’s plight is very much similar to that of Younger who struggles in the white society to prove himself as a man – a successful man in Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Ben’s wife Elvira attacks Ben’s inability to save his daughter from the sexual advances of the wealthy white land owner Mr. Clyde. She voices capitalist ideals of manhood lacking among men of Brewster Place, which results in a kind of perpetual boyhood:

> If you was half a man, you could a given me more babies and we woulda had some help working this land instead of a half-grown woman we gotta carry the load for. And if you was even quarter a man, we wouldn’t be a bunch of miserable sharecroppers on someone else’s land- but we is, Ben. (WBP 153)

Ben’s agony and menace find solace in spirituals which is almost like breathing for him. Spirituals seeped into his self and Ben and spirituals are inseparable.

A black writer who fails to draw inspiration from the spirituals is doing a kind of injustice to their literary tradition. Stimulated by the spirituals Naylor superfluously utilizes them to unravel the mystery disturbing the mind of the man in Brewster place. The swinging of Ben’s mind between consciousness and unconsciousness, past and present and love and hatred is poured out in ‘Swing low, Sweet chariot’ hummed forever.
The saliva was dripping from the corners of his mouth because, he had to take a huge gulp of wine between breaths, but he sang on-drooling and humming – because to sing was salvation, to sing was empty the tune from his blood, to sing was to unremember Elvira, and his daughter’s ‘Mornin’, Daddy Ben” as she dragged her twisted foot up his front porch with that song hitting her in the back.

Swing low,
Mornin’ Ben. Mornin’, Elvira
Sweet chariot’
The red pick-up truck stopped in front of Ben’s yard.
Comin’ for to carry me home.
Comin’ for to carry me home.
His daughter got out of the passenger side and began to limp toward the house
Swing low. (WPB 150)

The nature of black music is the nature of black speech, so prose too turns into ‘speech musicked’ as Baraka called black poetry. Music has penetrated into the soul, mind and body of blacks that –Africa American writers have tapped the essential poetic resources of the black speech and rhythm. Not only the political dependence and their cultural difference as being outsiders in the white man’s land have been responsible for the uniqueness of their experience but also their language and literature. Hence writers are sensitive to whatever is especially ‘theirs’.

The people of Brewster place were awakened by the somber tones of ‘swing low, sweet chariot’ which seemed to have a cathartic effect on him. "Ben and his drinking became a fixture on Brewster place, just like the wall” (WBP 3). The spirituals relied heavily upon Biblical phraseology and ideas. Zora Neale Hurston defines spirituals as the "Negro religious songs, sung by a
group, and a group bent on expression of feelings and not on sound effects" (3). The African Americans’ plight was very much similar to the Israelites who were made slaves in Egypt. They too look forward to their deliverance from the bondage of spacelessness and facelessness. Naylor uses the most famous spiritual “Swing Low, Sweet chariot, Coming for to carry me home”. (WBP 150) In life’s rhythms, man swings to the utmost extremes of weariness and pain.

The spirituals ‘swing low’ becomes one with Ben and it becomes his own. While discussing this feature Sterling Brown certifies that, “Negro singer took what he liked where he found it. And then he changed it, and, the most important point is “he made it his own” (21). Zora Neale Hurston expresses a similar opinion that all aspects of black religious worship which range from ‘sermons, prayers, moans, to testimonies’ have definite forms. At the same time she admits that these forms are flexible enough to provide room for ‘new and original elaboration’ (90).

Naylor’s intimate and intuitive knowledge of the folk forms which is the fountain head of the Black art and culture is explicit in such usages. The rich heritage of spirituals with spontaneous lyrical outbursts employed by Naylor make her prose more poetic. The music being inborn in the writer, she cannot possibly separate herself from it. This explains why Naylor always went to her music for form, structure and techniques and even themes.

Confirming that spirituals is an eternal source of inspiration from the oral tradition we find Naylor using the traditional spirituals - 'Go down Moses' It serves as an identity to Canaan Baptist church of poor blacks in Brewster Place against the muted benediction of prosperous blacks of Sinai Baptist. Music also connects them with their past. Naylor beautifully puts it "The words were as ancient as the origin of their misery, but the tempo had picked up threefold in its evolution from the cotton fields" (WBP 63). "The people sang
knowing that the world has changed but for some mystic, complex season their burden has not" (WBP 63).

God said to go down
Go down
Brother Moses
Brother Moses
To the shore of the great Nile River.

The choir clapped and stomped each syllable into a devastating reality, and just as it did, the congregation reached up, grabbed the phrase, and tried to clap and stomp it back into oblivion.

Go to Egypt
Go to Egypt
Tell pharaoh
Tell pharaoh
Let my people go. (WBP 63)

The music emanates from the sound. Music came with rhythm; singing was always accompanied with dancing for African Americans. This scene from Mama Day reminds the readers of Africa, the origin and fountainhead of their art and culture.

The clapping continued between the deep baritones of Parris’s voice:

Take my hand. Precious Lord.
Lead me on. Let me stand.
I am tired. I am weak. I am worn. (MD 333)
Each syllable was beat off in tune with their hands while his raised small clouds of dust on the ground-

Through the dark. Through the night.
Lead me on to the light.
Take my hand, Precious Lord.
And lead me home. (MD 334)

Their music has infiltrated into their whole being that it overflows as words –spoken and written. The body movements and clapping, stomping echoes and the significance of this song on three levels - spiritual, political and African Americans seeking for a sense of direction demonstrate the fact that music cannot be separated from this personal and communal life.

In contrast to Ben, Naylor has created Etta Mae Johnson who consoles her heart with blues. Her surmounting resentment and disillusions melt down with Billie Holiday’s music. Etta Mae Johnson’s story from her home town Rockvale, Tennesse to Memphs, Detroit, Chicago and even in New York was the same and miserable because she was just being herself. The heartache of the southerner gets expressed in the ‘Blues’.

I love my man
I’m a lie if I say I don’t
I love my man
I’m a lie if I say I don’t
But I’ll quilt my man
I’m a lie if I say I won’t. (WBP 55)

With her hands and heart full of Billie Holiday albums and music she reaches Brewster Place. The blues “a dual negation of self and world” (Switzer
and a recovery from the negative experience, comes to rescue Etta Mae Johnson.

There ain’t nothing I ever do
Or nothing I ever say
That folks don’t criticize me
But I’m going to do
Just what I want to, anyway
And don’t care just what people say
If I should take a notion
To jump into the ocean
Ain’t nobody’s business if I do? (WBP 57)

Naylor writes “The music, the woman, the words” (WBP 55). The above song clearly portrays the nature and character of Etta Johnson. The songs of Billie Holiday reveal the timbre of Etta’s life, pain, loneliness, heartbreak-haughty disdain for social rubs and prescribed behavior. Alice walker in *Meridian* explores the relevance of the blues experience in the life of the black people. The Blues “is the song of the people transformed by the experience of each generation, that holds them together, and if any of it is lost, the people suffer and are without soul” (Wald 271).

Gospel music, as one mentioned below

Them that’s got, shall get
Them that’s not, shall lose
So the Bible says
And it still is news. (WBP 59)

expresses hope and deliverance from pain, for whom past is a void and future bleak. Jazz and gospel music like Janus faced mixture of sensuality and salvation depict the life of Etta. She ‘wasn’t being an uppity nigger’ (WBP 60)
in abiding by the social rules of behaviour governing the relationship between southern whites and blacks. The following lines convey that Etta was born in South soon after the civil war.

Southern trees bear strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
Black bodies swinging
In the southern breeze
Strange fruit hanging
From the poplar trees. (WBP 60)

This has the historical overtones of the antebellum period. This is about the hanging of bodies of slaves caught during their attempt to escape. The life of African Americans is very firmly connected with their music as it was the only source of solace. The music is in her being and Etta Mae literally carries the albums with the singers and songs in her heart. Her car ride with Rev. Moreland Woods begins with:

Smooth road
Clear day
But why am I the only one
Traveling this way
How strange the road to love
Can be so easy
Can there be a detour ahead? (WBP 71)

and suggests the futility of all her expectations. She expects this car ride would lead her to marry him and settle in life. But he exploits her anxiety and throws her out. Karen Ford writes: “even the focus on the individual suggested by the ubiquitous blues themes of lost love and estrangement signifies the larger problem of the dispossessio
and estrangement is signifying not only her dispossession in Brewster Place but also in her life. She finds refuge in “Blues”. Songs of Bessie Smith and of Ma Rainey in which representations of pain suffered by women in their sexual relationships often also seem to be metaphorical allusions to pain caused by the material hindrances of sexism and racism give solace and direction in her life.

Naylor blends the private and the shared, the sexual and social life of Etta as in Blues themes. This is predominant in Naylor’s Bailey’s Café which will be discussed in detail in this chapter. At the end Etta realizes that she must depend on her own for salvation. Suffering both physically and mentally Etta clings to music and she always celebrates it. Etta is outplayed by man just like Mattie while Etta establishes her relationship with music; Mattie institutes black sisterhood. When Etta looks at Brewster Place from the hotel in which she was with Rev. Woods after everything was over between them, “it crouched there in the thin predawn light like ‘a pulsating mouth’ awaiting her arrival” (WBP 73). “If I walk into this street, she thought, I’ll never comeback. I’ll never get out. Oh, dear God, I am so tired so very tired” (WBP 73). In Naylor’s hands the language flows like clear stream of African American music. The black musicals are forms blended with her characters’ woes, and miserable plight.

Naylor making her character turn towards Bessie Smith and her songs is very significant as Smith was an articulator and shaper of African American identity. Ralph Ellison points out:

The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one’s aching consciousness, to finger into jagged grain and to transcend it, not by consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near tragic, near –comic lyricism. As a form the blues is an
autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed
lyrically. (qtd in Byerman 114)

The blues refrain is another feature found throughout the novel. Cora Lee is a happy mother as long as her infants are dependents but she neglects them when they grow up. She doesn’t know how to handle them. Her obsession with dolls as a child turned her into a grown up not wanting anything else but easily satisfied with ‘the gift of dead plastic’. But alas she destroyed them—“heads smashed and arms twisted”. She begets children just for the sake of getting a new baby every year like the dolls she got, but hasn’t learned how to nurture or love her children. Her children too can’t take responsibilities for their actions or haven’t learnt how to make reasonable choices. Kiswana steps in and tries to help Cora Lee to take the children to watch the black production of ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’ by her boy -friend Ahsbu. But Cora is reluctant as her kids are unmanageable. When Cora questions Kiswana why she doesn’t have kids when she is so good with them, Kiswana answers she doesn’t have a husband. “Cora says “So neither do I”. (WBP 120) Cora also supports her argument saying, “Babies don’t take up much space you just bring in a crib and a little chest and you’re all set”. (WBP 120) “But babies grow up, Kiswana said softly and handed the child back to Cora with a puzzled smile” (WBP 120).

After Kiswana leaves, her words linger in Cora’s mind echoing like a refrain just as Kiswana’s perfume lingers in the air, disturbing her. She glances through the studio poses of her kids, Dorain, Brucie, Sammy, Maybellnie—Deirdre and Daphne (twins) and they stare back at her “But babies grow up”.

Naylor uses this refrain to indicate the conscientizing of Cora—her duty as a mother. She wheels round to finish all her house hold chores like her ancestors, realizing babies grow up and the mother also has to grow up. Her
Both Naylor and Bambara have made the most of jazz in their works. Jazz music played a significant role in creating that new African American self because of its already established integrationist sub-cultural nature. Although jazz music remained an essentially marginal form of popular culture and the race relations in the mainstream society stayed rather unchanged in general, jazz clubs and other social spaces indeed accommodated various kinds of cross racial interaction between audience members and musicians, creating significant examples of resistance to segregation and embodying a sense of what King terms freedom as collective liberation. Therefore, jazz provided a place for the production of alternative and oppositional identities. Nat Hentoff highlights this. “There is more interracial social equality in jazz than in any other area of American society because more whites and Negroes actually come to know each other as individuals in jazz than they are likely to in their business or social lives” (36).

Jazz music, from its very initial stages as blues and work songs, has evolved through an “escape from boundaries” and a creation of its own form and standards; its own identity. Hard pop saxophonist Sonny Rollins talked about jazz and its meaning for freedom:

Jazz has always been music of integration. In other words, there were definitely lines where blacks would be and whites would begin to mix a little bit. I mean, jazz was not just a music; it was a social force in this country, and it was talking about freedom and people enjoying things for what they are and not having to worry about whether they were supposed to be white, black, and all this stuff, Jazz has always been the
music that had this kind of spirit. A lot of times, jazz means no bar. (303)

The blues gave birth to jazz, the musical form of poetry. Jazz is an individual performance with rhythmic beauty which highlights the day-to-day affairs. It emerged in the first decades of the twentieth century in African American communities with the confluence of African and European music traditions. It is the expression of the artistic meeting of elements and is used in ragtime, opera, and other European classical music. It is instrumental music strongly impacted by the sound of the African American voice. Jazz is a song, very personal with new musical felicity. These types of songs have an introduction, a break, and choruses with main themes, along with the secondary connecting theme. Call and response improvisation, syncopated cadences and other characteristic features of Jazz had an impact on the form and content of African American Literature.

Jazz is neither a solitary art nor can it reveal itself in the music form only. Jazz has been manifested in the powerful narratives encompassing jazz literature. In all of its modes, jazz narrates a people’s emotional reaction to oppression, expresses the artistic abilities of African-Americans, and provides a voice for those whose voices have been beaten into submission. From music the voice moved into poetry and from poetry into fiction. The narrative of jazz tells the stories of a people who developed a music that transcended racial boundaries and is an art that allowed for the emergence of self-expression in an overtly oppressed race.

Most of the African American writers have succeeded in capturing the magical capacity of music to imprint human behaviour in all of its impressive variety in their attempt to create stories influenced by Jazz. Language may not translate music exactly but the actions of the character, the description of landscape provide metaphoric ways to consider the essence of music. African
American music and its elements are enhanced in the hands of the writers who recreated the ambience of Jazz. They dramatized the lives of players and listeners in ways which allowed the readers to reconsider their music beyond lives and have proffered them with strong sense of identity and indignity.

The importance of African American identity is subordinate to the more expansive—infinitely more significant—question of humanity behind the music and its capacity to shape human behaviour. James Baldwin’s “Sonny’s Blues” is in conjunction with Baldwin’s own struggle with personal identity. Listening to Bessie Smith’s ‘Nobody knows my name’, Baldwin who was ashamed of Jazz, blues, Negro church and all stereotypes that country inflicted on the Negroes got inspired by her bravery. Her music enabled him to ‘dig back’ and find a more authentic black idiom and a more natural speech. Like their predecessors Naylor and Bambara have also been influenced by Jazz.

Jazz fiction can be either fiction about Jazz or fiction with Jazz-like prose. Jazz poetry as that of Langston Hughes and others had features like typographical uniqueness (vignette of a Jazz), musical techniques in poetry, clues like ellipsis, musical language—recreating the instrumental improvisational techniques, which are also found in the prose of many African American writers such as Ellison, Albert Murray, Baldwin, Morrison and Naylor. In 1948 Charles Harvey edited Jazz Parody: Anthology of Jazz Fiction which had prose pieces of mixed quality. A collection of Jazz short stories and poems Bflat, Bebop, Beat was published in 1986 and was edited by Chris Parker. Blue Lightening a collection of eighteen stories was edited by John Harvey. It is interesting to note that Jazz related mystery fiction was edited and published by Robert J. Randisi in 2004. The two important anthologies containing about twenty Jazz stories were published in 1990. They were Hot and cool: Jazz Short Stories edited by Marcella Breton and From Blues to Bop: A collection of Jazz Fiction edited by Richard Albert.
This list manifests the impact of black music especially Jazz in the life and literature of the African Americans. Apart from these collections there are many writers who used the musical techniques and qualities in their writing to preserve their ethnicity. The incorporation of improvisation, call and response brought in the musical and dramatic qualities into fiction and prose and widened the scope for new forms and techniques in literature. As Jelly Roll Morton and others have claimed, it is music that opens up the window and lets the bad air out, music has beautified the lives of African Americans and has enriched their language and literature. African American writers attempt to experiment with new forms and techniques which empowered them with dexterity. Naylor’s account of how Bailey’s Café was conceived in her mind, through an image of an old man and woman dancing for ‘Mood Indigo’ when she listened to it, explains the perpetual impact of music in the mind of the artists.

Most of the African American writers perceived music as a liberating force against the racial, social, and sexual repression of American society enjoyed the freedom that they believed the music represented, and their poetry and prose also borrowed the swinging rhythms of the era's Ragtime and Dixieland jazz styles. James Baldwin linked the jazz soloist's expressive individualism to the group's identity. Further, he used jazz improvisation as a communication which functions as a form of group memory and communal values within African American culture.

Women writers of African American origin have proudly projected the characteristics of their music in their writing. Toni Morrison named her novel Jazz. Naylor and Bambara have chosen the jazz mode and translated jazz an aural language into writing, to suit their novels’ theme and structure deliberately and this has enabled their works to gain orality and musicality, with which the texts sing. In her interview with Donna Perry in 1991, Naylor
very clearly stated how she has designed Bailey's Cafe with characteristic features of Jazz.

*Bailey's Cafe* deals with female sexuality, and I’ve structured it around a set of Jazz, in that you have the maestro come in—that’s Bailey- and then you have a section called ‘The Vamp’, this as you know, in music is the introduction of all of the notes and all of the things that will be used. That happens; then there’s a section called the Jam, which has different songs, if you will. There are no quotation marks in the book—this is all supposed to be in music. You will have the different songs that will occur, all involving most of the women and also a man, Miss Maple, who happens to come to this café. (95)

This gives a clear picture that similar to her other novels Naylor in *Bailey’s Cafe* too has dealt with the theme of female sexuality and has defined male and female. The form of this novel is attuned to the Jazz, telling the tales of individuals- like solo performance and counterpoint- several melodies with different rhythms played simultaneously. In form and theme *Bailey’s Cafe* seems to have resemblance with her debut novel *The Women of Brewster Place* as Naylor blends the form of short stories and novels as in a Jam session.

The manifold forms reflect the nuances of African American experience and existence. Naylor’s exuberant language in *Bailey’s cafe* is a replica of each character and its background. It turns poetic in accordance with the emotions and pain undergone by the characters and also the jazz mode of the novel. Naylor has used the Jam technique of tying the pieces together, which had helped her return to the same theme in each section.
The novel has been divided into various sections, Maestro, If you please, The Vamp, The Jam, Mood, Indigo, Eve’s song, Sweet Esther, Mary (take one), Jesse Belle, Mary (take two), Miss Maple’s Blues and The Wrap. ‘Maestro, If you please’ is the introductory section in which Bailey talks about him, his wife Nadine and the Cafe. He tells that, “There’s a whole set to be played here if you want to stick around and listen to the music. And since I’m standing at centre stage, I’m sure you’d enjoy it if I first set the tempo with a few fascinating titbits about myself” (BC 4). He says that he had almost no education but has gained a lot of learning from this world. His parents provided food and meagre education. He developed an interest in baseball after his father, especially in the Negro Leagues. Nadine, his wife is a woman of few words; her one line letter to Bailey proves that she is quiet by nature. She writes, “If you don’t make it home, I’m marrying the butcher, Love Nadine” (BC 13). They run an eatery at the edge of the world. In this section Bailey introduces his customers one by one to the reader.

Blues set the tone for a literary jazz concert in Bailey’s Café the last of Naylor’s quartet novels. The dejected women from various places come to Café which is described by its proprietor “the place sits on the margin between the edge of the world and infinite possibility” (BC 76). The narratives of these characters indicate “the destructive effects of their mistreatment either by men or women who accept the patriarchal vision of women’s reality” (Byerman 88). Their hopeless condition in which they have no place or person to return has ample scope for blues pattern. With the repetition and improvisation of blues, the women adjust the blues line about ‘the end of the world’ and they sing a varied repeat line that they had ‘come to the end of the line’. (BC 91,112)

The cafe situated between Eve’s boarding house and Gabe’s pawn shop forms “a kind of transitory Bermuda triangle attracting the hopeless” (Fowler 242) and function as “a relay for broken dreams” (BC 144). So Naylor chooses a musical mode that symbolizes collective performance. The flexibility and
In his *Blues and Ideology* Baker enunciates that Blues is a 'cultural matrix' and blues singer is at cross roads.

To suggest a trope for the blues as a forceful matrix [...] is to summon an image of the black blues singer at the railway junction [...] transforming experiences of a durative landscape into the energies of rhythmic song. The railway juncture is marked by transience. Its inhabitants are travellers-a multifarious assembly in transit. Polymorphous and multidirectional, scene of arrivals and departures, place betwixt and between (ever entre les deux), the juncture is the way-station of the blues. (Baker 7)

Naylor’s blues singers find the café at “the 'hopeless cross road of their lives’”(BC 224). “When those railroad tracks ran out of land going east, I changed trains and went south, then north. I was circling back toward the east again and realized I’d come to the end of the line. That’s when I heard of a place where women like me could go. Just get off that next stop, I was told; You can find Bailey’s Café in any town” (BC 112). This resounds the Crossroad blues ,“Standing at the crossroads, tried to flag a ride/Standing at the crossroads, tried to flag a ride/Aint nobody seem to know me, everybody passed by me” (Baker 1).

For a collective performance of the characters at the cross roads, it is no wonder Naylor selected jazz mode for their narration. “Jazz as it developed was a blue-based music” states Amiri Baraka in his *Blues People* (Baraka 78). “Jazz
is mostly an extension, elaboration and refinement of blues break riffing and improvisation” point out Jurgen Grandt and Albert Murray (Grandt xv) in their introduction to Kind of Blue: The Jazz Aesthetic in African American Literature. Naylor’s chronicles move from the plane of blues to that of jazz. The second section ‘The Vamp’ reveals the pattern set in the cafe and how everything and everyone fall into a pattern. “There are no menu cards Bailey says, “New customers are a pain in the butt until they get into rhythm of things. Fried Chicken Mondays. Hamburgers Tuesdays. Fish on Fridays. And a weekend open house: breakfast, lunch, dinner: your call” (BC 31).

This pattern in the cafe and the introduction of minor voices like Sister Carrie and Sugar Man is similar to the Jazz setting- the tempo, key, mood and the character. Sister Carrie- Cornerstone of the Temple of perpetual Redemption, a woman afraid of her own appetites and Sugar Man- all-around hustler and Pimp are introduced by Bailey. Bailey says, “Sister Carrie and Sugar Man aren’t as far apart as they sound. If you don’t listen below the surface, they’re both one-note players. Flat and Predictable” (BC 34). He also calls them minor voices. As a voice of the community requests the readers to listen in Mama Day, in Bailey’s Café too the narrator advises, “You need to know that if you plan to stick around here and listen while we play it all out” (BC 35).

One crucial aspect of jazz is the notion of personal narrative “of telling your own story”. (Grandt xiii) In ‘The Jam’ multitude of voices compete for their voices to be heard, voices assert in different degrees. “The jam session reinforces the relationship of individual and the community” (Fowler 137). As in the performance of jazz, the theme of the novel is improvised from the first soloist Sadie’s story to the last soloist Miss Maple’s narration. In Gabe’s pawnshop, Miss Maple sees a display of instruments- rows of guitars, saxophones and clarinets (BC 212) typify blues and jazz together that resound jam session – narratives from “Mood : Indigo” to “Miss Maple’s Blues”.

For Naylor every character is a song and the entire world is a jam, which introduces the stories of the central characters. The jam session have soloists recounting their tales in different degrees in first person or third person voices is like a spectrum fortifying individual’s relationship with the community. The stories of Esther, Mary, Jesse Bell, Mary and Miss Maple are narrated by Bailey and Nadine very naturally. Bailey instructs the reader, “Here I’ll show you that nobody comes with a simple story. Every one liner’s got a life underneath it. Every point’s got a counterpoint” (BC 34).

Typical of the story telling tradition of the blacks, Eve’s boarding house in Bailey’s Cafe accommodates the destitute women and the readers listen to the stories of its occupants. Eve’s brownstone has a garden with wild flowers and each woman boarding there is identified or associated with a particular flower and a man must buy that flower from Eve to meet a particular woman. Eve is the most powerful customer of Bailey Cafe and was raised by her ‘Godfather’ in Louisiana, her story is equally powerful. She is awakened to her sexuality, in her teenage. Her God father, who doesn’t allow anyone to come near her, chases her away from home. Her dangerous journey to New Orleans both destroys and remakes her. She sets her garden in the New York City block for the fallen women but she is not a charitable woman, as she doesn’t accept everyone. With her story the narrator unfolds the tragic tales of the women one by one.

From Eve’s story the narrator moves to Esther, another woman ditched by men of her family. If Eve was ditched by her God father, Esther is abandoned her elder brother. Sweet Esther is forced by her elder brother at the age of twelve to become a wife of a man, who he calls her husband, and asks her to live and have sex with the man in a basement. She is in darkness and silence as her brother warns her that, “We won’t speak about this Esther” (BC 96). Because of this bitter experience she chooses to stay in the dark basement of Eve’s boarding house, like Willa Prescott Needed of Linden Hills. Men
should come with roses to meet her and address her as little sister. The length of the story or role of a character does not determine their significance. At the same time their melodies are interdependent though they are independent in rhythm and contour. Unlike the narrator of classical tradition, Bailey comments, interprets, records his observations.

Mary’s woe originates from her spotless beauty which is like a magic spell enticing everyone. Her story begins with Mary’s daddy entering the cafe searching for his plump and sweet daughter ‘Peaches’. The pride he took in his daughter’s beauty gets shattered when he finds that every man sees her as an object of sex and every woman considers her a threat to her marriage. He starts leaving the closed gate for boys who roam after her and slowly confines her within the walls. Mary gets scared of her own beauty and hangs mirrors in her walls and treats her whore image as ‘her’. When ‘I’ and ‘she’ become one for her, hatred and pity for her father drives her out of her home and from the lustful eyes of men in the world. She cuts her face and disfigures it as if to destroy her whore self and leaves home to find refuge in Eve’s boarding house.

Jesse Bell is a victim of class consciousness of her husband’s people. Her scandal ridden marriage drives her to heroin and she becomes an addict to it. The conflict between Kings (Jesse’s in-laws) and the Bells, right from the music, dance, and party and also bringing up of her son and his education slowly isolates Jesse from her son. It hits her heavy when her son refuses to attend the nineteenth anniversary of Jesse’s mother as he had nothing common with those people. The ill treatment of Bells by Kings and not being accepted as a mother and a wife in the Kings family makes her seek refuge in drugs and women and ultimately reaches Bailey’s Cafe.

Mary (Mariam) comes to Gabriel’s pawn shop claiming that, no man has ever touched her. This fourteen year old excommunicated Jew from Ethiopia is pregnant. Gabe announces her arrival and brings her to Eve’s Way station. She
comes from an Ethiopian village in which the customs and rituals are more sacred and vital than their lives. Tradition teaches them gender discrimination: “Nine Shouts for a female and twelve for a male child” (BC 146). Women are not allowed to cross the threshold for Sabbath offerings in the holy ground after a certain age, after attaining puberty or child birth discloses patriarchal regimentation. Ethiopian women prepare for the feasting and ceremony of ostracizing. When Mariam is found pregnant she is excommunicated and her mother is punished according to their law. Left alone in the roads of her village Mariam sets her journey towards Addis Ababa where she is to get help and protection from the woman known to the high priest’s wife. But the family not found there, she walks and walks and reaches Gabe’s shop, curls into a ball and lies down due to fatigue. The heart rending ‘song’ of Miriam is overflowing with bluesiness.

The story of Stanley Beckwourth Booker T. Washington Carve who is christened by Eve as Miss Maple, is the last and the longest titled as ‘Miss Maple's Blues'. As ‘Blues is black man's heartache’ or the melancholic fit they feel, Naylor has named Miss Maple’s story as blues. Conceiving his own idea of manhood, Stanley thinks of his father as a coward, but later gets a new understanding of what it means “to become a man” (BC 182). Stanley as Miss Maple who hated his father for not fighting back against the white racist harassment, at the end of the novel is able to transcend all political, racial and cultural barriers. He presides over the formal ceremony of circumcision of Mariam’s son along with the black male proprietor of the café, who identifies himself as an American Negro and Gabe, the Russian Jew. The three male characters of the novel respond to the boy’s birth with their dance and the cross cultural ceremony of circumcision. It focuses towards the positive model of masculinity that Naylor presents in her fourth novel Bailey’s Cafe. The jazz swing and dance culminates in the birth, which symbolizes rebirth of mirth amidst the forlorn and estranged existence of the customers of café and women in Eve’s Boarding house.
With a degree in statistics from Stanford, Miss Maple applies for the posts of marketing analyst and statistical analyst but haunted and chased by the six lettered word (nigger). He is offered jobs as bellboy, mailroom clerk, sleeping-car porter, elevator operator. Coming from an assorted family, with multi-ethnic, multicultural background and ancestral property, Miss Maple is unable to get a job and establish his position in the cosmopolitan city. He gets fed up with the men’s wear which is unable to endure heat and thinks of business attires Arabian djellaba and light gauze Bombay dhoti designed for the tropical weather. This switching over from one dress to another signifies the improvisatory quality of music (Jazz), assumption of an identity and celebration of the difference. The social construct of gender is shattered when Stanley turns into Miss Maple. He chooses the dress of American female “The sleeves were short, the shirt’s loose and airy” (BC 201) and then “a simple tailored cotton dress and street jackets. Dark cotton gloves” (BC 202).

He drafts a letter in his mind to his papa before coming to the cafe “I have been in small towns and large cities; I have been in clothes of every description. There I no doubt-nor ever will be-that I am a man” (BC 212). He reaches Gabe’s pawn shop directed to the cafe where he meets Eve who offers him a job as a housekeeper. He is in the gray flannel suit with open shirt and in winter regular pants and jacket as he feels the freedom of it. He is doubted by Sugar man and others as a gay, but he lives as his father wanted: There is no greater love than what is found within. There is no greater love than reaching beyond boundaries to other men. There is no greater wealth than possessing true peace of mind. When my son left me to go out on his own, I wanted to give him the vision of such a brave new world (BC 186).

This is Naylor’s message to the world. Miss Maples’ song serves as the basic undertone of the whole novel which is like music- the universal language-which brought whites and blacks together to get relieved of their burden.
“The café exists for the sake of the stories, which are narratives of suffering especially those of women” (Byerman 86). From the positioning of the café through the narration of various customers coming there and the final wrap of the novel there is fluidity strongly resembling jazz. As Grandt points out “Jazz has always been an unruly art form, much too fluid, much too subversive to fit neatly into determinate grids or fixed categories” (Grandt xiv). Each solo as well as the jam session is fluid and flexible that if readers can change the names of characters all their stories will fit any woman, and her tensions of her sexuality.

Ralph Ellison in his seminal work *Shadow and Act* writes “true jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group….each true jazz moment., springs from a contest in which each artist challenges all the rest” (234). Bailey’s customers “keep a running feud going … Like this place is their personal discovery and only for them and their kind (BC 32). Esther can’t accept Miss Maple as he is a man and Sugar Man loses his senses when Miss Maple is around because according to him “he is a bad luck bringing faggot” (BC 116). Sadie’s story is again centered and contextualized in Miss Maple's story. Naylor utters the predicament of the women in the novel:

He was to say, all right now hopefully you’ve subliminally gone through women who would be classified as whores and the writer’s taken you into the world, all around the edges of the world […].Now you will look at what’s been going on: What she’s been attempting to do all the way through is to upset your assumptions about what is male or female, what is purity, what is whoredom. (131)

Last chapter “the wrap”, the closure of the Jazz is also a keynote to a new beginning. It is not the end of action, but proclaiming "I am the child of God"8. (BC 226) marks the meaningful existence of global harmony, bringing
all of them together- for a new beginning. Birth of Mariam’s boy declares hope, peace and joy to all gathered there. His birth and circumcision brings them together and creates a sense of community. According to Barnes, “The various songs of the characters blend to create a blues symphony that culminates in the ‘good news’: “Anybody ask you are? Tell him I’m a child of God” (BC 225). The spirituals ‘I am the child of God’ sung at the moment, gains significance in the life of everyone beyond the barriers of race, nation and gender. Only in the last chapter the wrap there is evidence of the presence of other characters which raises a doubt if there was any listener in other chapters when they narrated their stories. Byerman comments on their narration.

The telling has little to do with either the creation of community or the amelioration of pain…. Given the intimate and usually humiliating nature of the experiences, it is improbable that they would be spoken. In the liminal space of the café, they simultaneously are and are not speech. Naylor uses this device as speaking the unspeakable. (86)

Paula Barnes in *Blues Symphony* states that in Bailey’s Cafe Naylor uses African American music as a unifying motif. To read this book is to listen to the blues. The epigraph of Bailey’s Cafe states: “Look and you can hear the blues open a place never closing” (BC 2). If the pattern and design is similar to that of Jazz, each story is painful song as the blues. Naylor’s usage of African American music- both blues and Jazz- is as innovative as Jazz. Bailey’s cafe is a world of music- like juke joints and clubs- providing solace, comfort and hope for all its customers.

Shaped by Jazz, Bailey’s Cafe’s pattern is similar to a hypothetical plan for the Jazz performance as pointed out by Joseph Levy in his Jazz Experience: Introduction (sets the tempo, key, mood and character), Main theme (the central musical idea for the presentation), Variations on the theme (in the form
of solo improvisation), Modulating interlude (moves the piece into another key), Further variations (as written variations for the band), Ending section (creates the effect of concluding the piece).

As the author has divided the novel into various sections with subtitles like ‘Maestro, If you please’, ‘Jam’ and has given suggestive and significant titles of various sections ‘Miss Maple’s Blues’, ‘Mood Indigo’, ‘The Vamp’, ‘The Wrap’, it is obvious that the form and the content are closely knitted by music as in Jazz. The novel is set in the Jazz and blues milieu of the 1940’s among Duke Ellingtons and the Ella Fitzgeraldds. The music from the jukebox in the café stops the characters from disappearing into the void- which strongly reflects the day-to-day experience of African Americans in America. Their soul music saves them from denial of life and existence.

In Bailey’s Café there are the soloists narrating their plight with grief agonized like blues singers whereas in The Salt Eaters there is no narration but memories, dreams, flashbacks and forward, the whole narrative- in a web like strands- is saturated in music and presented as in Bailey’s Café.

Music as a medium and mode of healing and bringing back the distorted mind of individual and black society to wholeness, is one of the major themes of twentieth century African American fiction. The Salt Eaters by Toni Cade Bambara is the story of a community of black faith healers, who searching for the healing properties of salt, witness an event that will change their lives forever. The opening lines of the novel strike the chord “Are you sure, sweetheart, that you want to be well?” (SE 1). A question posed not only to Velma Henry, who has attempted to commit suicide, but also to a community of black folks and the novel describes their search for faith healing through salt. And there was Velma Henry – mother, wife, activist, silenced artist, under-valued laborer for the people, trusted friend, and the invisible corner stone at
the foundation of the community. And Velma had sliced her wrists and crawled into the oven to die.

Seated on a stool in South West Community Infirmary of Claybourne, Georgia before the fabled healer Minnie Ransome, Velma’s mind travels to various places and phases of her past and encounters many characters both human and spiritual. The healing session takes two hours, within the span of two hours Bambara takes her readers into the lives of more than a dozen characters in twelve chapters. The novel opens, two events bring the predominantly African-American community together: the failed suicide attempt of Velma Henry, community activist, and the Spring Festival, an event designed by Claybourne's Academy of the 7 Arts as a reenactment of a Mardi Gras slave insurrection and "a holding action, way to reconcile the camps, to encourage everyone to work together" (SE 92). Velma's healing involves diverse individuals from the Claybourne Infirmary, including the wise-woman healer Minnie Ransom, the older doctor Doc Serge, the younger doctor Julius Meadows, and the 12-member "Master's Mind." Other communities include the multicultural, multiracial Seven Sisters, a troupe of performing or artists, the Academy of the 7 Arts, Claybourne's once-vibrant community center; and the community between Jan and Ruby.

In this attempt, Bambara cannot use a linear plot but a maze like path of stream of consciousness narrative, metaphors, and the supernatural which results in a complicated, dense, and satisfying story revolving around several faith healers of the community. The form and content of the novel are most appropriately delivered by Bambara as a jazz composition.

As Eleanor Traylor states,

*The Salt Eaters* like one complex jazz symphony, orchestrates the chordal riffs introduced in the short stories of Toni Cade
Bambara.....The improvising, stylizing, vamping, recreative method of the jazz composer is the formal method by which the narrative genius of Toni Cade Bambara evokes a usable past testing its values within an examined present moment while simultaneously exploring the recreative and transformative possibilities of experience. The method of the jazz composition informs the central themes and larger revelation of the world of Bambara’s fiction. (65)

The symbolism of the novel's title insists on the need for balance: Salt can be an antidote for a snake bite, but in excess quantities it can often kill. It also alludes to the Biblical story of Lot’s wife who turned into a pillar of salt because she could not resist looking back, excessive loyalty to old things, a fear of the new, fear of change results in ossification of the self. Bambara explained that *The Salt Eaters* came from a desire to bridge the spiritual and the political, "to investigate possible ways to bring our technicians of the sacred and our guerillas together". (Bambara 31)

Bambara had unswerving faith in healing power of history and had realized the need for wholeness to struggle and survive as she was an activist. As John Wideman notes in the New York Times Book Review:

In her highly acclaimed fiction and in lectures, [Bambara] emphasizes the necessity for black people to maintain their best traditions, to remain healthy and whole as they struggle for political power. *The Salt Eaters*, her first novel, eloquently summarizes and extends the abiding concerns of her previous work. (21)

In the process of healing of Velma, Bambara brings in both the ancient and scientific means to attain ‘wholeness and she also insists you, “Have to be
whole to see whole” (SE 92). The hint is given in the beginning of the novel, the healing process is equated to jam session asserting the therapeutic value of music, ‘Music? Music. She had thought she’d heard some music. Well, what was this anyway, a healing or a jam session?’(SE 114). In the attempt of regaining Velma’s wholeness, the community too attains it, reinforcing the strong ties between an individual and the community. Contrapuntal or polyphonic improvisation typical of jazz is employed by Bambara as the host of healers goes into their own past and minds. “The polyphonic texture of music was a result of collective improvisation, with each melody player improvising his part in such a way that the parts combined into a balanced integrated whole” says (SE 377). The same polyphonic texture is created with the manifold forms and nuances of existence in the teeming city on the threshold of renewal ready to throw away bad things from life as in Bailey’s Café.

The action of Velma’s healing in the present is interwoven with her past its memories and further webbed to the past of the central characters such as her husband Obie Henry, son Lil James, sister Palma, god mother Sophie Heywood and fable healer Minnie Ransome. The Master’s Mind, twelve disciples of Minnie, hold hands forming a circle around her keep humming and praying with Minnie. From this circle, Velma’s mind like ripples in a pond extend to the music room, the infirmary, Claybourne city, peopled with activists and onlookers and take off to the sky and the universe as if to encompass the entire universe. This is symbolic of the connection between the individual and the society.

The visitors of the carnival and the spring festival for renewal have a myriad display of “spiritual arts” like “astrology, dream analysis, numerology, colorology, the tarot, the Ouija board, reading aura, palms, tea leaves, cards and energy maps’ are thrown open with ‘ancient wisdom and power of prayer’ exercised by ‘the root men….Conjure women…. obeah
The political activism, splitting of the Academy, people losing faith in movements, the conflict between folk and modern healing methods have left the Claybourne disoriented like Velma. In silent response to Minnie's question, Velma begins to recollect a series of reminiscences that travel between the "present" of the Infirmary back to the beginnings of her failing relationship with her husband, James "Obie" Henry, her frustrations with the chauvinism of the Civil Rights movement, and her childhood memories. While Velma's mind 'goes traveling', Minnie consults her spirit guide, "Old Wife," for advice, since Velma's healing appears to be a special case. What ails Velma goes deeper than overwork and exhaustion, just as what "ails" the community goes deeper than the poison of the encroaching nuclear power plant. As one of Velma's friends insists later in the novel, “They're connected” (SE 242). Velma’s journey proceeds toward her ancestral mothers and their strength, with her community gathered around her in a sacred cipher, merging their own stories with Velma’s, and calling on spirit guides and Lwa to create a quilt, a communion, a shelter inside understanding.

If Naylor’s *Bailey’s Cafe* has exploited jazz for the narrative techniques and structure of the novel, in Bambara’s *The Salt Eaters* Velma’s journey from the present to the past and future throughout the healing session with a host of family and friends is comparable to the jazz musician’s skill and ability to present the Jam session unifying the solos of different singers with his own unique piece.
Eleanor W. Traylor in her article, “Music as Theme: The Jazz Mode in the works of Toni Cade Bambara discusses” Bambara’s prose style and points out:

The vitality of the jazz musician, by analogy, is precisely his ability to compose, in the vigorous images of the most recent musical language, the contingencies of time in an examined present moment. The jam session, the ultimate formal expression of the jazz musician is on the one hand a presentation of all various ways, past and present that a tune may be heard; on the other it is a revision of the past history of the tune, or of its presentation by other masters, ensuring what is the lasting and valuable and useful in the tune’s present moment and discarding what is not. (34)

As jazz had created its own forms and style transcending boundaries Bambara has written the novel with a language of music depicting a society in a state of losing its hope, fixity and in doubt, fear and uncertainty rejuvenating itself through its encounter with the past history. Velma’s journey on a superficial level may sound as the Western harmonic music of several voices but it is a typical jam session highlighting the soloists performances closely knitted creating a new and comprehensive whole as a jazz composition. It is also a performance of her fluid identity. Velma lives in her traumatic past; the memories and voices of other persons, plus the cultural memories and constructions that are still considered vital to African American identity. Her memory, interior monologues with herself are strengthened and complemented by voices and memories of her family, friends and community, and become polyphonic.

Bambara was very much fascinated, influenced and inspired by the speaker’s corner and community meeting places of Harlem in 1940s and 50s. She makes use of the voice of the street preacher which calls for awakening.
The gentle hum and ebonic voice of Minnie Ransome, and with the tempo of the tones of twelve disciples of Minnie and their humming in long meter merges and remains distinct like the black music itself. These voices also penetrate through the disfigured mind of Velma ensuring the healing quality of the black music. The process is doubted by Dr. Meadows who has no faith in the healing ritual mutters half aloud “I swear by Apollo the physician..., by Aesculapius, Hygeia and Panacea and to keep according to my ability and my judgment the following oath” (SE 21). Except for a few voices heard in between, the whole novel is unraveling the sub-conscious and unconscious mind of Velma Henry.


*The Salt Eaters* is almost an incantation, poem-drunk, myth-happy, mud caked, jazz-ridden, prodigal in meanings, a kite and a mask. It astonishes because Toni Cade Bambara is so adept at switching from politics to legend, from particularities of character to prehistorical song, from LaSalle Street to voodoo. It is as if she jived the very stones to groan. (Holmes 11)

The stage is set for introducing each of the soloists with her mind’s journey from Velma to her own circle of family and friends:

She (Cora Rider) searched for the faces of the circle of twelve that ringed the two women in the centre of the room, wondering whether God was being thanked for giving Miz Minnie the gift or shutting Cora up. The twelve or the Master’s Mind as some folks called them, stood with heads down and hands clasped. Yellow seems to be predominate,
yellow and white. Shirts, dresses, smocks, stacks yellow and white were as much an announcement that a healing session had been scheduled as the notice on the board. The bobbing roses, pink, yellow chiffon flowerettes on Mrs. Sophie Heywood’s hat, seemed to suggest that she was the one who praised God. Though the gent humming in long meter, his striped tie looking suspiciously like a remnant from a lemonade-stand awning, could just as well have been the one, Cora Rider thought. (SE 11)

The myriad colorful bits as fragmented and unrelated segments unify in jazz-begin to emerge in the multi-layered minds of the characters which wander in search for self and wholeness. Yellow links with and stimulates the psychic center and is suggestive of knowledge predominant in the individual and the collective mind of the community. Yellow presses forward to the new, modern, the developing and the uniformed mind, drawing ideas from the higher mind. White contains all the other colors in the spectrum, in perfect balance and harmony. So it is the color of the awakened Spirit and light of perfection. The pink flowers on the hat suggest affectionate, loving nature of the persons who are sympathetic and understanding with Velma’s plight. The colorology of the African Americans displayed in the carnival is practically applied in their healing session and today chromology studies the psychological effects of color and use it as a therapy for physical ailments and psychic-related conditions. Both the narrative and the healing process are like a song:

Velma caught, caught up, in the weave of the song. Minnie was humming, of the shawl, of the threads, of the silvery tendrils that extended from the healer’s neck and hands and disappeared into the sheen of the sunlight. The glistening bangles, the metallic threads, the dancing fringe, the humming like bees. (SE 4)
The healing sessions usually go on for ten or fifteen minutes but in Velma’s case it takes two hours -with the reconstruction of black history in individual’s and community’s healing - and music plays a significant role in it. "The song running its own course up under the words, up under Velma’s hospital gown, notes pressing against her skin and Velma steeling herself against intrusion". (SE 4-5)

The spell of music seems to hold Velma from escaping from the restoration process. “She wasn’t sure how to move away from Minnie Ransom and from the music, where to throw up the barrier and place the borderguard” (SE 5). The healer reassures herself stating: “In the last quarter, sweetheart, anything can happen. And will” (SE 6).

As she was delving deep into her memories Bambara says she was spinning in her past with music: “Velma was spinning in the music. A teenager at the rink in a fluffy white angora and a black and white checked skating skirt. Spinning in some corny my gal shall merry-go-round organ grinder music. Just the thing, the skaters joked, to keep Black folks off balance. Spinning” (SE 114 – 115).

The healing process heals the mind that words try to come out exorcising the traumatic experiences which has frozen her mind:

Spinning, and then the omen by the turnstile covered with leaves, covered with mud. And it’s too cold for them the babies, young Velma wants to shout out. But the words bubble like foam in the chapped cracks round her mouth and whip around her cheek, the back of her neck, her ear, and seal her mouth closed. (SE 115)
'Spinning' denotes loss of balance, but spinning in music brings back the lost balance. The spinning and spilling of music shapes and moulds Velma’s self towards wholeness.

The music drifted out over the trees toward the Infirmary, maqam now bleeding with the bebop of Minnie Ransom’s tapes. Minnie’s hand was before her face miming ‘talk, talk’ graceful arcs from the wrist as though she were spinning silk straight from her mouth. The music processing against the shawl draped round Velma, pressing through it against her skin and Velma trying to break free of her skin to flow with it, trying to lift, to sing with it... She would sing. Minnie would spin and she would sing and it would be silk. (SE 168)

The novel opens with an interrogation, later many questions are raised by various characters at different situations echoing all over the text reflecting the uncertainty overwhelming in the atmosphere. Obie tries to pacify Velma and patch up the differences between them "Can’t we, Vee? Push all the past aside, dump all of it" (SE 20). His hands were churning the air and the spinach thread was wiggling. "Create a vacuum for good things to rush in. Good things" (SE 25). When Palma, Velma and Ruby are in a heated discussion about the role of women in the Academy “I heard that, Vee. You all hear that? We all hear that? Well this is it, honeys. We’re at the crossroads and are gonna have to decide the scope shape thrust and general whatnot so forth of this group" (SE 37).

The same questions keep reverberating throughout the novel, creating a pulsating throbbing music getting unified in Velma’s mind as in the novel. “What is wrong with the women?” (SE 43) "What’s happening to the daughters of Yam?” (SE 44) asks the Old wife, a haint “the beatingest guide” (SE 45) whom Minnie turns towards in the healing. Minnie keeps asking the same
question throughout the novel, “Are you sure You wanna be well?” and the old mother questions her "What’s troubling you? It aint like you to be talking about “Are you sure you wanna be well?”, “what kind of way is that?” (SE 45) “Choose” hums Minnie. “Can you afford to be whole?”(SE106). The questions begin to pour out from Velma’s mind,

Don’t they know we on the rise? That our time is now? Here we are in the last quarter and how we gonna pull it all together and claim the new age in our name? How we gonna rescue this planet from the radioactive mutants? No wonder Noah tried to bar them from the ark. “Hmmm” laments Minnie. (SE 46)

The huge jump back from twentieth century to Noah’s days is distinctive of jazz musician’s style and technique of revisiting the past as Eleanor Traylor points out in her article, "Music as theme: The Jazz Mode" in the works of Toni Cade Bambara:

Constructing rapid contrasts of curiously mingled disparities; the jam session is both a summing up and a part –by-called melody is nothing more or less than a noticeable pattern occurring through time as time assumes its rhythmic cycle: past, and future. The Salt Eaters of Toni Cade Bambara is a modern myth of creation told in the jazz mode. (65)

Velma’s journey is now toward her ancestral mothers to draw strength from them. With her community gathered around her in a sacred cipher, merging their own stories with Velma’s, and calling on spirit guides and Lwa, Bambara creates a quilt and a communion as in Naylor’s Mama Day. As opposed to the Western music’s fixity the black musicians’ flexibility influenced the African American writers that we find a strong influence of the
same in the literary forms and style. Like bebop, the narration is marked by conflicting changes, sudden nuances, sharp and impudent interjections, broken rhythms, and passages sometimes in the manner of the jam session punctuated by the riffs, breaks, and distortions of the music of a community in transition.

In between the prose style the readers come across lines with long meter which are found in the novel scattered like rap, as the following passage is more poetic different from prose in structure, with a superfluous usage of similes that elevates the narrative structure and style.

Like babies and doctors and tears in the night, like being rolled to the edge of the bed, to extremes, clutching a stingy share of the corners and about to drop over the side, like getting up and walking, bare feet on cold floor, round to the other side climbing in and too mad to struggle for warmth, freeze.

Like going to jail and being forgotten, forgotten, or at least deprioritized case bail was not as pressing as a printer’s bill. Like raising funds and selling some fool to the community with his heart set on running for public office. (SE 25)

In jazz the soloist usually performs improvisatory statements while the ensemble played fixed short, simple, melodic clichés known as riffs. Various musical instruments and voices blend as in Jazz. A woman’s voice, high-pitched and hysterical, called out from somewhere “Fredieeeeee?” sent chills up the collective spine (SE 248) raises above the instrumental music.

The clang clang and winking lights, left right, left right, were doing something for him. (SE 65)

The dumm tete tete tak diir tik piercing the wall between the dance studio and the one skinny roominghouse left on the
Hill, jammed between the Regal and the Patterson Professional building... Duummmmm dah dah dum tete tete dii irr. (SE 172)

The narration turns into the rap mode, and the non-stop unending search for 'self' for African Americans ended up with the pouring out of the hearts with various musical forms which were signifiers of the identity and ethnicity.

One would run back to the woods, not jogging in unpaid outfits, trampling shoots not moving in with tents, dope and bombed-out playmates mouthing off about” We’re into Nature” not hiding out in Wordsworth or Keruoc, excusing the self from social action but running into woods in the hopes of an audience with the spirits long withdrawn from farms and gardens all withered and wasted, bringing eagle-bone whistles or gourd rattles or plaster saints or rakes or seeds gifts of soap or sacks of cornmeal or sticks of licorice or cones of incense anything one had to place on a tree stump altar or a turned-rock shrine to lure the saving spirits out to talk and heeded finally. Stumbling through thorns and briars, following the rada rada big booming of the drums or weh weh wendo riff of reed flutes, running toward a clearing, toward a likely sanctuary of the saints of the loa, the dinns, the devas. And found, would open up..... One would tap the brain for any knowledge of initiation rites lying dormant there, recognizing that life depended on it, that initiation was the beginning of transformation and that ecology of the self of the tribe, the species, the earth demanded on just that. In the dark of the woods the ground shaking, underfoot, the ancient covenants remembered in fragments one would stand there,
fists pummeling the temples, trying to remember the whole in time and make things whole again. (SE 247)

Bambara has employed the technique of a jazz musician improvising all the past performances and towards the end coming out with his indigenous composition. The hidden, latent past brings transformation to Claybourne in the novel. Not only Velma Henry but even minor characters are trapped in past or ensnared in the present or worried about or scared of future. Fred Holt, a bus driver is trapped in the past affected by the death of his friend Porter in an accident. Campbell a journalist researches all possible fields of knowledge in focusing on plans for future. Ruby and Jan are juxtaposed as one is impatient, over simplifying the crisis of her present, the other understands the complex convulsions of her present of its relations to the past, search for synthesis. Campbell thinking of tackling things with his knowledge writes at the end of his research, “everything that is now has been before and will be again in a new way, in a changed form, in a timeless time” (SE 249). As literary critic Eleanor Traylor accurately describes it, time in *The Salt Eaters* is convergent. “All time converges everywhere in the world in the immediate present; the contemporary, remote, or pre-historical past, and the incipient future are in constant fluid motion” (65). The voice of the healer calling Velma to become whole, the street corner preacher’s call to the community, “to recall its history, manifest its destiny, heed its loss” (21) lead to transformation, synthesis and renewal, as in Jazz composition.

The onomatopoeic effect of the drum is like the collective consciousness of the community pulsating them to energy and life. In *Indaba My Children* African Scholar Credo Mutwa talks of the significance of drums this way:

The drum beat can summon tears from the springs of our eyes and drive our souls deep into caverns of sorrow. Drums can be sounded in such a way that they have a soothing effect and
create a restful feeling. The beat of the drums can cure what no medicine can cure! It can heal the ills of the mind – it can heal the very soul. While Americans and Europeans have their evil drugs and the couches of their psychiatrists, the Africans still have their drums. (59)

Bambara juxtaposes the room with all musical instruments and audition going on and the room where healing session takes place to reveal the close connection between music and healing. But the musical instrument that dominates the mind is the drum which takes the African Americans to their historical and cultural origin.

Dum tete teke dom diir
One side of the Hill calling to the other.
Bateke teke bembe wahh
The call and response, drums on the move, a gathering summoned.
Rada rada boom tete wahh
Echoed from the park.
Rada rade tum vida omm
Feedback and contagion. (SE 250)

The last chapter of the novel opens with the sound of the drum, the West African instrument – a symbol of their origin, culture, art which was and is inherent and instinctive. The primitive means of communication – gives a clarion call for Claybornians like the voice of the street preacher. Benston comments in Baraka: The Renegade and the Mask: He esteems in black music the qualities indicative of Africanesque emotiveness: “the shout, the holler or scream; atonality; improvisation; communal modes” (83). The shout, holler, scream were replacing the African drum. By using it Bambara connects with the communication of their ancestors, origin impetus of their culture music and
Benston also suggests “The horn penetrates the womb-like circle of the black collective and helps to conceive the black child, the fresh promise of liberated Afro-consciousness” (72). Benston’s interpretation of horn is very apt, for drum strongly relates to the resemblance of womb and African music’s communicability.

The rain’s music is more insistent than the drumming sound from across the way in Manu Herbstein’s novel Brave Music Of A Distant Drum, which happens to be the name of a radical feminist journal, which suggests the sound of drum getting integrated with the rain and thunder, reinforce that synthesis and regaining of wholeness can be only through its history and women.

The historical realm of black experience as termed by Houston Baker “the always already of Afro-American culture” and “the already gone” have materialized in evolving of Clayborne with a new hope, ‘a new birth’ as Eleanor Traylor points out. Velma too is glowing with “unstreaked yellow and white” (295). No need of Minnie’s hands now. So the healer withdraws them, drops them in her lap just as “Velma, rising on steady legs, throws off the shawl that drops down on the stool a burst cocoon” (SE 295).

The music wraps the broken identities and brings back wholeness, after healing the psyche and the self, promising a meaningful existence and becomes an ethnic identity of black experience in America.

African American music has liberated the African Americans, defined their identity and enabled them to celebrate their difference. Mourning, moaning, pleading, yearning, rebelling, protesting, asserting soul music of African Americans has left the western world awestruck, and astounded with its variety and styles. Bambara and Naylor have not only employed it in their narrative structure and style but also validate its healing power. The music of slums and sewage dwellers has metamorphosed with a stamp of their superiority.