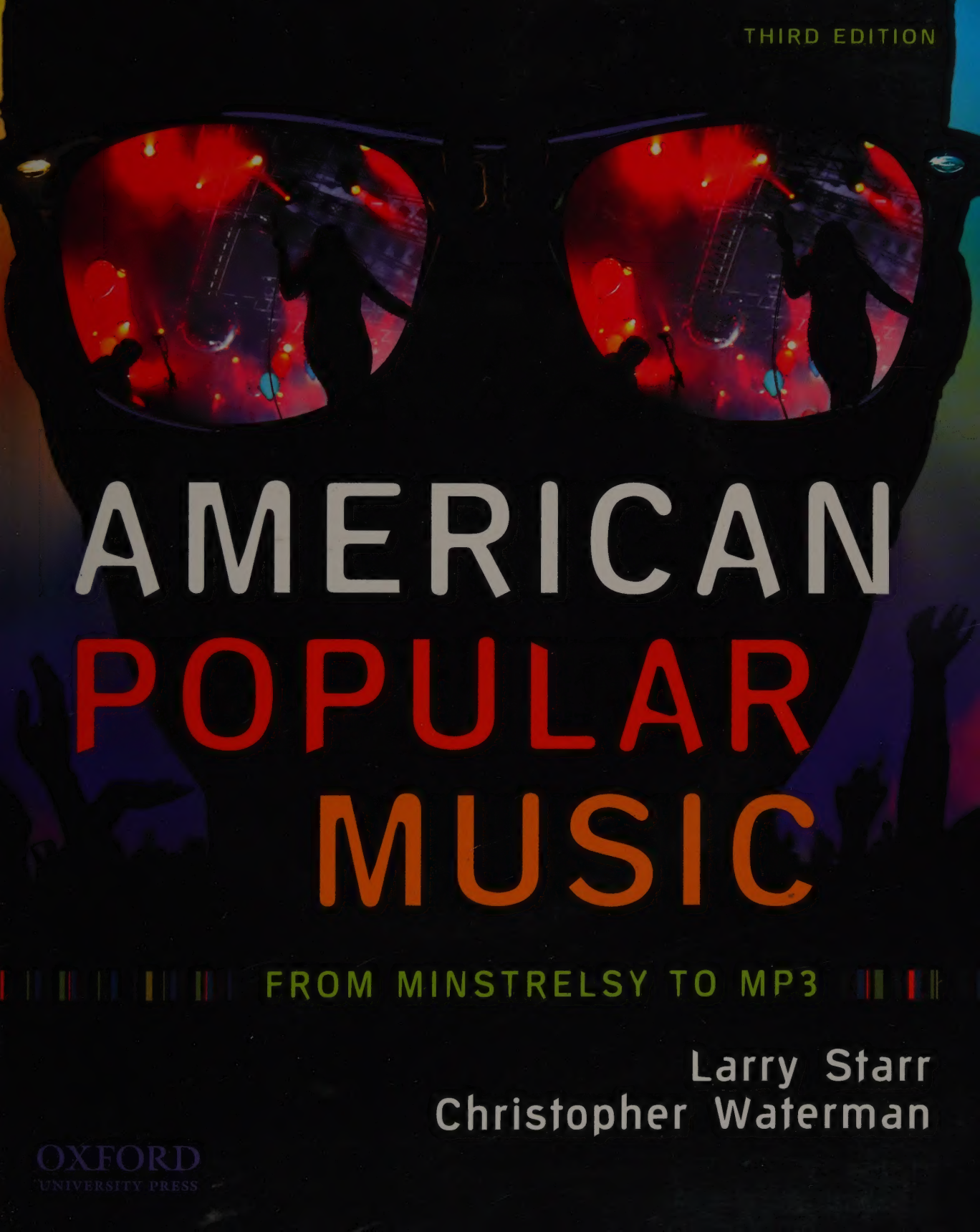


THIRD EDITION



AMERICAN POPULAR MUSIC

FROM MINSTRELSY TO MP3

Larry Starr
Christopher Waterman

OXFORD
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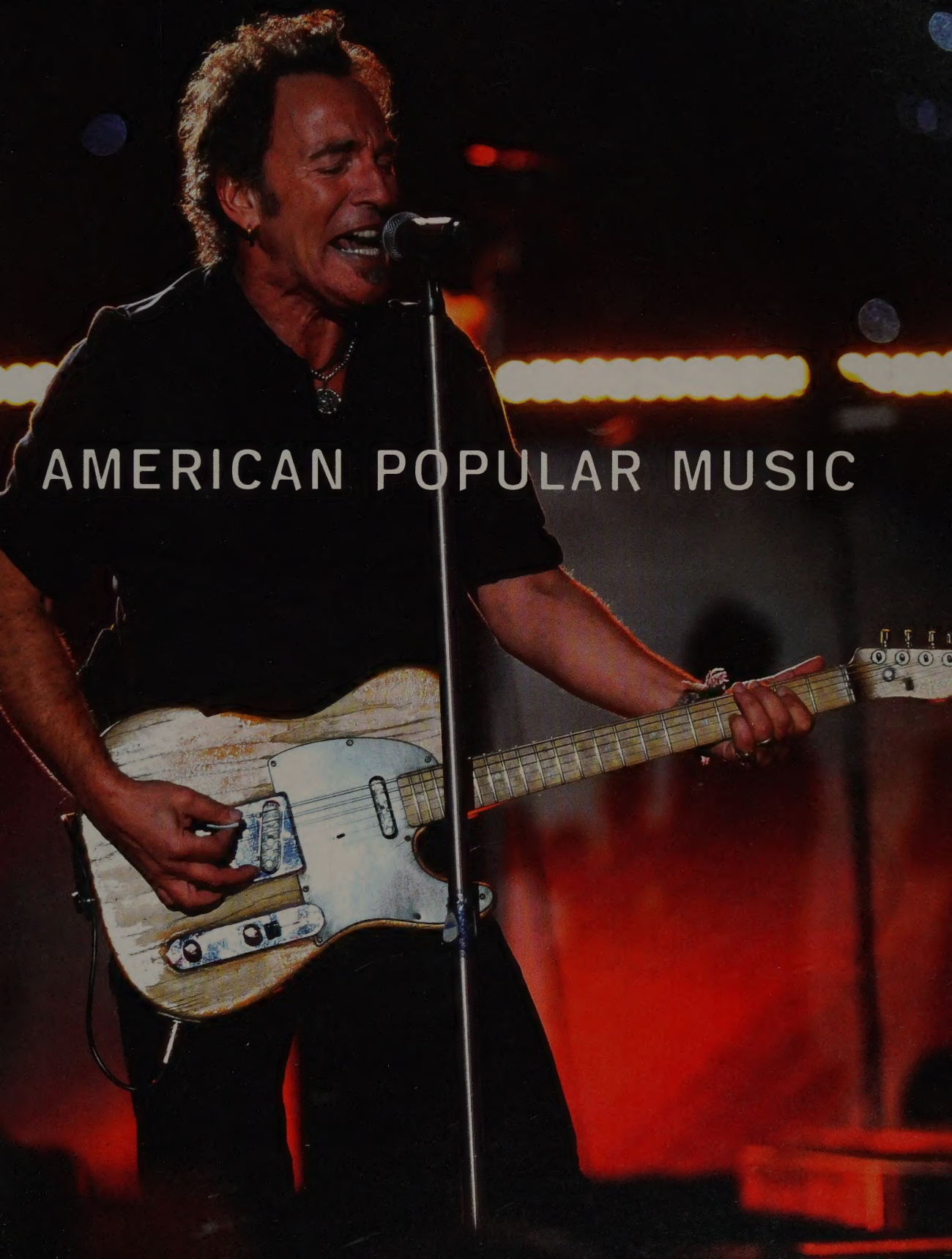
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AMERICAN POPULAR MUSIC



THIRD EDITION

AMERICAN POPULAR MUSIC

FROM MINSTRELSY TO MP3

Larry Starr

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Christopher Waterman

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

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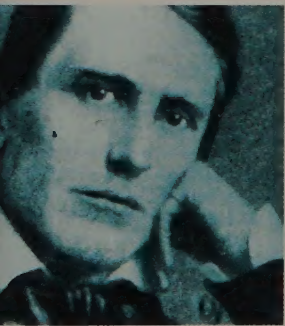
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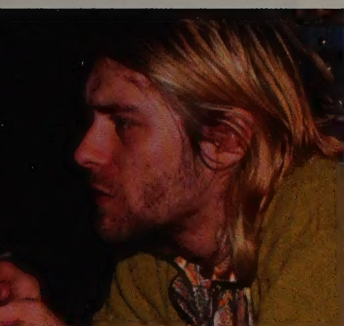
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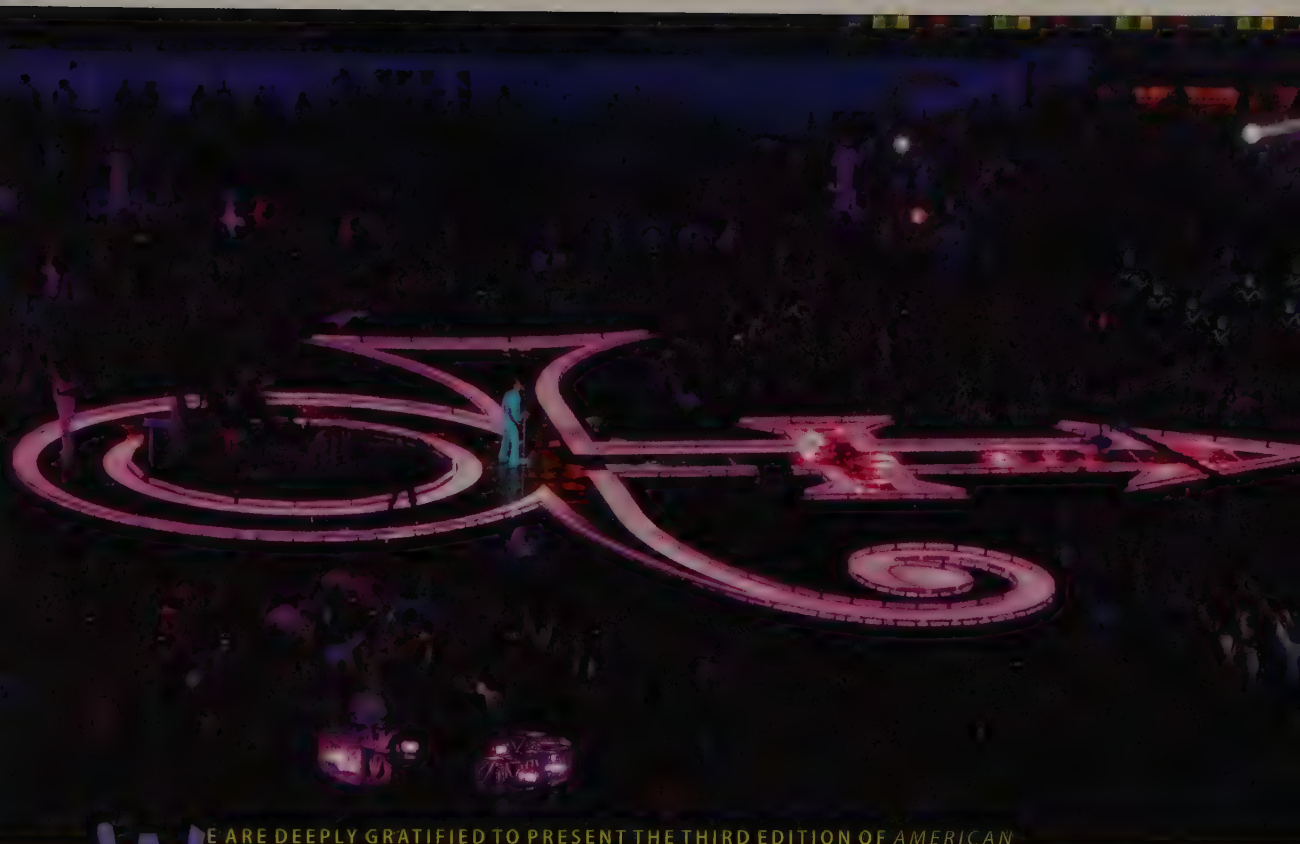
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Preface



WE ARE DEEPLY GRATIFIED TO PRESENT THE THIRD EDITION OF *AMERICAN Popular Music: From Minstrelsy to MP3*. It is not possible to thank adequately the many students, colleagues, and other interested readers whose enthusiasm for the previous editions of the book has brought us to this point, and whose many helpful observations and suggestions have informed the creation of this new edition at every stage.

What distinguishes our book from others in this rapidly growing field is that it combines two perspectives not often found in the same place: the study of cultural and social history on the one hand, and the analytical study of musical style on the other. In presenting this introductory survey of the rich terrain of American popular music, we bring years of experience in teaching courses for a general student population and in lecturing on musical subjects to general audiences. This experience has taught us that it is neither necessary nor desirable to talk down, write down, or think down to such groups. People love music and can quickly grasp all kinds of intricacies and subtleties concerning music, so long as what they read is free of jargon, clear, and unpretentious. We love American popular music ourselves—that is why we have written this book—and we have attempted to foreground this love for the subject in our writing, realizing that it is the most valuable common bond we share with all potential readers of our work.

OUR APPROACH

We fully expect that students, teachers, and readers of all kinds will enter into a creative dialogue with the material in this book. No general overview of a complex subject can begin to satisfy everyone. And since passions run high in the field of popular music, we anticipate that our particular perspectives, and particularly our choices of artists to emphasize and of specific examples to study, may well provoke some controversy at times, whether in the classroom or simply in the mind of the reader. We have felt it better to identify clearly our own viewpoints and enthusiasms than to try to hide behind a scrim of apparent objectivity. The opening chapter outlines particular *themes* and *streams* that serve as recurring reference points throughout the book, so that our narrative focus and our strategy are put forward at the outset.

While we feel that this text provides a sound and reliable starting point for the study and appreciation of American popular music, we claim no more than that. We hope and expect that teachers who use this book will share supplementary and contrasting perspectives on the material with their students, and that individual readers will use the bibliography as an enriching source of such perspectives as well. We inevitably bring certain limitations of perspective, along with our passions, to the understanding of the broad trajectory of American pop, and it is certainly desirable for all readers to seek out other perspectives and modes of understanding as they pursue this subject further.

WHAT'S NEW?

In one very important respect, this third edition reflects a thorough rethinking of our approach, and that is in our treatment of the Latin American “stream”—a stream of influence that plays such an essential role in both the history and the sound of American popular music. We have allowed this stream to come much more obviously, and appropriately, into the foreground of our story, principally through the addition of a great deal of new material that covers in detail topics such as Latin music in the big band era, the mambo craze of the 1950s, bossa nova, and salsa, among others. The result is a much more balanced overview, more accurately reflecting the richness and diversity of American popular culture.

All of the material from the second edition of the book has been reviewed and, of course, has been revised and updated wherever necessary. In our dizzying digital world, revision and updating proved most necessary in the sections on music technology and the music business.

To help students understand basic musical concepts and appreciate discussion of them in the text, we have added a new appendix illustrating beat, tempo, rhythm, and form.

We have also added exact timings to the “Listening and Analysis” boxes throughout the text, which we hope will help students more quickly grasp the intricacies of the music discussed. At the front of the book, you’ll find a list of all the listening guides: “Listening and Analysis” boxes as well as “Listening to” boxes (in-depth discussions of popular songs), with page numbers for ease of reference.

FEATURES

- **Listening Guides.** Rather than being separated out or introduced independently, the main musical discussions are integrated into the text at the points where they become relevant to the developing narrative; this approach seemed to us both logical and functional. Listening charts are used to represent and summarize, in outline form, the most important elements of recordings that are discussed in some detail in the text. The fact that we are dealing here to an overwhelming extent with *songs*—texted music—has enabled us to treat musical issues with some sophistication without having to employ musical notation, since lyrics may be used as points of specific orientation in the musical discussions. This keeps the focus on *listening* and opens the musical analyses to the widest possible audience without compromising depth of treatment. The “Listening and Analysis” and “Listening to . . .” boxes are indexed at the front of this book.
- **Key Terms.** We have sought to limit the use of specialized terms, to employ them only when clearly necessary, and to define them as they arise naturally in the course of study. The most important and frequently employed of these terms appear in **boldface** and are given extensive definitions in the glossary at the end of the book. The glossary is reserved for terms that recur throughout the book and that would not be defined adequately for our purposes in a standard college dictionary. (This means that terms like **producer**, which have a special meaning in popular music, will be found in the glossary, along with other expected terms such as **blues** and **syncopation**.) Significant terms that are relevant only to a limited section of material are *italicized* when they first occur, are defined in context, and can be located by using the book’s index.
- **Boxes.** Boxes are used occasionally in this book to provide further insight and information on significant individuals, recordings, and topics in cases where such material—albeit useful—would interrupt the flow of narrative. Important names are in **boldface italics** throughout the book.
- **Timeline.** An illustrated timeline at the back of the book surveys important landmarks in American popular music and places them in historical context.
- **In-Text CDs.** We are pleased to offer within this book a two-CD set presenting many important songs discussed in its pages. Obviously, due to both practical and licensing restrictions, we are unable to present a number of specific selections we wished to include, or to present as many selections as we would have liked. Although many songs analyzed in considerable detail are present on the CDs, not all of them are. Those that aren’t, with rare exception, will be found on an iMix available through the book’s **Companion Website**, www.oup.com/us/popmusic. Songs on the included CDs are marked with this symbol: ; songs on the iMix are marked with this symbol: .

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

The Instructor and Student Resources were updated and expanded for this edition by Mark Bergman of George Mason University, following on the materials prepared for the Second Edition by Patrick Roulet of Southern Utah University.

- **Instructor Resources.** The book's **Companion Website** at www.oup.com/us/popmusic offers an array of instructor resources, including PowerPoint slides for lectures, sample lecture outlines, assignments and exercises, filmographies, review/discussion questions, and sample syllabi. An **Instructor's Manual and Computerized Test Bank on CD** as well as **Course Management Systems** are available separately to instructors.
- **Student Resources.** Students will also find many helpful resources on the Companion Website, www.oup.com/us/popmusic, including chapter outlines, chapter overviews, important names and brief bios, flashcards with key terms and definitions, and links to websites relevant to the study of American popular music.
- **Subscription to the *Encyclopedia of Popular Music Online*.** Students and instructors alike will benefit from the **free 6-month subscription** to the online edition of the *Encyclopedia of Popular Music* (EPM) offered with this text; see the access code at the back of the text. EPM Online contains 27,000 entries covering popular music of all genres and periods from 1900 to the present day. The entries provide key dates, biographies, and further reading, along with complete discographies that include record labels, release dates, and a 5-star album rating system.

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At the University of Washington, our valued colleague Tom Collier has been a consistent and selfless source of assistance and encouragement. The course on American popular music out of which this book grew was shaped not only by faculty members but by graduate students as well—among whom we especially wish to cite Jon Kertzer, Peter Davenport, Stuart Goosman, and Jun Akutsu. We would like to thank Richard Caceres at UCLA, who designed the charts in the new appendix on meter and form and created the associated audio tracks. The many students who road-tested this book, both in its preliminary stages and in its first two editions, also merit our sustained thanks. Graduate assistants Elizabeth Knighton, Timothy Kinsella, Shelley Lawson, and Nathan Link at the University of Washington, and Sabrina Motley, Mark Eby, and Ann Mazzocca at UCLA gave invaluable and generous editorial assistance. We also owe a debt of gratitude to the folks at Joel Whitburn's Record Research for their series of books containing *Billboard* chart data. We could readily go on, like those CD inserts thanking everybody from the Almighty on down, but there's a story waiting to be told, and we'd best get on with it.

Larry Starr, University of Washington
Christopher Waterman, UCLA



Themes and Streams of American Popular Music

MANY PAGES OF THIS INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER COULD BE FILLED MERELY by listing the various terms and phrases that have been employed over time to categorize the many styles and forms of American popular music. Jazz. Rock. Hard rock. Soft rock. Classic rock. Alternative rock. Country. Easy listening. Hip-hop. And so on, and on, and on . . .

But think for a moment. Why all these categories? Who listens to them? Why are adjectives such as “soft” and “hard” applied to music? How do formats such as “classic rock,” “urban contemporary,” “adult alternative,” and “Spanish tropical” take shape? What does this dividing up of styles and audiences tell us about contemporary American culture? And who’s making money from all this?

We hope that this book will help you to think creatively and critically about such questions. Our goal is to get you to listen closely to popular music and to learn something about its history and about the people and institutions that have produced it. We cover a wide range of music, starting in the nineteenth century and continuing up through the 1990s and beyond. Listening to music is an important part of this study, and we hope that

you will enjoy the recordings that we have chosen to highlight. But be forewarned—we cannot possibly do justice to all the music you like, or all the musicians you admire (nor can we adequately denigrate the music you hate).

It is difficult to come up with a satisfactory definition of “popular music.” In many cases popular music is defined by its difference from other types of music, especially “art music” or “classical music,” on the one hand, and “folk music,” on the other. One problem with such categories is that they seem less reasonable when you get to grips with particular examples. In some ways the “garage band” tradition of rock music—in which a bunch of people get together to play music for fun, sometimes copying songs from records and sometimes composing their own—is more like “folk music” than “popular music.” In other cases—say, the ragtime piano pieces of Scott Joplin or the Beatles album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*—it is not easy to separate the “artistic” from the “popular.” Much of the music that people regard today as “folk music”—the records of the Weavers, the Kingston Trio, or Peter, Paul, and Mary—has been profoundly shaped by market forces. In many cases stylistic categories are themselves partly the product of marketing strategies by record companies, who in defining types of music hope to define types of fans to whom they can sell the music.

In this book we use the term “popular music” broadly, to indicate music that is mass-reproduced and disseminated via the mass media; that has at various times been listened to by large numbers of Americans; and that typically draws upon a variety of preexisting musical traditions. It is our view that popular music must be seen in relation to a broader musical landscape, in which various styles, audiences, and institutions interact in complex ways. This musical map is not static—it is always in motion, always evolving.

Theme One: Listening

Although this book covers a wide range of performers, styles, and historical periods, it is unified by several themes. First and foremost, we hope to encourage you to *listen critically* to popular music. The word “critical” doesn’t imply adopting a negative attitude. Rather, critical listening is listening that consciously seeks out meaning in music, drawing on some knowledge of how music is put together, its cultural significance, and its historical development.

Even if you don’t think of yourself as a musician, and don’t have much—or any—experience at reading musical notation, it is likely that you know much more about music than you think. You know when a chord sounds “wrong,” a note “out of tune,” or a singer “off key,” even if you can’t come up with a technical explanation for your reaction. You have learned a lot about music just growing up as a member of society, although much of that knowledge rests below the level of conscious awareness.

In everyday life, people often do not think carefully about the music they hear. Much popular music is in fact designed not to call critical attention to itself (a good example of this is the multimillion-dollar “environmental music” industry, pioneered by the Muzak Corporation). Other types of popular music—big band swing, funk, punk rock, hard rap, thrash metal—seek to grab your attention, but do not by and large encourage you to engage them

analytically. The point of analyzing popular music is not to ruin your enjoyment of it. Rather, we want to encourage you to expand your tastes, to hear the roots of today's music in earlier styles, and in the final analysis, to be a more critically aware "consumer" of popular music.

Formal analysis—listening for musical structure, its basic building blocks and the ways in which they are combined—can tell us a lot about popular music. We can, for example, discover that recordings as different as Glenn Miller's 1939 big-band hit "In the Mood," Little Richard's rock 'n' roll anthem "Tutti Frutti," James Brown's "I Got You (I Feel Good)," The Doors' "Riders on the Storm," and the theme song of the 1960s TV show *Batman* all share the same basic musical structure, the twelve-bar blues form (to be discussed in Chapter 5). Similarly, tunes as diverse as George Gershwin's 1930 song "I Got Rhythm," the Penguins' 1955 doo-wop hit "Earth Angel," "Yesterday" by the Beatles, and the theme of the 1960s cartoon show (and the 1993 film) *The Flintstones* all have an AABA melodic structure. You don't have to worry about such technicalities yet; there will be ample opportunity to discuss them later on. The point here is simply to suggest that a lot of popular music draws on a limited number of basic formal structures.

Structure is not the only important dimension of music. In order to analyze the way popular music actually sounds—the grain of a singing voice, the flow of a dance groove, or the gritty sound of an electric guitar—we must complement formal analysis with the analysis of *musical process*. To adopt a biological analogy, there is an important difference between understanding the *structure* of an organism—its constituent parts and how they are related—and the *processes* that bring these parts and relationships to life. Popular songs may be analyzed not only as composed "works" with their own internal characteristics but also as interpretations by particular performers: in other words, one must understand not only *song* but also *singing*.

Traditional musicology, which focuses on the written scores that serve as the model for performances in classical music, is often of little relevance in helping us to understand popular music. In this book we frequently use concepts directly relevant to popular music itself: for example, **riff**, a repeated pattern designed to generate rhythmic momentum; **hook**, a memorable musical phrase or riff; and **groove**, a term that evokes the channeled flow of "swinging" or "funky" or "phat" rhythms.

Another important aspect of musical process is **timbre**, the quality of a sound, sometimes called "tone color." Timbre plays an important role in establishing the "soundprint" of a performer. Play just five seconds of a recording by Louis Armstrong, Frank Sinatra, Johnny Cash, Aretha Franklin, Neil Diamond, Bruce Springsteen, Bonnie Raitt, Dr. Dre, or Bono, and any knowledgeable listener will be able to identify the singer by the "grain" of his or her voice.

Instrumental performers may also have highly memorable "soundprints." Some—for example, Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, Eddie Van Halen, or Kenny G—have become superstars. Others remain unknown to the general listening public, although their soundprints are very familiar: for example, James Jamerson, the master bassist of Motown; King Curtis, whose gritty tenor saxophone is featured on dozens of soul records from the 1960s; and Steve Gadd, studio drummer par excellence, who played on records by Aretha Franklin, Stevie Wonder, Barbra Streisand, Steely Dan, and Paul Simon during the 1970s.

Recording engineers, producers, arrangers, and record labels may also develop unique “soundprints.” We will encounter many examples of this: the distinctive “slap-back” echo of Elvis Presley’s early recordings on Sun Records; the quasi-symphonic teen pop recordings produced by Phil Spector; the stripped-down, “back to basics” soul sound of Stax Records in Memphis; and the immense sampled bass drum explosions used by engineer Steve Ett of Chung House of Metal, one of the most influential hip-hop studios. You will learn more about the creative contributions of arrangers, engineers, and producers as we go along; for now, you should simply note that the production of a particular “sound” often involves many individuals performing different tasks.

Lyrics—the words of a song—are another important aspect of popular music. In many cases words are designed to be one of the most immediately accessible parts of a song. In other cases—for example, the songs of Robert Johnson, Bob Dylan, John Lennon and Paul McCartney, David Byrne, Kurt Cobain, or Ice-T—the lyrics seem to *demand* interpretation, and fans take a great deal of pleasure from the process of figuring them out.

Dialect has also been a crucial factor in the history of American popular music. Some musical genres are strongly associated with particular dialects (country music with southern white dialects, rap music with certain urban black dialects, 1970s punk rock with working-class British dialects). The ability of African American artists such as Nat “King” Cole, Chuck Berry, and Diana Ross to “cross over” to a white middle-class audience was to some degree predicated upon their adoption of a dialect widely used in the mass media. In other cases, the mutual incomprehensibility of varieties of English has been consciously emphasized, particularly in recordings aimed at consumption within ethnic communities. There are sometimes very good reasons not to be understood by the majority.

These are some of the dimensions of popular musical style to keep in mind as you work your way through this book. Think about what attracts you to the music you like: the texture of a voice, the power of a guitar, the emotional insight of a lyric, the satisfying predictability of a familiar tune, the physical momentum of a rhythm. This is what makes popular music important to people: its sound, the sense it makes, and the way it feels.

Throughout the book, we will be operating on the assumption that you are (or have been, or will be) listening to the music under discussion. When sustained attention in the text is focused on individual recordings, you will find this indicated in one of two ways. *Listening and Analysis* sections include detailed treatment of formal elements and incorporate *Listening Charts* to assist in the comprehension and appreciation of these elements. Sections marked *Listening to* are less formal, and generally shorter, investigations into particular aspects of specific recordings.

Theme Two: Music and Identity

None of us is born knowing who we are—we all *learn* to be human in particular ways, and music is one important medium through which we formulate and express our identity. Think back to the very first pop song you remember hearing as a little kid, when you were, say, five years old. Odds are you heard it at home, or maybe in a car, or

(depending on your age) over a transistor radio or a portable CD player at the beach. The person playing it may have been one of your parents, or an older brother or sister. These are often the people who influence our early musical values, and it is they whose values we sometimes emphatically reject later in life. In elementary school, other kids begin to influence our taste, a development closely connected with the ways in which we form social groups based on gender, age, and other factors (boys versus girls, fifth graders versus first graders, cool kids versus nerds).

As we move into adolescence, popular music also enters our private lives, providing comfort and continuity during emotional crises and offering us the opportunity to fantasize about romance and rebellion. Pop music provides images of gender identity, culturally specific ways of being masculine and feminine. Ethnicity and race—including notions of how to act authentically “white” or “black” or “Latino”—are also powerfully represented in popular music.

As you grow older, a song or a singer’s voice may suddenly transport you back to a specific moment and place in your life, sometimes many decades earlier. Like all human beings, we make stories out of our lives, and music plays an important role in bringing these narratives to life. Some popular songs—for example, Frank Sinatra’s version of “It Was a Very Good Year,” Dolly Parton’s “Coat of Many Colors,” Don McLean’s “American Pie,” and Missy Elliott’s “Back in the Day”—are really *about* memory and the mixed feelings of warmth and loss that accompany a retrospective view of our own lives.

Popular music in America has from the very beginning been closely tied up with *stereotypes*, convenient ways of organizing people into categories. It is easy to find examples of stereotyping in American popular music: the common portrayal in song lyrics and music videos of women as sexual objects, and the association of men with violence; the image of African American men as playboys and gangsters; the stereotype of southern white musicians as illiterate, backwoods “rednecks”; the association of songs about money with supposedly Jewish musical characteristics; and the caricatures of Asian and Latin American people found in many novelty songs from the 1920s through the 1960s.

Stereotyping is often a double-edged sword. In certain cases popular performers have helped to undermine the “commonsense” association of certain styles with certain types of people: the black country singer Charley Pride and the white blues musician Stevie Ray Vaughan are just two examples of performers whose styles challenge stereotyped conceptions of race and culture. The history of popular music in the United States is also replete with examples of minority groups who have reinterpreted derogatory stereotypes and made them the basis for distinctive forms of musical creativity and cultural pride—“Say It Loud, I’m Black and Proud,” “Okie from Muskogee,” “The Happy Polak Polka,” “[At the] YMCA.”

Why do people make and listen to music? What do they want from it, and what does it give them? These questions take us beyond the central concern of classic aesthetic theory, the creation and appreciation of “beauty for beauty’s sake.” People value music for many reasons, including a desire for beauty, but also a great deal more: they use music to escape from the rigors of the work week, to celebrate important events in their lives, to help them make money, war, and love. In order to understand the cultural significance of

popular music, we must examine both the music—its tones and textures, rhythms and forms—and the broader patterns of social identity that have shaped Americans' tastes and values.

Theme Three: Music and Technology

From the heyday of printed sheet music in the nineteenth century through the rise of the phonograph record, network radio, and sound film in the 1920s, right up to the present era of digital recording, computerized **sampling**, and Internet-based radio, technology has shaped popular music and has helped disseminate it, more and more rapidly, to more and more people. Technology doesn't determine the decisions made by a musician or an audience, but it can make a particular range of choices available to them.

It has often been argued that the mass media create a gap between musicians and their audiences, a distance that often encourages us to forget that the music we hear is made by other human beings. To what degree has technology affected our relationship to music and, more importantly, to other people? This is by no means a simple issue. Some critics of today's musical technology would say that a much higher percentage of Americans were able to perform music for their own enjoyment a century ago, when the only way of experiencing music was to hear it performed live or to make it yourself. This decline in personal music making is generally attributed to the influence of mass media, which are said to encourage passive listening. However, nationwide sales figures for musical instruments—including electronic instruments such as digital keyboards and drum pads—suggest that millions of people in the United States are busy making music.

In addition, although the mass media can encourage passivity, people aren't always passive when they listen to recorded music. Have you ever pretended to be a favorite musician while listening to music by yourself, perhaps even mimicking onstage movements (playing "air guitar" or "virtual drums")? Have you ever embarrassed yourself by unconsciously singing along with your iPod in a public setting? When you listen over headphones, don't you enter into the music in your imagination and in an important sense help to "make" the music?

Although we tend to associate the word "technology" with novelty and change, older technologies often take on important value as tokens of an earlier—and, it is often claimed, better—time. Old forms of musical hardware and software—music boxes, player pianos, phonographs, sheet music, 78s, 45s, and LPs—become the basis for subcultures made up of avid collectors. In some cases, older music technologies are regarded as qualitatively superior to the new. For example, some contemporary musicians make a point of using analog rather than digital recording technology. This decision is based on the aesthetic judgment that analog recordings—which directly mirror the energy fluctuations of sound waves—"sound better" than digital recordings—which break sound waves down into packets of information. Musicians who prefer analog recording say that it is "warmer," "richer-sounding," and somehow "more human" than digital recording.

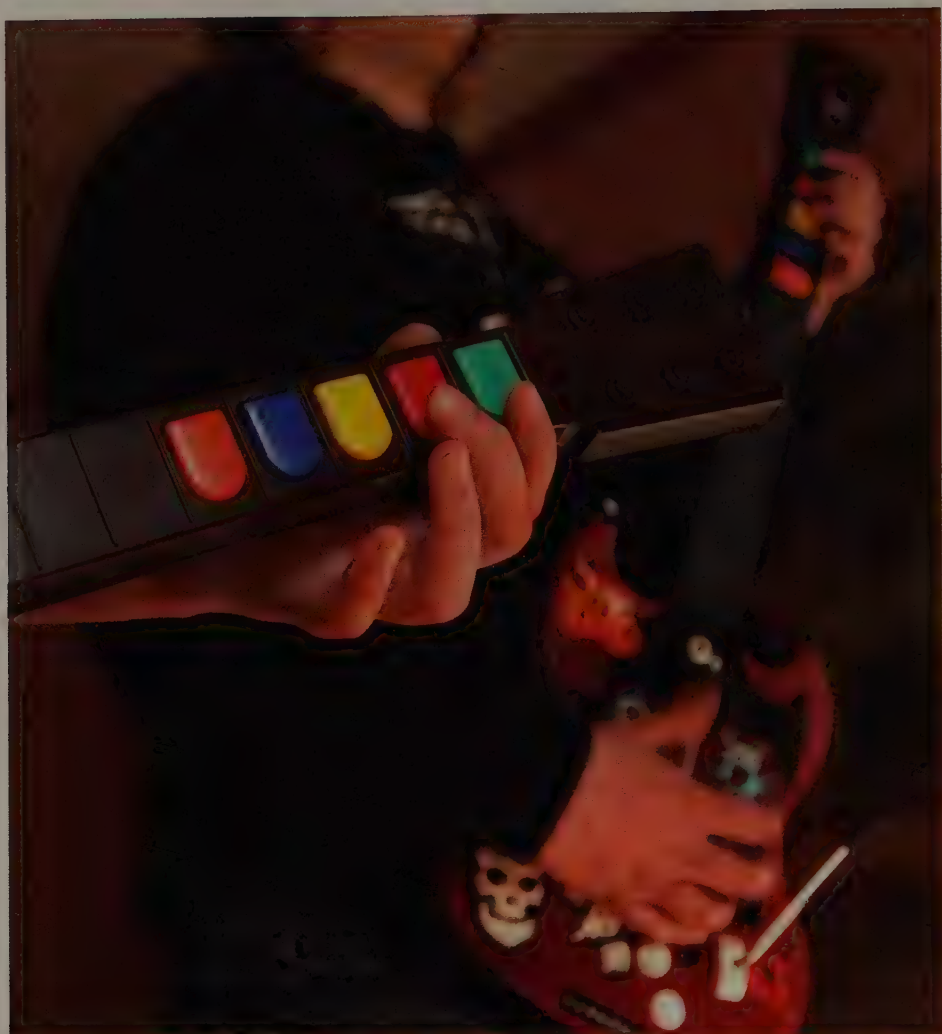
Sometimes the rejection of electronic technology functions as an emblem of "authenticity," as, for example, in MTV's *Unplugged* series, where rockers such as Eric Clap-



One of the earliest FM radio stations, Alpine, New Jersey, 1948. Courtesy Library of Congress.

ton, R.E.M., Nirvana, and Korn demonstrate their “real” musical ability and sincerity by playing on acoustic instruments. However, there are also many examples of technologies being used in ways that encourage active involvement, ranging from the hands-on manipulation of multiple record turntables by hip-hop **DJs** to the worldwide popularity of *karaoke* machines and software, a technology whose effectiveness depends upon the active participation of listeners. Worldwide sales of musical instruments have remained more or less steady during the first decade of the twenty-first century, and even a cursory tour of the video-sharing website *YouTube* (launched in 2005) will confirm the existence of thousands of musicians eager to share their work with a wider audience.

In the end, there is no easy way to summarize the evolving relationship between human musicality and technology. It could be argued that the emergence of the *Guitar Hero* video game (2005) is a perfect instance of the multiple, contradictory possibilities built into the latest musical technologies. Playing *Guitar Hero* can probably help nonmusicians develop their sense of musical form and their rhythmic skills, since the game involves touching buttons on the guitar controller’s neck within certain windows of time determined by the structure and the speed of the music. However, it can also be argued that racking up a high score on *Guitar Hero* is not in essence a musical accomplishment at all, but rather a skill more akin to playing other video games, and that the



Now everyone can be a (guitar) hero. Mark Dye/Star Ledger/Corbis.

game might in fact direct some aspiring musicians away from the sustained discipline involved in mastering a musical instrument. In any case, there can be no doubting the commercial impact of *Guitar Hero*, both in terms of sales (23 million units and \$1.6 billion in profit as of December 2008) and in its role as a means of promoting contemporary musicians and introducing young gamers to the rock music of decades past. (According to the *Washington Post*, every song included in the *Guitar Hero III* and *Rock Band* game packages saw Internet download sales increase during 2007 between 15 and 843 percent!) If it is true that technology has long been used in cynical ways to manipulate the public into buying certain kinds of music, it also remains the case that people frequently seek to exert creative control over the role of musical machines in their own lives.

Theme Four: The Music Business

In order to understand the history of American popular music, it is necessary that we learn about the workings of the music business. The production of popular music typically involves the work of many individuals performing different roles. From the nineteenth century until the 1920s, sheet music was the principal means of disseminating popular songs to a mass audience. This process typically involved a complex network of people and institutions: the composer and lyricist who wrote a song; the publishing company that bought the rights to it; song pluggers, who promoted the song in stores and convinced big stars to incorporate it into their acts; the stars themselves, who often worked in shows that toured along a circuit of theaters controlled by yet other organizations; and so on, right down to the consumer, who bought the sheet music and performed it at home.

The rise of radio, recording, and movies as the primary means for popularizing music added many layers of complexity to this process. Today hundreds of people will have had a hand in producing the music you listen to. In mainstream pop music, the **composer** and **lyricist** are still important; the songs they write are reworked to complement a particular performer's strengths by an **arranger**, who decides which instruments to use to accompany them, what key the song should be in, how many times it should be repeated, and a host of other details. The **A&R** (artists and repertoire) personnel of a record company seek out talent, often visiting nightclubs and rehearsals to hear new groups. The **producer** of a record may play several roles: convincing the board of directors of a record company to back a particular project, shaping the development of new "talent," and often intervening directly in the recording process. Engineers work in the studio, making hundreds of important decisions about the balance between voice and instruments, the use of effects such as echo and **reverb**, and other factors that shape the overall "sound" of a record. The publicity department plans the advertising campaign, and the public relations department handles interactions with the press.

This is only the barest outline of the interlocking roles involved in the production and promotion of popular music today. Business agents, video producers, graphic artists, copy editors, record stores, stage hands, truck drivers, T-shirt companies, and the companies that produce musical hardware—often owned by the same corporations that produce the recordings—also play vital roles in this process. It is hard to know where to draw the boundaries of an industry that has extended itself into so many aspects of commerce and culture.

In addition, many of the roles described above have become intermingled in complex ways. A person like Quincy Jones, for example, is a performer, a songwriter, an arranger, a producer (who makes lots of engineering decisions), and a record label executive. And the wider availability of digital recording equipment means that some performers may also act as their own arranger, producer, and engineer (Stevie Wonder and Prince are good examples of this kind of collapsing of roles).

Theodor Adorno, a German philosopher who wrote in the 1940s and 1950s, powerfully criticized the effects of capitalism and industrialization on popular music. He suggested that the music industry promotes the *illusion* that we are all highly independent individuals defined by our personal tastes—"I'm a country music fan," "You're a metal-

head.” In fact, Adorno argued, the industry manipulates the notion of personal taste to sucker us into buying its products. Emotional identification with the wealthy superstars portrayed on television and in film—the “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous” syndrome—is, in Adorno’s view, a poor substitute for the humane and ethical social relations that typify healthy communities.

In some ways Adorno was right: Americans are probably less individualistic than they like to think, and it is often true that record companies con us into buying the latest thing on the basis of tiny differences in musical style, rather like the little design changes that mark off different kinds of automobiles or tape decks or tennis shoes. And it is true that the private experience of listening over headphones—like the experience of driving alone in an automobile with the windows rolled up—can isolate people from one another.

But there’s more to it than that. Just ask anyone who’s worked in the music business and developed an ulcer trying to predict what the next trend will be. Compared to other industries that produce consumer products, the music business is quite unpredictable. Today, only about one out of eight recordings makes a profit. One platinum album—a certified million-seller like Michael Jackson’s *Thriller*, Madonna’s *Like a Virgin*, Nirvana’s *Nevermind*, or Dr. Dre’s *The Chronic*—must compensate for literally hundreds of unprofitable records made by unknown musicians or faded stars. As record company executives seek to guarantee their profits by producing variations on “the same old thing,” they also nervously eye the margins to spot and take advantage of the latest trends.

The relationship between the “majors”—large record companies with lots of capital and power—and the “indies”—small independent labels operating in marginal markets—has been an important factor in the development of American popular music. In most cases, the majors have played a conservative role, seeking to ensure profits by producing predictable (some would say “bland”) music for a large middle-class audience. The indies, run by entrepreneurs, have often had to be more daring, searching out new talent, creating specialized niches, and feeding new styles into the musical mainstream. It is mostly these small labels that initially popularized blues, country music, rhythm & blues, rock ‘n’ roll, funk, soul music, reggae, punk rock, rap, grunge, worldbeat, and other “alternative” styles. In some cases, indie labels have grown large and powerful; one example of this is Atlantic Records, which began as a small R&B label in the late 1940s and grew into a multimillion-dollar corporation.

Today, the relationship between indies and majors has been extended over the globe—four corporations now control at least 75 percent of the world’s legal trade in commercially recorded music. Each of these transnational corporations has bought up many smaller labels, using them as incubators for new talent, a system reminiscent of the relationship between major and minor league teams in baseball.

Theme Five: Centers and Peripheries

The distinction between major and minor labels leads us to a final theme: the idea that the history of American popular music may be broadly conceptualized in terms of a center-periphery model. The “center”—actually several geographically distinct centers,

including New York, Los Angeles, and Nashville—is where power, capital, and control over mass media are concentrated. The “periphery” is inhabited by smaller institutions and by people who have historically been excluded from the political and economic mainstream. This distinction is by no means intended to suggest that the center is “normal” and the periphery “abnormal.” Rather, it is a way of clarifying a process that has profoundly shaped the development of popular music in the United States: that is, the role of the musical “margins” in shaping mainstream popular taste and the workings of the music industry.

The stylistic mainstream of American popular music was, until at least the mid-1950s, largely oriented toward the tastes of white, middle- or upper-class, Protestant, urban people. In economic terms, this makes perfect sense, since it was these people who for many years made up the bulk of the expanding urban market for mass-reproduced music. From whom have the vital “peripheral” musical impulses of which we have been speaking come? The evidence, as you shall see, is abundant: from African Americans, poor southern whites, working-class people, Jewish and Latin American immigrants, adolescents, gays, and various other folks whose “difference” vis-à-vis the mainstream has at times weighed upon them as a burden.

The history of popular music in the United States shows us how supposedly marginal musics and musicians have repeatedly helped to invigorate the center of popular taste and the music industry. Regrettably, it has sometimes also been the case that the people most responsible for creating the music that people in the United States and elsewhere consider quintessentially American have not reaped an equitable share of the profits accumulated from the fruits of their labor.

Streams of Tradition: The Sources of Popular Music

In 1937 the anthropologist Ralph Linton published an article entitled “One-Hundred Percent American.” “There can be no question about the average American’s Americanism or his desire to preserve his precious heritage at all costs,” wrote Linton. “Nevertheless, some insidious foreign ideas have already wormed their way into his civilization without his realizing what was going on.” These “insidious ideas”—derived from the cultures of Asia, the Near East, Europe, Africa, and Native America—include pajamas, the toilet, soap, the toothbrush, the chair, shoes, the mirror, coffee, fermented and distilled drinks, the cigar, and even the newspaper. On the train to work, Linton’s “average American” reads the news of the day, imprinted in characters invented by the ancient Semites by a process invented in Germany on a material invented in China. As he scans the latest editorial pointing out the dire results to our institutions of accepting foreign ideas, he thanks a Hebrew God in an Indo-European language that he is 100 percent (decimal system invented by the Greeks) American (from Amerigo Vespucci, Italian geographer).

Similarly, every aspect of popular music that is today regarded as American in character has sprung from imported traditions. These source traditions may be classified into three broad “streams”: European American music, African American music, and Latin

American music. Each of these streams is made up of many styles of music, and each has profoundly influenced the others.

THE EUROPEAN AMERICAN STREAM

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, American popular music was almost entirely European in character. The cultural and linguistic dominance of the English meant that their music—including folk ballads, popular songs printed as sheet music, and various types of dance music—established early on a kind of “mainstream” around which other styles circulated.

At the time of the American Revolution, professional composers of popular songs in England drew heavily upon **ballads**, a type of song in which a series of **verses** telling a story, often about a historical event or personal tragedy, are sung to a repeating melody (this sort of musical form is called **strophic**). Originally an oral tradition, passed down in unwritten form, ballads were eventually circulated on large sheets of paper called *broad-sides*, the ancestors of today’s sheet music. While some broadside ballads were drawn from folk tradition, many were urban in origin and concerned with current events (much like today’s tabloid newspapers). In most cases only the words were provided, with an indication of a traditional melody—for example, “Greensleeves”—to which they were to be sung. Balladmongers hawking the broadsides sang them on the streets, an early form of commercial song promotion. Composers of broadside ballads often added a catchy **chorus**, a repeated melody with fixed text inserted between verses.



Castle Garden, New York City, in 1848, as depicted in a lithograph by Nathaniel Currier. Courtesy Library of Congress.

The *pleasure garden*, a forerunner of today's theme parks, was the most important source of public entertainment in England between 1650 and 1850. Large urban parks filled with meandering tree-lined paths, the pleasure gardens provided an idyllic rural experience for an expanding urban audience. The pleasure gardens became one of the main venues for the dissemination of printed songs by professional composers, and many of the first widely popular songsheets were illustrated with sketches of the gardens and other romanticized rural scenes. In the 1760s the first American pleasure gardens opened in Charleston, New York, and other cities.

The English *ballad opera* tradition was also extremely popular in America during the early nineteenth century. These stage productions drew upon ballads, some of which had previously been circulated as broadsides. Perhaps the best known of the English ballad operas is John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), designed to counter the domination of the British stage by Italian composers and musicians. The main characters in ballad operas were common people, rather than the kings and queens of imported operas; the songs were familiar in form and content; and the lyrics were all in English rather than Italian.

The pleasure gardens and ballad operas both featured songs produced by professional composers for large and diverse audiences. Melodies were designed to be simple and easy to remember, and the lyrics focused on romantic themes.

The English ballad tradition thrived in America, and songs were reworked to suit the life circumstances of new immigrants. In the early twentieth century folklorists interested in continuities with English traditions were able to record dozens of versions of old English ballads in the United States. While today these songs are preserved mainly by folk music enthusiasts, the core of the tradition—including its musical forms and storytelling techniques—lives on in contemporary country and western music. In addition, vocal qualities derived from the Anglo-American tradition—notably the thin, nasalized tone known as the “high lonesome sound”—continue today as markers of southern white identity.

Irish, Scottish, and Italian songs also influenced early American popular song. Copies of Thomas Moore's multivolume collection of *Irish Melodies* (a collection of Moore's poems set to Irish folk melodies, published in London and Dublin between 1808 and 1834) were widely circulated in the United States, and Scottish songs such as “Auld Lang Syne” (probably written in the late seventeenth century and still performed today on New Year's Eve) also enjoyed wide popularity. By the first decades of the nineteenth century, the Italian opera was also very popular in the United States. Songs by Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and other Italian composers were published as sheet music, and the *bel canto* style of singing—light, clear, flexible, and intimate—had a major effect on the development of popular singing style.

Dance music was another important aspect of the European influence on American popular music. Until the late nineteenth century European American dance was closely modeled on styles imported from England and the Continent. Country dances—in which dancers arranged themselves into circles, squares, or opposing rows—were popular. In the United States the country dance tradition developed into a plethora of urban and rural, elite and lower-class, black and white variants. It continues today in country and western line dances and in the contradances that form part of the modern folk music scene.

The nineteenth century also saw a move toward couple dances, including the waltz, the galop, the schottische, and the ballroom polka, the last based on a Bohemian dance that had already become the rage in the ballrooms of Paris and London before coming to America. Later, in the 1880s, a fast dance called the one-step, based in part on marching band music, became popular. These couple dances are direct predecessors of the African American-influenced popular dance styles of the early twentieth century, including the two-step, fox-trot, bunny hug, and Charleston.

In addition to songs and dance music produced by professional composers for a largely urban audience, immigration brought a wide variety of European *folk music* to America. The mainstream of English-dominated popular song and dance music was from early on surrounded by a myriad of folk and popular styles brought by immigrants from other parts of Europe. The descendants of early French settlers in North America and the Caribbean maintained their own musical traditions. Millions of Irish and German immigrants came to the United States during the nineteenth century, seeking an escape from oppression, economic uncertainty, and—particularly during the potato famine of the 1840s—the threat of starvation. Between 1880 and 1910 an additional seventeen million immigrants entered the United States, mostly from eastern and southern Europe. These successive waves of migration contributed to the diversity of musical life in the United States. European-derived musical styles such as Cajun (Acadian) fiddling, Jewish *klezmer* music, and the Polish polka—an energetic dance, quite different from the “refined” style of polka discussed above—have each contributed to mainstream popular music while maintaining a solid base in particular ethnic communities.

The Europeans who came to America also brought many styles and traditions of religious music to our shores. The Protestant sacred repertory exerted a strong influence on the development of country music, an influence that is felt to this day. Echoes of synagogue cantorial singing may be heard in the melodic lines composed by the great Jewish songwriters of Tin Pan Alley. In fact, the line between “sacred” and “secular” song was rarely, if ever, absolutely fixed in American culture. This is readily illustrated by our long tradition of popular “Christmas music,” which freely mixes songs of deeply religious import with songs of nonsectarian seasonal character. Popular musicians from the most wide-ranging ethnic, national, and religious backgrounds have regularly made their contributions to Christmas music, often creating major hit records in the process. The seasonal tribute “White Christmas” (composed by songwriter Irving Berlin, who was Jewish) is the most famous example of this, but the tradition of Christmas hits can now be traced back over a century. Between 1905 and 1936 there were no fewer than six different hit recordings of “Silent Night,” by six different artists; in more recent times, Barbra Streisand and the Temptations brought forth their own successful versions of the song—which, we should be quick to recall, is an English translation of a German song of Christian devotion originally composed in 1818.

THE AFRICAN AMERICAN STREAM

Not all immigrants came willingly. Between one and two million people from Africa, about 10 percent of the total transatlantic traffic in slaves, were forcibly brought to the

United States between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. The areas of western and central Africa from which slaves were drawn were home to hundreds of distinct societies, languages, and musical traditions.

The genesis of African American music in the United States involved two closely related processes. The first of these was *syncretism*, the selective blending of traditions derived from Africa and Europe. The second important process was the creation of *institutions* that became important centers of black musical life—the family, the church, the voluntary association, the school, and so on.

It is misleading to speak of “black music” as a homogeneous entity. African American culture took different forms in Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica, and the United States, shaped by the particular mix of African and European (and in some cases American Indian) source traditions, and by local social conditions. In the United States, people from the Senegambia region of West Africa—the Wolof, Mandinka, and other groups—appear to have made up a large part of the slave population. Kunta Kinte, the ancestor of *Roots* author Alex Haley, was a Wolof man from what is today the nation of Gambia; the banjo, an African American invention, was developed from stringed instruments common in the Senegambia region; and certain aspects of blues singing, including the role of the musician as a social critic, are derived from the *griot* (praise singer) traditions of the West African savannah.

Certain features of African music form the core of African American music and, by extension, of American popular music as a whole. *Call-and-response* forms, in which a lead singer and chorus alternate, the leader being allowed more freedom to elaborate his part, are a hallmark of African American musical traditions. In much African musicmak-



The Harlem Gospel Choir, demonstrating the leader-and-chorus, call-and-response relationship common in African American music (2004). Robert O. Rabanne/Getty Images.

ing *repetition* is regarded as an aesthetic strength, and many forms are constructed of relatively short phrases—often two to eight beats in length—that recur in a regular cycle. These short phrases are combined in various ways to produce music of great power and complexity. In African American music such repeated patterns are often called **riffs**.

The aesthetic interest of much African music lies in the *interlocking* of multiple repeating patterns to form dense **polyrhythmic** textures (textures in which many rhythms are going on at the same time). This technique is evident in African American styles such as funk music, particularly the work of James Brown, and the instrumental accompaniments (“beats”) for contemporary rap recordings. One common West African rhythm pattern has generated many variants in the Americas, including the “hambone” riff popularized during the rock ‘n’ roll era by Bo Diddley, Johnny Otis, and Buddy Holly.

In contrast to the aesthetics of Western art music, in which a “clear” tone is the ideal, African singers and instrumentalists often make use of a wide palette of **timbres**. *Buzzing tones* are often created by attaching a rattling device to an instrument, and singers frequently use growling and humming effects, a technique that can also frequently be heard in African American genres such as blues, gospel, and jazz. In West African drumming traditions the lead or master drummer often plays the lowest-pitched drum in the group. This *emphasis on low-pitched sounds* may be a predecessor of the prominent role of the bass drum in Mississippi black fife-and-drum ensembles and of the “sonic boom bass” aesthetic in rap music (the *whooomp!* created by heavily amplified low-frequency signals). Kurtis Blow, a rap performer and producer, described the rap producer’s goal in terms of breaking car speakers, house speakers, and boom boxes, identifying this as “African music”!

The influence of African musical aesthetics and techniques on American popular music has been profound. The history of this influence, which we shall examine in some detail, reveals both the creativity of black musicians and the persistence of racism in the music business and American society as a whole. The origins of a distinctively American style of popular entertainment lie in the minstrel show of the mid-nineteenth century, in which white performers artificially darkened their skin and mimicked black music, dance, and dialect. In the early twentieth century African American ragtime and blues profoundly shaped the mainstream of American popular song. The “jazz age” of the 1920s and the “swing era” of the 1930s and 1940s involved the reworking of African American dance music so it would appeal to a predominantly white middle-class audience.

Although country music is typically identified as a “white” style, some of its biggest stars—for example, Ray Charles and Charley Pride—have been black, and the styles of influential country musicians such as Jimmie Rodgers, Hank Williams, and Willie Nelson were strongly influenced by African American music. One could cite many more examples of the influence of black music on the musical “mainstream” of America: 1950s rock ‘n’ roll was, in large part, rhythm & blues (**R&B**) music reworked for a predominantly white teen music market; the influence of 1960s soul music, rooted in black gospel and R&B, is heard in the vocal style of practically every pop singer, from Bonnie Raitt and Whitney Houston to Bruce Springsteen and Michael Jackson; the virtuoso guitar

style of heavy metal owes a large debt to the urban blues of Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf; and rap music, based on African-derived musical and verbal traditions, continues to provide many white Americans with a vicarious experience of "listening in" on black urban culture.

We could say, then, that with every passing year American popular music has moved closer to the core aesthetic values and techniques of African music. Yet this way of phrasing the matter is somewhat misleading, for it directs attention away from the fact that African Americans are Americans, that the ancestors of black Americans arrived in the United States *before* the forebears of many white Americans. The complex history of interaction between European American and African American styles, musicians, and audiences demonstrates the absurdity of racism, just as it attests to the unfortunate tenacity of racial thinking in America.

THE LATIN AMERICAN STREAM

As in the United States, musicians in Latin America developed a wide range of styles blending African music with the traditions of Europe (including colonial powers such as Spain, Portugal, and France). Caribbean, South American, and Mexican traditions have long influenced popular music in the United States.

The first Latin American style to have a major international impact was the Cuban *habanera*, an African-influenced variant of the European country-dance tradition that swept the United States and Europe in the 1880s. The characteristic *habanera* rhythm—an eight-beat pattern divided 3-3-2—influenced late nineteenth-century ragtime music and was an important part of what the great New Orleans pianist Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton called the "Latin tinge" in American jazz.

The next wave of Latin American influence on the music of the United States came from Argentina. The *tango*, initially played by musicians in the capital city of Buenos Aires, was influenced by the Cuban *habanera* rhythm, Italian and Spanish songs, and the songs of *gauchos* (cowboys). The tango reached Europe in the 1910s, where it was popularized by Carlos Gardel, a film and recording star who is today regarded as a national hero in Argentina. In the United States the ballroom version of the tango, a couple dance featuring close contact between partners and an insistent rhythm, was popularized around 1914 by dance stars Irene and Vernon Castle (see Chapter 3). One of the first big tango stars was Rudolph Valentino, whose film persona somewhat indiscriminately mixed the stereotypes of the "Latin lover" and the proud and independent Middle Eastern sheik.

The next wave of Latin American musical influence was the *rumba*. The roots of the ballroom rumba style that became popular in the United States lie in 1920s Cuba. The rural *son*—a Cuban parallel of "country music"—moved to the city of Havana, where it was played by professional dance bands. These musicians created a more exciting style by adding rhythms from the *rumba*, an urban street drumming style strongly rooted in African traditions.

A "refined" version of *rumba*, developed by musicians working at tourist hotels in Cuba, was introduced to the world by Don Azpiazu and his Havana Casino Orchestra. Azpiazu's 1930 recording of "El Manicero" ("The Peanut Vendor") became a huge international hit (see Chapter 3). Within a few months of its release many dance orchestras



Contemporary performance of the tango, a dance music style from Argentina that swept the world in the 1910s. Robbie Jack/Corbis.

in the United States had recorded their own versions of the song, a phenomenon later known as “covering” a hit song. The *rumba* reached a height of popularity in the United States during the 1930s and 1940s and was succeeded after World War II by a series of Cuban-based ballroom dance fads, including the *mambo* and the *cha-cha-chá*.

Variants of Cuban-based music in the United States ranged from the exciting blend of modern jazz and *rumba* pioneered by Machito and Dizzy Gillespie in the 1940s to the tourist-oriented style performed by Desi Arnaz’s orchestra on the *I Love Lucy* television show. The 1960s saw the emergence of *salsa*, a *rumba*-based style pioneered by Cuban and Puerto Rican migrants in New York City. The stars of *salsa* music include the great singer Celia Cruz and bandleader Tito Puente. In the 1980s Miami Sound Machine created a commer-

cially successful blend of *salsa* and disco music, and “world beat” musicians such as Paul Simon and David Byrne began to experiment with traditional Afro-Cuban rhythms.

The Brazilian *samba* is another dance style strongly rooted in African music. The variant of samba that had the biggest influence in the United States was the *carioca*, a smooth style developed in Rio de Janeiro. The *carioca* was boosted in the 1940s by the meteoric career of Carmen Miranda, who appeared in a series of popular musical films. A cool, sophisticated style of Brazilian music called the *bossa nova* (“new trend”) became popular in United States during the early 1960s, eventually spawning hit songs such as “The Girl from Ipanema” (1964).

Mexican music has long had a symbiotic relationship with styles north of the Rio Grande. At the end of the nineteenth century Mexican musicians visited the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago (an early example of the world’s fair) and later toured throughout the United States. The two best-known Mexican-derived styles today are *conjunto acordeon* (“accordion band”) music, played in northern Mexico and Texas; and *mariachi* (“marriage”) music, a staple of the Mexican tourist trade, performed by ensembles made up of guitars, violins, and trumpets. Country and western music has been influenced by Mexican styles since at least the 1930s. Mexican immigrants in California (*Chicanos*) have also played an important role in the development of rock music. This continuing influence is exemplified by Ritchie Valens’s 1959 hit “La Bamba,” based on a folk tune from Veracruz; the mixture of *salsa* and guitar-based rock music developed in the late 1960s by guitarist Carlos Santana; recordings of traditional Mexican songs by Linda Ronstadt; and the hard-rocking style of the Los Angeles-based band Los Lobos.

The impact of the Latin American stream on American popular music is seen most obviously in the Latin dance and Spanish-language recordings that have become hits in the United States. Far more wide reaching and arguably more important, however, is the way in which sounds and rhythms rooted in Latin American musical culture have found their place in a broad range of U.S. popular styles and genres—often without conscious intent on the part of those involved. It may be said that Latin American sounds and rhythms have penetrated the collective unconscious of American popular music, as aspects of African American performance styles and European American song forms have done.

IN THIS CHAPTER we have discussed some unifying themes that run through the history of American popular music and described some of the diverse traditions that have contributed to this rich history. Now we want to get more specific, beginning with the nineteenth century, when the music business and the first distinctively American styles of popular music began to take shape.

"After the Ball"

Popular Music of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

IN THIS CHAPTER WE TURN OUR ATTENTION TO POPULAR MUSIC OF THE nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This period saw the birth of minstrelsy, the first distinctively American form of popular culture; the rise of the modern music industry; rapid expansion of the audience for popular music; changes in technology that supported the dissemination of music to a national audience; and the emergence of song and dance music styles that were to influence profoundly the subsequent development of popular music in the United States.

The Minstrel Show

The *minstrel show*, the first form of musical and theatrical entertainment to be regarded by European audiences as distinctively American in character, featured mainly white performers who artificially blackened their skin and carried out parodies of African

American music, dance, dress, and dialect. Today blackface minstrelsy is quite reasonably regarded with embarrassment or anger. Yet there is good reason to believe that the common interpretation of minstrelsy as an unvarying expression of white racism oversimplifies the diverse and sometimes ambiguous meanings that this form of popular culture held at different times and for various audiences. In any case, it would be difficult if not impossible to understand subsequent developments in the history of American popular music without some knowledge of the minstrel show.

Recent scholarship on the evolution of blackface minstrelsy suggests that this semi-nal form of American popular culture emerged from rough-and-tumble, predominantly working-class neighborhoods such as New York City's Seventh Ward, commercial urban zones where interracial interaction was common. From this point of view, early blackface performers were the first expression of a distinctively American popular culture, in which working-class white youth expressed their own sense of marginalization through an identification with African American cultural forms. This does not mean that minstrelsy cannot also be read as a projection of white racism—in fact, this interpretation makes even more sense in the later years of minstrelsy (1840s–1880s), when, as we shall see, the portrayal of black characters became more rigidly stereotypical. But, as is often the case with popular cultural forms, the meanings of blackface minstrelsy were neither fixed nor unambiguous.

Black characters had been played by white actors in British comic operas of the eighteenth century, some of which became popular in America before the Revolutionary War. Most of the songs sung by these characters were European in character and written in a childishly simple style; they often drew upon Irish or Scottish melodies ("exotic" styles available to English composers). *George Washington Dixon* was the first white performer to establish a wide reputation as a "blackface" entertainer. He made his New York City debut in 1829, and two of the earliest "Ethiopian" songs to enjoy widespread popularity—"Long Tail Blue" and "Coal Black Rose"—were featured in his act. Like their English predecessors, they were simple melodies in a European mold.

Thomas Dartmouth Rice (1808–60), a white actor born into a poor family in New York's Seventh Ward, demonstrated the potential popularity (and profitability) of minstrelsy with the song "Jim Crow" (1829), which became the first international American song hit. Rice sang this song in blackface while imitating a dance step called the "cakewalk," an Africanized version of the European quadrille (a kind of square dance). Ironically, the cakewalk was first developed by slaves as a parody of the "refined" dance movements of the white slave owners. An ex-slave, interviewed in 1901, recalled the slave dances of the 1840s, the same period in which minstrelsy rose to mass popularity among whites:

Us slaves watched the white folks' parties where the guests danced a minuet and then paraded in a grand march, with the ladies and gentlemen going different ways and then meeting again, arm in arm, and marching down the center together. Then we'd do it, too, but we used to mock 'em, every step. Sometimes the white folks noticed it, but they seemed to like it. I guess they thought we couldn't dance any better! (Levine 1977, p. 17)

to saloons, the latter often patronized by a racially mixed audience of urban workers and craftsmen. Contrary to much of what has been written about early minstrelsy, which suggests that the performers were exclusively white, recent research suggests that black and mixed-race performers were on view in most of the local "dives" that featured minstrel performances. The musical and linguistic heritage of early minstrelsy was just as mixed as its audience and practitioners. Scholars have suggested that the most likely inspiration for "Jim Crow" was not an African American song but an Irish folk tune that had subsequently been transformed into an English stage song. Although sheet music arrangements suggest that Rice's song bore only an indirect relationship to African American folk music, we have no direct evidence of the musical aspects of his stage performances.

"Daddy" Rice's Jim Crow character spoke and sang in a dialect that was partly based on preexisting white rural characters (such as the Kentucky rifleman, Davy Crockett) and partly on the variety of black and creole dialects heard by Rice as a youngster growing up by the docks in New York's Seventh Ward.

*Come, listen all you gals and boys, I'se just from Tuckyhoe
I'm goin to sing a little song, My name's Jim Crow
Weel about and turn about and do jis so
Eb'ry time I weel about I jump Jim Crow*

The Jim Crow character used this hybrid dialect—neither black nor white but something in between—to make fun of pretentious politicians and social elites, mangling their fancy words and introducing a satirical subtext that Rice's high-class targets found somewhat threatening:

I make my infernal sensibilifications yieldify to de "Fox popular," as I tinks dey call de people's breath at de Walnut street Te-atre. . . . I am gwaing in short time to do like oder great hactors, publish my account ob men and manners in dese blessed States, and I trus I shall be unable to do dem as much justice as dey deserve, on account ob my debility to use falsificationority as de foreignificated deatrical ladies do. (Lhamon 1998, pp. 188–89)

This speech, from the introduction to Rice's 1835 autobiography *The Life of Jim Crow*, captures the subversive, trickster-like quality of the Jim Crow character, a quality lost sight of in the subsequent furor over minstrelsy's role in promulgating racist stereotypes. Arbiters of public taste and morals, including newspaper and magazine publishers, politicians, and the clergy, ridiculed minstrelsy as an indicator of the depraved state of the lower classes, and urged its rejection in favor of more refined (i.e., European-derived) forms of entertainment. For their part, the racially mixed, relatively impoverished audience for early minstrelsy must have found Jim Crow's lampooning of the pretensions and "falsificationority" of the "foreignificated deatrical ladies" ("high society" critics of minstrelsy) richly satisfying.

When Thomas Dartmouth Rice toured England in the 1830s, he became the first native-born American performer to export a type of music *perceived* abroad as quintes-

entially American in style and content. There is a terrible irony in the fact that the title of Rice's "Jim Crow"—arguably the origin point of American popular music—was soon transformed into a derogatory epithet for African Americans, and, from the 1870s until the 1950s, for the segregationist laws that excluded blacks from white theaters, cemeteries, hospitals, restaurants, and schools.

The next big "Ethiopian" song hit was "Zip Coon," published in New York in 1834. The song was in the familiar verse-chorus ballad form, its verses sprinkled with images of banjo playing, wild dancing, and barnyard animals. The chorus consisted of the nonsense syllables "Zip a duden duden duden zip a duden day" (direct ancestor of the song "Zip a Dee Doo Dah," featured in Walt Disney's 1947 cartoon *Song of the South*). Like "Jim Crow," the melody of "Zip Coon" is more closely related to Irish or Scottish than to African American song. The same melody was adopted by both black and white country fiddlers, rearranged, and given the title "Turkey in the Straw." This is a good example of the continually evolving relationship between popular and folk music in the nineteenth century. (Early minstrel songs still surface occasionally in popular music; for example, Michelle Shocked's medley entitled "Jump Jim Crow/Zip a Dee Doo Da" on her 1992 CD *Arkansas Traveler*.)

From the 1840s through the 1880s blackface minstrelsy rose to become the predominant genre of popular culture in the United States. As the genre was reworked for mass appeal by theatrical entrepreneurs and promoters and transformed into the more formally organized and predictable "minstrel show," much of its original subversive quality was lost. As the scholar W. T. Lhamon Jr. has phrased it, "the early Jim Crow was not the late Jim Crow. Jim Crow went from fond alliance to hateful segregation as the Civil War approached and then as the Nadir replaced Reconstruction" (Lhamon 1998, p. 191). As the fires of white racism were stoked, first by the escalating conflict between the states and then by postbellum fears of black backlash and economic competition, minstrelsy both reflected and helped to promulgate the national obsession with symbols of racial difference. It was during this period that the most pernicious stereotypes of black people—the old faithful slave (a.k.a. the "good negro") and the big-city knife-toting dandy (the "bad negro")—became enduring images in mainstream American popular culture, disseminated by an emerging entertainment industry and patronized by a predominantly white mass audience.

Beginning in 1843 with the first appearance of the Virginia Minstrels (led by the white banjo virtuoso Dan Emmett), more lengthy performances featuring a standardized group of performers became popular. This became the classic minstrel show, organized around a sequence of more or less independent sketches and songs, and featuring characters such as Mr. Interlocutor, a lead performer who sang and provided patter between acts, and Bones and Tambo, who sat at either end of the line of performers.

By the mid-nineteenth century minstrel songs had become an important influence on the mainstream of American popular song. Many of these "plantation songs" were very successful as sheet music, and they were a dominant force in the development of nineteenth-century popular music. Some of these later minstrel tunes do show evidence of African American influence, particularly in their irregular syncopated rhythms, but

there is good reason to believe that few minstrel performers were able to capture the rhythmic and textural complexity of the black musical traditions they purported to represent. The typical minstrel song of the early 1840s was sung by one member of the troupe, accompanied by a fiddle, one or more banjos, a tambourine, and a pair of rib bones held in one hand and clacked together to create a syncopated rhythmic pattern.¹ Despite the adoption of instruments used by some black musicians, this type of performance still had little to do with African American musical traditions of the American South. Nonetheless, minstrel troupes competed with one another on the basis of their attention to "authentic" details of southern black culture.

Although the biggest celebrities of minstrelsy were white during the form's rise to national popularity, African American performers continued to appear in minstrel shows. In a practice that shows the arbitrariness of social distinctions based on race, light-skinned African American minstrels had to apply blackface in order to prepare themselves for their stage roles as "authentic negroes." This development adds yet one more twist to the complex and often ironic feedback between African American and European American cultures. In this later stage of the evolution of minstrelsy, a parody of white culture, initially created by African slaves and later incorporated into a popular theatrical genre that developed in urban working-class neighborhoods, was in turn propagated by black people whose physical appearance apparently did not match white stereotypes of "blackness." We might cite this as an example of the importance of popular culture as a key to understanding the development of racial identity in the United States, including contemporary notions of whiteness and blackness. Suffice it for now to say that in this regard as in others, minstrelsy left a lasting imprint on American popular consciousness.

It should be stressed that in the formation and rise of the nineteenth-century minstrel show, we encounter many of the basic themes that will concern us throughout our survey of the history of American popular music. Minstrelsy arose during the 1830s as an expression of a predominantly white urban youth culture, which sought to express its independence through the appropriation of black style. As minstrelsy became a mass phenomenon in the decades just before and after the American Civil War, its form became routinized, and its portrayal of black characters more rigidly stereotyped. This basic pattern, in which a new genre of music arises within a marginalized community and then moves into the mainstream of mass popular culture, in the process losing much of the rebellious energy that gave rise to it in the first place, will be encountered many times in this book.

Minstrel troupes toured the United States constantly from the 1840s until the 1870s, helping to create an embryonic national popular culture. Minstrels borrowed from the diverse traditions they encountered, adopting aspects of English, Irish, German, and African music, dialect, and dance and continually crossing the boundaries between folk and popular, rural and urban, southern and northern culture. The minstrel show is also the direct ancestor of *vaudeville*, a kind of variety show that became the dominant form

1. Examples of minstrel performance, reenacted in the early 1980s, can be heard on *Early Minstrel Show* (New World Records NW 338).



Advertising lithographs for minstrel (1896) and vaudeville (1899) shows. Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division.

of popular entertainment in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America (see Chapters 3 and 4). And while the mass success of the blackface minstrel show doubtless helped to reinforce racist attitudes among whites, minstrelsy also established a mobile performance tradition within which influential black musicians such as W. C. Handy, Ma Rainey, and Bessie Smith could later flourish (see Chapter 5).

An Early Pop Songwriter: Stephen Foster

Stephen Collins Foster (1826–64), who composed around two hundred songs during the 1840s, 1850s, and early 1860s, is regarded as the first important composer of American popular song. He was probably the first person in the United States to make his living as a full-time professional songwriter, surviving on the fees and royalties generated by sales of sheet music for songs such as “Oh! Susanna,” “Old Folks at Home,” “My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night,” “Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair,” and “Beautiful Dreamer.” His earliest musical experiences, growing up on the western frontier near Pittsburgh, were dominated by the sentimental song tradition, derived from England and considered a mark of gentility by upwardly mobile Americans. Foster also knew and incorporated into his work the various song styles popular in midcentury America: ballads,

Italian light opera, Irish and German songs, and minstrel songs. In embracing both genteel traditions and less highly regarded but wildly popular traditions like minstrelsy, Foster demonstrated his versatility while establishing models for many later generations of American songwriters.



Listening and Analysis "JEANIE WITH THE LIGHT BROWN HAIR"

"Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair" is an example of Foster's sentimental "Irish" style, strongly reminiscent of the songs of Thomas Moore (see Chapter 1). The most typical realization of this song would have featured a high male tenor, employing a slight Irish accent. "Jeanie" is also a prototypical example of a form that would become increasingly common in American popular music: the four-section song with an AABA melodic structure. The A sections begin identically, although their endings vary slightly (this is why we have chosen to call them A¹, A², and A³; see the listening chart). The B section introduces a new melody and chords and acts as a musical "bridge" that leads us to the final A section. This basic structure, with its economical and easily comprehended balance between repetition and variation, was to become one of the most important popular song forms of the early twentieth century.

Forms such as AABA are not just technical features or blueprints for the composer. They also become the basis for listening habits. Once you have learned to hear a kind of song form, you expect things to happen in a certain order. The *arrangement* of a song—that is, the way in which the song is actually presented in a particular performance—may delay things or speed them up. A performer or arranger may even vary the order of the sections to create a certain effect. But these variations make sense only against the background of the listener's learned expectations.

The melody of "Jeanie" contains hints of its origin in Irish popular song. In melodic terms, there is plenty of conjunct (that is, step-by-step) movement, which is contrasted with dramatic leaps up or down. See if you can identify the large melodic leaps as you listen: "*I dream of Jeanie with the light* [downward leap →] *brown hair, Borne like a* [upward leap →] *vapor on the summer air.*"

LISTENING CHART "JEANIE WITH THE LIGHT BROWN HAIR"

Music and lyrics by Stephen Foster; published 1854

FORM

LYRICS

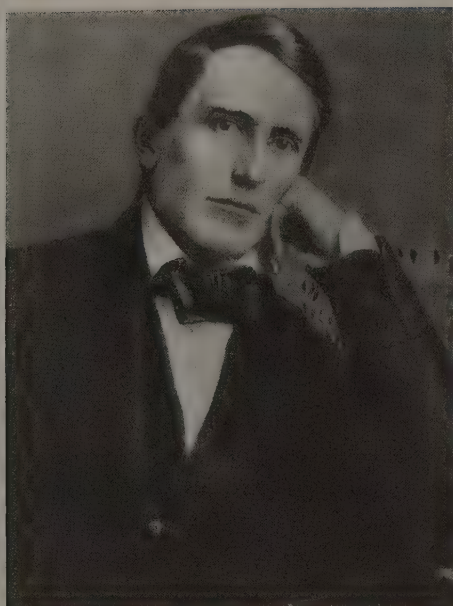
DESCRIPTIVE COMMENTS

[Instrumental intro]

A ¹	0.14	<i>I dream of Jeanie with the light brown hair...</i>	Here is the main melody, meant to "hook" your ear..
A ²	0.31	<i>I see her tripping where the bright streams play...</i>	The melody repeats, with new words and a different ending
B	0.48	<i>Many were the wild notes her merry voice would pour...</i>	New melody, new chords, and new words.
A ³	1.07	<i>I dream of Jeanie with the light brown hair...</i>	This final A section has a new ending, which produces an effect of finality (this is called a cadence).

[The form repeats itself, with new words.]

"Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair," a product of the nineteenth-century genteel song tradition, reemerged onto the Hit Parade during World War II, performed by several swing era dance bands. And it was still well-enough remembered in the 1960s to lend its name—or, to be more precise, a pun built on its first line—to a popular television series, *I Dream of Jeannie*.



A portrait of Stephen Foster, looking wistful (and dreaming of "Jeanie," perhaps?). AP Photo.

Although Foster was not the wealthiest popular songwriter of the nineteenth century, he was the most influential. He was a master at creating the simple but compelling combinations of melody and text that later popular composers would refer to as "hooks" (i.e., the basic musical or verbal idea that "hooks" the listener's ear). Foster's compositions were heard almost everywhere—in saloons, theater productions, variety shows, and band concerts. His biggest hit, a plantation song called "Old Folks at Home," sold some 100,000 copies of sheet music during the year it was published (1851). On a per capita basis, this is equal to a million-seller in today's terms. Some of Foster's songs became part of American oral tradition, passed from generation to generation without the aid of musical notation. His songs have remained attractive vehicles for popular entertainers to the present day; the well-received compilation *Beautiful Dreamer: The Songs of Stephen Foster* (2004) is but one recent example of this phenomenon.

Foster's success was supported by a number of social and technological factors. Minstrel troupes performed his songs on their tours, popularizing them across the country. In addition, the sheet music publishing business expanded during the mid-nineteenth century, fueled in part by the rapid growth of public music education, which allowed many more people to read and play the simple piano arrangements that accompanied popular songs. This trend was also encouraged by expanded domestic production of cheap pianos. The piano became a standard feature of the middle-class parlor—a cozy room outfitted with sofas, paintings, books, kerosene lamps and candles, and, if the family in question could afford it, a piano or reed organ. The parlor was a center of family life, a place for entertainment, conversation, and courting.

Foster's success as a "hit maker" occurred well before the rise of electronic mass media and was dependent on the ability of the public to read and perform the arrangements of his songs published on sheet music and in songbooks. During this period, people often performed music in their homes. Amateur piano playing was widely considered a female specialization, an attractive feature in a prospective wife. The piano remained a center of domestic music making in the United States until the 1920s, when commercial radio was introduced.

Foster's life—which ended in obscurity and poverty at the age of thirty-seven—illustrates the state of copyright enforcement in the mid-nineteenth century. His first success, the plantation song "Oh! Susanna" (1847), was sold outright to a music publisher for one hundred dollars. The publisher subsequently made thousands of dollars from the worldwide hit, but no more money for the music went to Foster. This was a typical situation, for the law covered the rights of music firms but not those of the composers of songs