



PAUL AUSTERLITZ

I have long been drawn to the rich constellation of African-derived religious practices, and have regularly attended Lucumí (or Santería), Vodou, and Candomblé ceremonies in which music plays a central role. These experiences have informed my thinking about the transformative power of *all* music, and the inner nourishment that I have imbibed in these settings has fed my development as an artist, scholar, and individual. I have also been deeply touched by the depth of expression, the spiritual power, of the music of visionaries such as John Coltrane. The concept of *consciousness* suggests a valuable way to look at musical spirituality. Consciousness implies awareness, sentience, mind-set, and world-view. Musical consciousness is different from other forms of consciousness because musical experience makes us aware, mindful, and sentient in ways that non-musical experience does not. At the same time, musical experience cannot be separated from other experience, so while it issues from a particular backdrop, music can inform, and even influence, other aspects of life; musical consciousness is thus an active agent in culture. Of course, musical consciousness is ineffable: it is impossible to describe it in words. But precisely because it speaks its own language, music can tell stories that otherwise go untold. This ability lies at the heart of musical spirituality.

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