

“ . . . it appears that the call-and-response as a linguistic operator signaling cultural information is vibrantly alive in a medium more often praised for its . . . thoughtlessness than for its academic merit.”

CALL-AND-RESPONSE

An Ancient Linguistic Device Surfaces in Usher's "Love in This Club"

NATHAN KEEGAN

THE CALL-AND-RESPONSE, ORIGINATING FROM AFRICAN TRIBAL RITUALS, HAS BECOME PART OF THE FOUNDATION OF MODERN AFRICAN-AMERICAN CULTURE. THIS ARTICLE EXPLORES THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CALL-AND-RESPONSE IN USHER'S "LOVE IN THIS CLUB" AND RELATES SALIENT FEATURES OF THE MUSIC TO THE CLUB CULTURE THAT UNDERLIES IT. "CLUB HIP-HOP" EMERGES AS FIRMLY ROOTED IN THE USE OF CALL-AND-RESPONSE. THE RITUALS OF THE CLUB ARE LIKEWISE MIRRORED IN THE STYLE OF THE MUSIC, WHICH AT TIMES CAN BEAR THE IMPORTANCE OF SACRED CEREMONY.

The call-and-response, a pattern of two distinct phrases played by different musicians in which the “response” is a commentary on the “call,” has likely existed since the dawn of Africa’s language-proficient communities. It developed over millennia through sacred rituals, spiritually-tinged conversations with the sounds of Africa’s wildlife, and community-based interactions that fostered the growth of a common identity. It came to be ubiquitous in pan-African music; its penetration of almost every sub-Saharan African tribe, nation, or ethnic group was due to nomadic movement patterns, wars, empires, and geographic proximity.ⁱ

The call-and-response followed the first African slaves to the Americas, where it ceased to be a universal musical technique and adopted the survivalist tone of slave work songs. Though the slaves were not allowed to express the music of their cultures, they punctuated the day’s work with the rhythm of the call-and-response. This use of call-and-response—sanctioned by the slave masters because it brought consistency to fieldwork—helped inspire a sense of spirituality and community among slaves. Early slaves used it in much the same way as their African decedents:

Obviously, the melodic and rhythmic characteristics of [Long John, a slave song which makes prominent use of the call-and-response], the vocal style, and the performance mannerisms of the singers are African-derived. Only the language is Afro-American.ⁱⁱ

But what do the characteristics of slave songs tell us about the role of the call-and-response in America? First, we know that repetition—a vital feature of the call-and-response—was an important part of the African worldview.

A call-and-response sequence may go on for several hours, with apparently monotonous repetition of the same short phrase sung by a leader and answered by the chorus. . . . The repetitions of African music have a function in time which is the reverse of [Western classical] music—to dissolve the past and the future into one eternal present, in which the passing of time is no longer noticed.ⁱⁱⁱ

Besides dissolving past and future into eternal present, the call-and-response in Africa was a democratizing process that rendered the responding vocalists “colleague[s] in the creation” instead of merely listeners.^{iv} James Snead would later explain how this African approach to repetition affected the African-American worldview, a view constantly clouded by the burden of slavery. For Snead, repetition was now “a means by which a sense of continuity, security, and identification are maintained.” The call-and-response was no longer a culturally-contingent event appearing in rituals and music, but a viable linguistic device that helped slaves derive both sense and culture out of their surroundings. While it later became abundant in African-American musical styles like blues and jazz, the device more importantly littered the everyday speech of slaves, former slaves, and those haunted by the specter of slavery.

Over two hundred years later, call-and-response still remains a salient feature of African-American culture and language. As such, it operates on two levels: a secular level and a sacred level. As Smitherman describes, the secular level might include call-and-response examples you could hear on the street,

phrases like ‘oh, you mean, nigger’, ‘get back, nigger’ . . . [or] hey, the other day I was . . . uh-huh . . . yeah . . . I hear you, [where] the response can take the form of a back-and-forth banter between the speaker and various members of the audience.^v

The sacred level, on the other hand, was most carefully preserved in the church:

PREACHER. *How many of y’all wanna live to a old age?*

CONGREGATION. *Hallelujah!*

PREACHER. *Or is y’all ready to die and go to heaven?*

CONGREGATION. *[uncomfortable; some laughter]*

Well, no Lord, not yet, suh!

PREACHER. *Y’all wanna stay here awhile?*

CONGREGATION. *Praise the Lord!*

PREACHER. *Well, y’all better quit all this drankin,*

*smokin, and runnin round. Cause, see, for me, I
got a home in Heaven, but I ain't homesick!*^{vi}

These examples of call-and-response transmit important cultural information, as the responses can signify both active listenership and accordance with the content of the calls:

[Such words and vocalizations as 'yeah,' 'right,' 'uh-huh,' and 'hmm'], although referentially meaningless, have great interactional import by indicating one's attention to and ratification of the speaker's talk. . . . [These] responses may also indicate extremely powerful affirmation of what the speaker has said.^{vii}

In this we see the echoes of African and slave society: the call invites a responder to a conversational community, and the responder supports that community through his attention and affirmation. Be it a small conversation held in passing on a street or a preacher's emotional sermon, the call-and-response creates the bond of community between all its participants.

Rap music, a powerful vehicle of the African-American rhetorical tradition, stands out because it uniquely showcases the call-and-response. When attempting to define any call-and-response in modern rap music, one must look to the example of the church or to the example of everyday conversations. While many understand the call-and-response primarily as a musical interchange between a blues singer and guitarist or between two jazz singers, modern rap's call-and-response owes more to the linguistic tradition above than to any musical tradition.

This article argues that the call-and-response in modern hip-hop and rap is just as culturally and linguistically significant as the above examples in continuing the development of community and identity. The call-and-response in one specific song, Usher's "Love in This Club," contains evidence for this interpretation. Examining this song develops a more universal understanding of the call-and-re-



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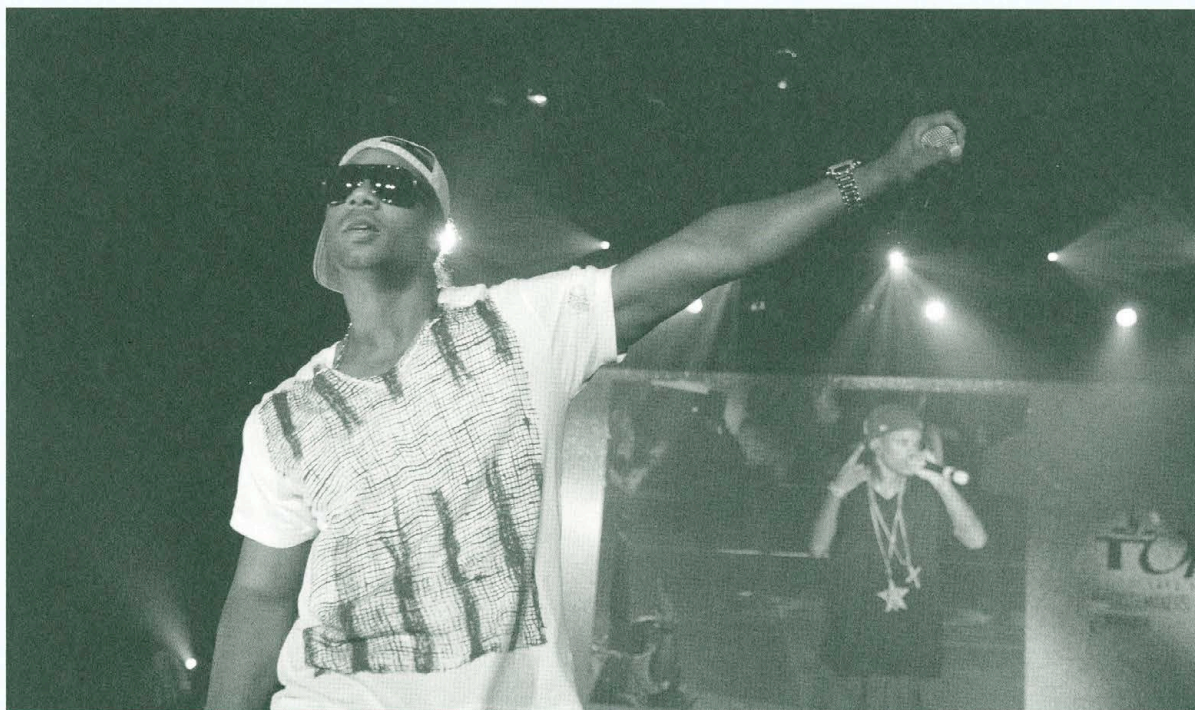
sponse in modern hip-hop and rap which is translatable to other songs, proving in the process that popular hip-hop—a genre brimming with a potent combination of violence, drugs, and sex—is worthy of scholarly examination.

IDENTITIES OF CALLER AND RESPONDER IN CONTEMPORARY HIP-HOP

Usher Raymond IV, a popular R&B and hip-hop artist whose laurelled career boasts record sales of almost forty million internationally, rose to the top of the charts in March 2008 with a song titled "Love in This Club." The lyrical theme is quite simple—Usher and his friends are at a club when Usher has the urge to have sexual relations with his dance partner, perhaps right on the dance floor:

*I know you scared baby/They don't know what we doin'
Let's both get undressed right here/Keep it up girl then I
swear
I'mma give it to you non stop/And I don't care who's
watchin'
Watchin', watchin'/Watchin', watchin', ohh
In this club, on the floor/Baby let's make love*^{viii}

Though the song's themes echo much of what today per-



WHETHER KNOWINGLY OR NOT, POLOW DA DON, FEATURED HERE, PARTICIPATES IN A RICH LINGUISTIC TRADITION.

meates pop and urban radio, of more scholarly interest is the prominent call-and-response utilized in the refrain, where a chorus of males responds with a systematic, identical “hey” on the last beat of three successive measures. This “hey” is shouted after Usher employs the call “in this club”:

USHER. I wanna make love in this club

CHORUS. Hey

USHER. In this club

CHORUS. Hey

USHER. In this club

CHORUS. Hey^x

This call-and-response brings us to a pressing question: who is the male chorus? A number of clues might help us better discern the identity of Usher’s male chorus. Taking into account both the song’s lyrics and the song’s music video, it appears as though a prominent member must be

the principal producer of “Love in This Club,” Polow da Don:

USHER. Where we at Polow?

CHORUS. [In response] Hey^x

The music video supports this assertion; when “Where we at Polow?” is uttered, the camera cuts to an unmanned DJ table. In exact sequence with the “hey” response, Polow da Don appears, throwing his arms up in the air and offering a few introductory dance movements from behind the table, where he remains for the duration of the song.

In addition to Polow da Don, other members must comprise the chorus. If this call-and-response is viewed as a democratizing technique within communities, both the lyrics “leave them with my niggas let ‘em know that I got you”^{xi} and the song’s club setting can be viewed as significant. Since according to the lyrics Usher is at the club with his

posse and other festive partygoers, the multi-layered “hey” easily transforms itself to a voice of the community. While contextually this “hey” must come from Polow da Don, the multiple voices lend credence to the idea that this response comes also from friends and club patrons.

If this “hey” is coming from Usher’s friends and club patrons, two things must be true: 1) the response must have some measure of conversational import, and 2) Polow da Don must have a viable reason to give the song this effect.

THE CONVERSATIONAL IMPORT OF THE “HEY” RESPONSE

To affirm number 1 above, it is necessary to explore the human interaction inherent in the call-and-response. As stated previously, the call-and-response in African-American culture can affirm and signify accordance with what the speaker has said. Thus, Polow’s male chorus could be seen as a linguistically important operator in the affirmation of Usher’s words. This “hey” response could serve to strengthen Usher’s claim that he wants to “make love in this club.” In a sense, one does experience this feeling when listening to Usher’s song. The ludicrous idea of conjugal relations in a public place is rendered slightly more credible by his posse’s affirmation. It might sound less legitimate or believable without this affirmation.

Nevertheless, why would Polow, one of the most visible producers in a profession known for its egocentrism and self-important swagger, decide to create the male chorus effect? An examination of the different levels of conversation in the call-and-response is helpful here:

- a) On one conversational level (the conversation that includes only Usher and his male chorus), the “hey” response is an affirmation that denotes total agreement and active listenership. This is the “local response.”
- b) On a more global conversational level (the conversation that includes Usher, Polow da Don, his friends, clubgoers, and song-listeners), the same accordance can be

ascribed, only instead of agreeing with Usher’s words, they are agreeing with the *content* of Usher’s song: its musical merit, its rhythm, and the enjoyable club setting it portrays, fraught with alcohol and women. This is the “global response.”

The “global response” points to the reason behind Polow’s creation of the male chorus. By creating a call-and-response effect, he is inviting all listeners into the conversation. He invites each club patron, regardless of location or affiliation with Usher, to throw up their hands and shout “hey” at rhythmically appropriate times. To give another example, this interaction appears prominently in the video for Asher Roth’s “College,” where a multiracial chorus of college coeds shouts “hey,” hands waving, on every eighth beat of the song’s 4/4 time.^{xiii} This invitation to conversation is also an invitation to music; this invitation to music could lead to participation and enjoyment, which leads to consumption and makes Polow an in-demand producer. “Hot” producers sell their beats for considerably more money, so this invitation might help Polow da Don attain power, wealth, and status.

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It would be difficult, however, to establish a correlation between monetary success and the call-and-response. Surely, producers have signature styles that help them achieve strings of hits (notable examples include Timbaland and Pharrell) and many, like Polow, use the call-and-response to help establish this style. Though the assertion that call-and-response begets both community and participation can be academically verified by referring to African studies (i.e. Kubik) and African-American studies (i.e. Smitherman), this call to community does not necessarily determine a hit.

In establishing a more academic rationale for Polow's employment of the call-and-response, two sources will prove valuable: a rap genre typology put forth by Adam Krims in his 2000 work *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity*, and the Greek chorus in Sophocles' *Antigone* as described by Kevin Hawthorne.

A GENRE EXAMINATION OF PARTY RAP

In Krims' work, he describes party rap as “[rap] designed

for moving a crowd, [and] making them dance.”^{xiii} Krims and others, such as Toop, actually believe this appeal to a moving crowd may have been the origin of rap, since the “African-American tradition of DJ toasting and rhyming often served similar purposes in similar contexts.”^{xiv} Krims goes on to lament the disappearance of party rap, including the Sugar Hill Gang, early Will Smith, and LL Cool J. Party rap, Krims says, was almost entirely supplanted by gangsta rap, and this transition signified an “early fall from innocence,” for the ethos of “fun” was lost in rap.^{xv}

Krims develops the genre identity of party rap by exploring what he sees as an inherent contradiction of party rap, the commercialization of subcultural capital:

Its generally optimistic tones and faster, often more dance-oriented beats have an appeal that crosses over from hip-hop audiences into the more general record-buying public.^{xvi}

This quote points us toward the future, toward the example of Polow da Don and other call-and-response-toting producers to be discussed in depth below. Like early party rap in the 1980s and 1990s, contemporary urban hip-hop is supremely commercial. But also like party rap, Polow's tracks follow the “musical ethos” of party rap, which for Krims is “consistent with the goal of ‘moving the crowd,’ getting heads nodding and bodies dancing.”

In terms of party rap's flow, the MC uses “frequent two- and four-bar groupings”:

The rapped rhythms in this genre are thus also more conducive than many to audience memorization and sing-alongs [especially in the choruses]; and DJs in dance clubs not surprisingly often value party rap for its ability to incite enthusiasm through listener [and dancer] participation.^{xvii}

Here we see many of the features of the call-and-response—its rote formula is perfect for easy memorization and audience sing-alongs—and its ability to incite enthusiasm in the listener is manifest in the enthusiasm of the

male-chorus in “Love in This Club.”

But it would be incorrect to categorize any urban hip-hop, much less Usher’s “Love in This Club,” as party rap. It simply does not fit the same bill as Biz Markie’s “Just a Friend,” Naughty by Nature’s “Hip-Hop Hooray,” or even Will Smith’s “Gettin’ Jiggy Wit It.” Perhaps it is that, as Krims laments, these songs had an “ethos of fun” that has since been lost. Or perhaps it is simply because of a decade of temporal removal that these songs have very little in common, outside of the few mentioned similarities.

Since none of Krims’ other genre billings, e.g. reality rap, mack rap, and gangsta rap, fit this brand of call-and-response heavy urban hip-hop, I will suggest a new term. “Club rap” or “club hip-hop” appears a suitable name for this subgenre. Though it may seem hastily named after “Love in This Club,” which I regard as a flagship “club hip-hop” song for a number of reasons, we will see below that this is only incidental.

“Club rap” is a commercial hybrid of gangsta rap and party rap. On one hand, the singer touts violence, drugs, and materialism, as Young Jeezy, featured on “Love in This Club,” raps:

*Pulled up like a trap star . . .
You ever made love to a thug/In the club with his sights on
'87 jeans/And a fresh pair of Nike's on . . . xviii*

On the other hand, it champions the mainstream commercialism of party rap since “Love in This Club” spent five weeks on top of *Billboard's Hot 100*—a feat not achievable by a true gangsta rap song.

The naissance of “club rap” is not entirely surprising since the 1990s and early 2000s saw increasing preference for gangsta rap on the radio, resulting in its subsequent commercialization. Nonetheless, the systematic call-and-response heard in “Love in This Club” was never present in either gangsta rap or party rap and constitutes a sizable part

of the identity of this new subgenre. Its invitation to community and participation is noticeably foreign to gangsta rap. This invitation is also at home in clubs, where sing-alongs and hand-waving are often the norm.

SOPHOCLES’ CHORUS: A SIMILAR EFFECT?

Though the rap genre study cited above is sufficient to describe the reasons for the use of the call-and-response in modern rap, Sophocles’ *Antigone* offers an interesting, compellingly similar chorus. Kevin Hawthorne understands the all-male chorus in *Antigone* as a rhetorical audience. Consider a present-day debate when Barack Obama addresses a debate moderator such as Jim Lehrer; Obama is actually speaking to the millions of Americans watching at home. In this way, Jim Lehrer is a rhetorical audience—a stage stand-in for all those watching from outside the actual play:

As characters in tragedy maneuver and pursue their discursive goals, they may not only argue about issues among themselves but also perform to the members of the chorus as present representatives of a community.^{xix}

If Usher’s male-chorus is taken as a similar rhetorical audience, a stand-in for the club-goers enjoying his song in real clubs outside the fictional world of his music video or song, some interesting comparisons come to light. After a fight in which Haemon chides his father, King Creon, for being stubborn, the chorus responds, “Oh, king, give heed if sense be in his words.”^{xx} This response is very close to an assertion of accordance with Haemon, similar to the assertion that Smitherman contends is explicit in the “hey” of the call-and-response. Thus, we have an all-male chorus agreeing in response to another male’s call. The all-male chorus, as a fictional audience, is ostensibly a stand-in, guiding the emotional responses of the real audience. Certainly this is an apt comparison to Usher’s “Love in This Club,” enlightening and strengthening assertions about the global conversational level. If the Greeks made use of this sort of rhetorical audience, then Usher certainly can.

CLUB RAP AS RITUAL THROUGH THE CALL-AND-RESPONSE

I contend that “club rap,” a hybrid of party rap and gangsta rap, is a subgenre that showcases participation and community and uses them to promote the content—and perhaps the profits—of the song. A glamorized club environment is present in many of these songs through titles and lyrics. I argue that producers, in conjunction with artists, are purposefully labeling “club hits”—the club rap tracks designed to make people dance and sing-along—as appropriate vehicles for the call-and-response. Tellingly, of the nearly thirty songs explored in the thesis from which this excerpt was taken, all are singles. These singles receive heavy airplay on radio and in clubs. Like party rap singles, these club-ready singles are made for a singing-and-dancing environment.

For certain danceable, singable, club-ready songs, audience participation is even more important; listeners who might be under the influence of alcohol and drugs are likely to be participants in a club musical community. Therefore, producers such as Polow da Don may add them after the fact. Of little importance is the moment at which the call-and-response is finalized on any certain track. The club environment constitutes a social ritual in contemporary hip-hop and calls for the appearance of a meaningful, communicative musical technique.

This social ritual is by no means as sacred or as important as those of Africa, but there are similarities. It is entirely possible that a connection of call-and-response to ritual through its prevalence in African-American churches helped establish the call-and-response as its own invitation to a ritual of revelry in “club rap.”

This ritual can also be seen as a cultural process similar to African examples valuing rhythmic response and repetition as unique creation. The “hey” chorus is a local and a global ritual that exists in two conversational realms. It both affirms Usher’s statements and invites the community. In this ritual we see a call-and-response which, if not

sacred, is at least a communicative, culturally-tinged affirmation.

SECULAR OR SACRED: USHER AS RITUAL LEADER?

A more in depth way to understand the call-and-response as a ritual indicator is by viewing Usher as a ritual leader, like the bandleaders in African communities who represent patriarchal structures. In Yoruba vocal music, we see this example;

In most genres, the bandleader (often called a captain) is a praise singer who initiates solo vocal phrases . . . segments of which a chorus doubles. He also sings responsorial sequences, in which his improvised phrases alternate with a fixed phrase, sung by the chorus. . . . The social structure of [this] is closely linked to traditional ideals of social organization, which simultaneously stress the “naturalness” of hierarchy and the mutual dependency of leaders and supporters.^{xxi}

Taking into account Carey’s ritual view of communication:

[It is] directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs.^{xxii}

We can see how in Yoruba music, the “naturalness” of male hierarchy is being ritually transmitted through music. Their call-and-response, based on social organization, is not simply meant to transmit information or music; it is a means of both subjugating supposedly inferior groups, such as women, and solidifying social structures.

Correspondences exist between this ritualistic maintenance of social structure and Usher’s “Love in This Club.” Both Usher’s treatment of women and his bold exclamations of heterosexuality work to maintain the prevailing social structure of the club. Firstly, though he avoids disparaging women openly, he does dismiss the will of the

woman. He “[doesn’t] care,” and he can’t “take it no more,” implying that he cannot resist the urge to make love in the club, though the woman is at times neither dancing with him (“you on the other side”), nor complicit with his urges. Moreover, he tells his partner that all of her female friends can be left with his posse, reinforcing a paternal hold on this group of young women, who likely came to the club without any men.^{xxiii}

Secondly, strong proclamations of heterosexuality reinforce a hetero-normative worldview, championing an imposing heterosexuality that promotes itself as a more culturally appropriate orientation for public conversation. If Usher’s partner were a man, or if Usher were openly gay, this sort of assertion would likely not receive airplay on radio stations. There is a double standard of the hetero-normative society that champions boisterous heterosexuals, but derides equally boisterous homosexuals.

Thus, the “hey” response can also be seen as an affirmation of ritualistic communication.

In supporting Usher’s proclamations, the male chorus is simultaneously affirming the social structure that permits the objectification of women. Moreover, it condones the social structure that permits public exclamations of sexuality, so long as they are heterosexual. The male chorus is, therefore, seeking through ritual to maintain the patriarchal society that Usher presents to them, viewing him as the bandleader who, through his leadership, represents the “naturalness” of a hierarchy that subjugates women.

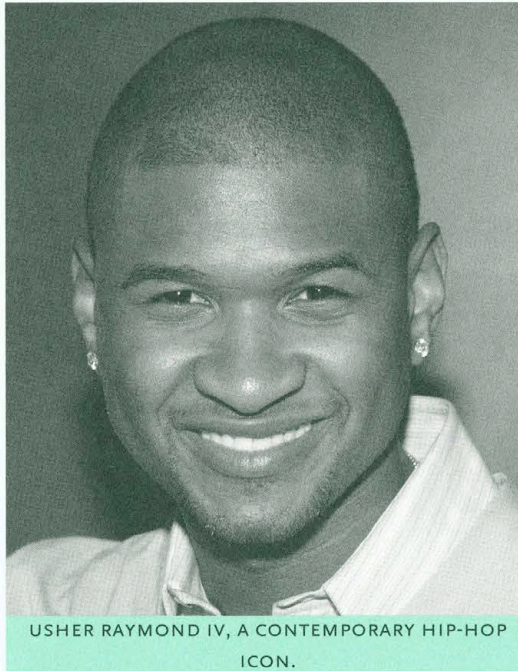
Returning briefly to Sophocles’ *Antigone*, an interesting comparison can further our understanding of Usher’s ritualistic communication. When Creon ends his famous speech, “I won’t be called weaker than womankind,” the chorus immediately responds, “We think . . . that what you say is sensible and right.”^{xxiv} Here there is an assertion of male-dominance affirmed immediately by a male chorus, just as in Usher’s “Love in This Club.” Another salient example appears in popular music when the following lyrics

in Kanye West’s “Heartless” are interspersed with systematic “heys”:

*You run and tell your friends
that you’re leavin’ me
They say that they don’t see
what you see in me
Just wait a couple months and
you gon’ see
You’ll never find nobody better
than me.*^{xxv}

Kanye is almost echoing Creon’s claim, “I won’t be bested by womankind.” Time and time again, the affirmations of the call-and-response can be interpreted, sometimes almost word-for-word, as some embrace of a patriarchal society.

The patriarchal figures of Usher, Kanye, and the Yoruba bandleader are more commonly represented in African-American communities by ministers in the church. Just as Usher can be seen as the Yoruba bandleader, he can also be seen as the African-American preacher. This ascription is upheld by examining the linguistic content of the call-and-response in the church. Cobb’s *The Roots* makes the connection more explicitly.



USHER RAYMOND IV, A CONTEMPORARY HIP-HOP
ICON.

“By understanding Cobb’s historical examination of a rapper and preacher’s cultural similarities, we can see that Usher-as-minister is perhaps not the sacrilege we imagined . . .”

For Pawelczyk and other scholars, since “Black verbal style exists on a sacred-secular continuum,” the call-and-response necessarily exists on its own plane.^{xxvi} A traditional interpretation of Usher’s conversation would plant it securely in the secular realm, where examples might include Smitherman’s previously mentioned response techniques, such as “oh, you mean, nigger” or “uh-huh” or “yeah.”

The sacred realm, on the other hand, traditionally cites the black church as the most prevalent example: “In the sacred style, the minister is urged on by the congregation’s *amens*, *that’s right*, etc.” But a more in-depth look at Smitherman’s example cited earlier yields comparisons to Usher’s “Love in This Club.”

Looking at the content of the preacher’s questions, they are often purely rhetorical, designed to energize, motivate, and stir emotion in a unique manner. Smitherman describes them as “high-keyed, emotional and animated.” Surely everyone would like to “live to an old age.” Shouldn’t everyone want to “stay here awhile”? We can ascribe this sort of value to Usher’s words. I argue that Usher—and by proxy all call-and-response—draws on this tradition of easily answered questions as emotional reinforcement. Usher desires to have sex in a club, going as far as to implicitly suggest the “velvet rope” as support for his lady in a remix of

the song. Painting Usher’s words as sacred renders them equivalent to rhetorical questions for his festive posse. Since his words are *sacred*, his rhetorical devices are simply taken at their word. If Usher wants to “make love in this club,” then *amen*, according to his friends and other clubbers. Evidence supporting this comes midway in the song’s video, where Usher’s “love in this club” call meets its expected “hey” response, as all of the club patrons throw up their hands in perfect timing, signaling both active listenership and powerful affirmation.

Is it really sacrilege to call Usher’s words sacred? In some ways, certainly. The African-American church is vibrantly alive today and the sacred call-and-response between preacher and congregation remains of high importance, both academically and culturally. But two scholarly sources point to the relevance of the Usher-as-minister metaphor. W.J. Cobb explains that the preacher was the most unique personality, and the first black artist in America—an artist that lived and died by the call-and-response. He then goes on to cite Mase, Rev Run, and other rappers-turned-preachers in an effort to show the similarity of the two careers. By understanding Cobb’s historical examination of a rapper and preacher’s cultural similarities, we can see that Usher-as-minister is perhaps not the sacrilege we imagined—especially since they both utilize the call-and-response so effectively.^{xxvii}

Secondly, Robin Sylvan in an article on popular culture and religion, might support this assertion, arguing in favor of popular music as religion:

For the millions of people who have experienced something similar to the accounts above, religion and God are not dead, but very much alive and well and dancing to the beat of popular music; the religious impulse has simply migrated to another sector of the culture, a sector in which religious sensibilities have flourished and made an enormous impact on a large part of the population.^{xxviii}

Sylvan argues that if today’s youth cannot identify with tra-

ditional religions, they search elsewhere, sometimes ending that search at popular music. Consequently, we can posit that while the notion of Usher as sacred might be appalling to some, it may be considered a valid claim by scholars such as Sylvan.

SUMMING UP: THE ROLE OF THE CALL-AND-RESPONSE

Polow da Don's "invitation" discussed above can also be seen as an invitation to community similar to the call-and-response of slave songs or preacher-sermon interactions. When viewed in conjunction with its highly rhythmic, systematic appearance in the measure's last beat, it is easy to see that this example of call-and-response owes more to the linguistic tradition of the call-and-response than it does to improvisation-heavy African-American music like jazz, blues, or swing. Gone are the highly creative lyrical calls from Ella Fitzgerald and the freewheeling beauty of Louis Armstrong's gravelly responses. They are replaced with a linguistic call-and-response, a repetition that in many ways is closer to the methodical responses of slave songs like "Long John," or "Follow the Drinking Gourd." This relation explains much about the identity of and communication between participants.

The call-and-response has value to the communication and identity of African communities and those of African descent. Taking into account the example of Usher's "Love in This Club," it appears that the call-and-response as a linguistic operator signaling cultural information is vibrantly alive in a medium more often praised for its bland nature or thoughtlessness than for its academic merit. Usher's calls present his words as sacred in some respects, and the chorus' response creates a sense of community, both between Usher and his friends, and between Usher and his audience.

In Usher's "Love in This Club," the call-and-response stands as a ritual that showcases both community and identity. By using historical call-and-response to better understand this 2008 song, we can conclude that the linguistic

call-and-response is flourishing in an arena thus far not examined in popular music studies.

ENDNOTES

- i. Stone (361)
- ii. Kebede (129)
- iii. Small (54-55)
- iv. Rose (46)
- v. Smitherman 1977 in Pawelczyk (104)
- vi. Smitherman 2000 in Pawelczyk (105)
- vii. Pawelczyk (416)
- viii. Raymond
- ix. Ibid.
- x. Ibid.
- xi. Ibid.
- xii. Roth
- xiii. Krims (55)
- xiv. Ibid.
- xv. Ibid.
- xvi. Krims (56)
- xvii. Ibid.
- xviii. Raymond
- xix. Hawthorne (26)
- xx. Sophocles (11)
- xxi. Stone (161)
- xxii. Carey (20)
- xxiii. Sophocles (II. 677-80)
- xxiv. Raymond
- xxv. West
- xxvi. Pawelczyk (416)
- xxvii. Cobb
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