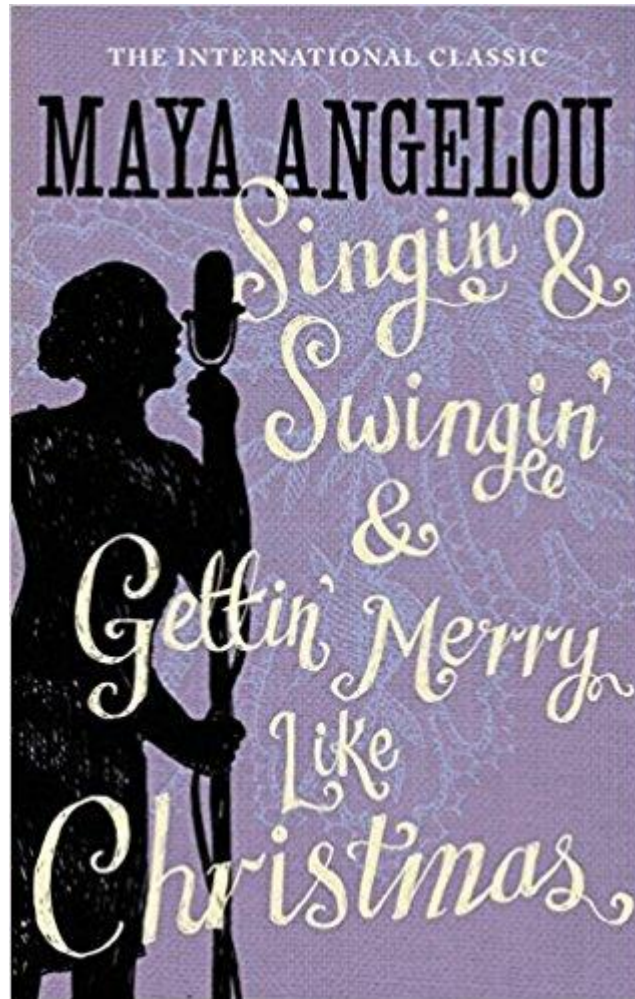


**Theme of Music in Maya Angelou's
*Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin Merry Like Christmas***

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Music and Maya Angelou

In her autobiography *Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry like Christmas*, Maya Angelou writes about the awe she has felt while on an European tour. Maya Angelou is a major contemporary author and contributor to the black autobiographical tradition whose literary reputation is based on her five volume autobiographical series and her poetry. Music appears

throughout Angelou's third autobiography, starting with the title, which evokes a blues song and Angelou's career in music and performance.

Free to Articulate

During a century dominated by slavery, the black women struggled to write and to be heard. But in recent years, African - American women are able to articulate their existence in autobiography, fiction, poetry and polemics. It is quite interesting that these women have written, spoken, sung and survived. But every day they are recovering voices from the past, to remind us that:

If the first women god ever made
as strong enough to turn the world
upside down all alone, these women
together ought to be able to turn it
back, and get it right side up again (Evans, p. 342)

New Ways

With the diversity of black women's lives now acknowledged in literature, African – American women writers search for new ways to express old and new situations and silences:

black women are searching for a specific language
specific symbols, specific images with which to record
their lives, and even though they can claim a rightful
place in the Afro American tradition and in the feminist
tradition of women writers, it is also clear that, for purpose
of liberation, black women writers will first insist on their
own name, their own space. (Evans, p. 163)

Own Musical Styles

African-American slaves on southern plantations cultivated their own musical styles, which later evolved into gospel blues, and what is now known as bluegrass and country music. One of the most pervasive holdovers from African music is an emphasis on rhythm and the use of complex polyrhythms. Over time, many distinct practices and traditions of African music are either forgotten or blended with other musical traditions. The blues is perhaps the simplest American musical form and yet also the most versatile. Along with jazz, blues takes its shape and style in the process of

performance, and for this reason it possesses a high degree of flexibility. Although certain musical and lyrical elements of the blues can be traced back to West Africa, the blues, like the spiritual, is a product of slavery. The musical structure of the blues is very simple, built upon three main chords. In the standard blues, called the twelve-bar blues, a certain idea is expressed twice in a repeated lyric and then responded to or completed in a third line.

During the 1920s, interest has shifted from classic blues sung by women to country blues performed most often by men. This “down-home” blues has been sometime performed with banjo, string, or guitar. In country blues, the vocal quality is gritty, strained, and nasal, and the voice was “played” in a variety of ways.

One of the forms frequently used in black literature is the blues. Langston Hughes is the first poet to recognize its power, and in the late 1970’s African – American women writers have also pursued its literary possibilities. By using this form as a basis for written expression, these writers have merged the old with new and have captured the essence of black tradition and culture.

The blues, Black American’s most popular form of music, is first performed and frequently written by black women in the 1920’s. But its importance lies not only in sounds, but also in its relationship to the history of people. Amiri Baraka explains “The term blues relates directly to the Negro, and his[her] personal involvement in America, blues means a Negro experience, it is the one music the Negro made that could not transferred into a more general significance than the one of the Negro gave it initially” (Evans, p. 163).

Black Americans continued to play an important part in the field of light entertainment. The major night clubs in New York, Chicago and other cities frequently employed black orchestras, singers and dancers. There has been a steady increase of widely acclaimed Negro singers. The victory of the Negro singers in later years is symbolized by their acceptance in the major companies of the United States.

Singin’ and Swingin’, Gettin’ Merry like Christmas

Maya Angelou who is one of the leading African- American women writers is also a singer who has dedicated her life for music. She writes “Music was my refuge could crawl into the space between the notes and curl my back to loneliness” (Angelou, p.1). *Singin’ and Swingin’, Gettin’ Merry like Christmas* is the third book of Maya Angelou’s six-volume autobiography series. This book is set between 1949 and 1955. In this volume, Maya Angelou describes her struggle to support her young son and depicts the conflict she felt as a single mother despite her success as a performer as her travel led Europe with the musical “Porgy and Bess” troupe. Music appears throughout Maya Angelou’s third autobiography. Music is the first word in the book where of Angelou has. She has made use of music and musical concepts in her book. As the story opens, a lonely Maya Angelou finds solace in black music and is soon hired as a salesgirl in a record store on Fillmore Street in San Francisco. “Don’t the Moon look lonesome shining through the trees? Ah, don’t the Moon look lonesome shining through the trees? Don’t your House look lonesome when your baby pack up to leave?”(Angelou, p.1)

Maya Angelou and Music

Maya Angelou begins to relax and enjoys a world of music. There is a reference to music in this book- She points out Charlie Parker’s song “Lord I wonder, do she ever think of me, Lord I wonder, do she ever think of me, I wonder, I wonder, will my baby come back to me (Angelou , p.5). She also speaks about Negro musician like Dexter and Dave Brubeck. They are popular blue musicians of her time. She says ”My music tastes sea sawed between the blues of John Lee Hooker and the bubbling silver sounds of Charlie Parker” (Angelou , p.4). In a record store, she lives fantasy lives through the mandolin melodies of the forties and fifties. “You’d be so nice to come home to.”

The job allows her to move back into her mother’s house and to spend more time with her son. While working in the store, Maya Angelou meets Tosh Angelos, a Greek-Sailor. They fall in love and he is fond of her son. Against her mother’s wishes, Maya Angelou marries Tosh in 1952. She begins to resent Tosh’s demand that she stays at home. She is also bothered by her friends’ reaction to her interracial marriage. Maya Angelou is disturbed by Tosh’s atheism and his control over her life. After three years the marriage disintegrates when Tosh announces to Maya Angelou that he is tired of being married. She goes to the hospital for an appendectomy and after the operation, she tell her desire to return to her grandmother in Stamps but Tosh

informs her that Annie has died on the day of her operation. After learning of her grandmother's death, her reaction is musical she writes:

Ah, Momma I had never looked at death before, peered into its yawning charm for the face of a beloved. For days my mind staggered out of balance. I reeled on a precipice of knowledge that even if I were rich enough to travel all over the world (56).

Success as a Performer

Maya Angelou begins to find success as a performer. She gets a job dancing and singing at the purple onion, a popular night club in San Francisco and on the recommendation of the club's owner she changes her name from Marguerite Johnson to Maya Angelou. When her contract expires, Maya Angelou joins Porgy and Bess for a European tour. "Angelou mention about blues. She says 'The blue.' Madame said, 'Oh, how the blue I love will you sing "St. Louie Blues" (Angelou , p.211). ? This line shows her interest in listening to Blues music. Despite Maya's success with Porgy and Bess she is racked with guilt and regret about leaving her son behind. When she hears about her son's health she cancels the tour and returns to San Francisco. Maya and her son are healed from emotional pain which is caused by their separation and she promises never to leave him again.

Clyde, her son, also announces that he wants to be called "guy". As Angelou writes: "it took him only one month to train us. He became guy and we could hardly remember ever calling him anything else" (Angelou, p.305). Maya is true to her promise .She accepts a job in Hawaii, and he takes her son. At the close of the book, mother and son express pride in each other. When he praises her singing she writes, "Although i was not a great singer i was his mother, and he was my wonderful, dependently independent son" (Angelou , p.310) . Maya Angelou receives great critical acclaim for her narrative skills because she blends honesty with dignity. *In singin' and swingin'*, Maya Angelou depicts the conflicts she felt as a single mother and her struggles to support her young son, and her successful career in the entertainment world.

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