

St. James 2007 Jazz Mass

It's Sacred: Church

Everything in God's world is sacred. Trees/ and toads/ and little girls' eyes.
Grandfather's hands and the murmuring voices of lovers. All Sacred.

A poet's dream, almanac compilers/ and rocks that look up at the moon. All Sacred.
Everything can be church and anything can be church.

Church was the first public place/ where I came child to spirit to Christ. "Suffer
little children to come unto me, for such is the Kingdom of Heaven." Church.

Literally, church introduced me to my very first friend. Louise and I both thought/
the preacher talked too long, Mrs. Sneed sang too loudly/ and Brother Williams got
too wild when he prayed. We both giggled at the same time and cried just as
piteously when we were chastised.

Every time I feel the spirit, I know I am immersed in the essence of church. That
knowledge changes my voice. I speak more softly/ and choose my words more
carefully. There are more "yes ma'ams" and "no ma'ams" and "yes sirs"/ and "no
sirs"/ in my conversation.

Out of my heart, out of my brain, more "thank yous"/ slide across my tongue. I am
blessed. I am in church.

Church is not the luggage I bear, nor the cloak I wear. It is neither the hat I sport,
nor the shoes, which carry me around my world. It is not my destination, nor my
place of departure.

The breadth/ and depth/ and width/ and height/ of church/ cannot be defined, but
church can define me always. It slides the skin over my muscles/ and allows my/
lungs to inspirate/ and fill so that "Hallelujah"/ like rain/ comes from my mouth,
"Hallelujah"/ falls like rain from my lips.

Church is where I go when I want a certain/ fulfillment, and church is where I don't
have to go/ because it is always with me, holding me up, propelling me forward,
sustaining me.

Every time I feel the spirit moving in my heart, I will pray.

When I think about church/ and remember that church and I/ are one, I am
reminded that everything in God's world/ is sacred.

My name is **Maya Angelou**.

Church: a building, a congregation, a sacred place where the secular is enabled, a disciplined place offering free-space – space to celebrate, show reverence, dance, meditate, mourn, create, weep, praise, shout and embrace each one another. The word resonates with complicated meanings and emotional entanglements that can baffle the most astute linguist. Certainly the narrowest definition of Church is an environment of spiritual well-being, power and vulnerability, of invention and surrender that infuses the congregation. ... Witness to crushing oppression and cataclysmic violence, Church is distinguished by its function as sanctuary. It is also the place where one knows for certain she is perfect because she was created by her Maker. Therefore, the sound of Church is more than refuge and a source of strength – it is a reflection of that divine perfection: sunbeams floating before a stained glass window, a sea of hats, fluttering paper fans, affirming “Amens,” words proclaimed between the stark reality of a fearful present and the promise of a glorious eternity.

Church: a building, a congregation, a sacred place.....

[Toni Morrison]

Over my head, I hear music in the air.....
Over my head, I hear music in the air.....
Over my head, I hear music in the air.....
There must be a God somewhere.

[Negro Spiritual]

Many jazz musicians will readily admit that they are not a church going folk. Late hours, smoky clubs, and all of that intoxicating music ... who can blame them.

Even so, jazz is sacred.

Duke Ellington's sacred concerts.

John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*

Rich Harney's *Soul Prayers*

Jazz speaks from the musician's soul to our souls. Rich, vivid, powerful, sacred.

We look at each other and see ourselves more clearly.

We listen together and hear ourselves more plainly.

We are refreshed, renewed, transformed, transported ...

Lifted up out of ourselves and *we* become sacred ...

[Gina Houston]

There's a place we can go if you take my hand.

In the sun and sand of a Holy Land.

Close your eyes realize there's a sacred concert in the skies.

We can live through the strength of a sacred plan.

In the burning sand of a Holy Land.

Joy will be what we see in a place where everyone is free.

From our birth, everyone has a destiny.

But life's toil and strife just won't let us be.

We must share worldly cares if we want an answer to our prayers.

Land so near, land so dear, Holy Land so clear.

Let us find you now. Take us from all fear.

Hear our cries; makes us wise; let us join the sacred concert in the skies.

Let us join us join the sacred concert in the skies.

[Cedar Walton]