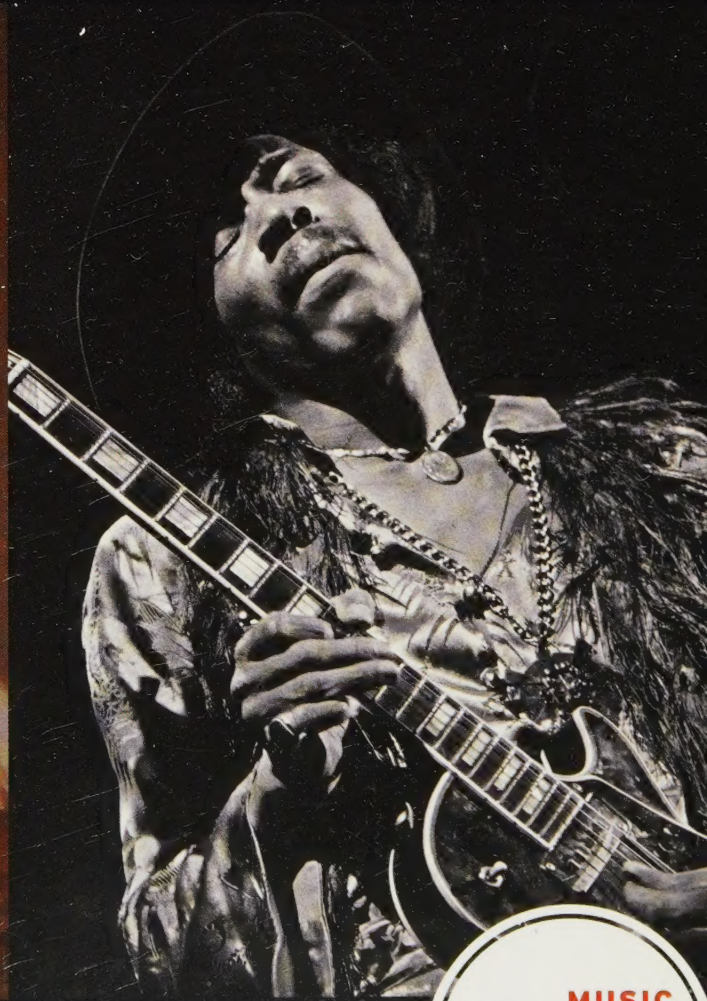


AMERICAN POPULAR MUSIC

Fourth Edition

FROM MINSTRELSY TO MP3



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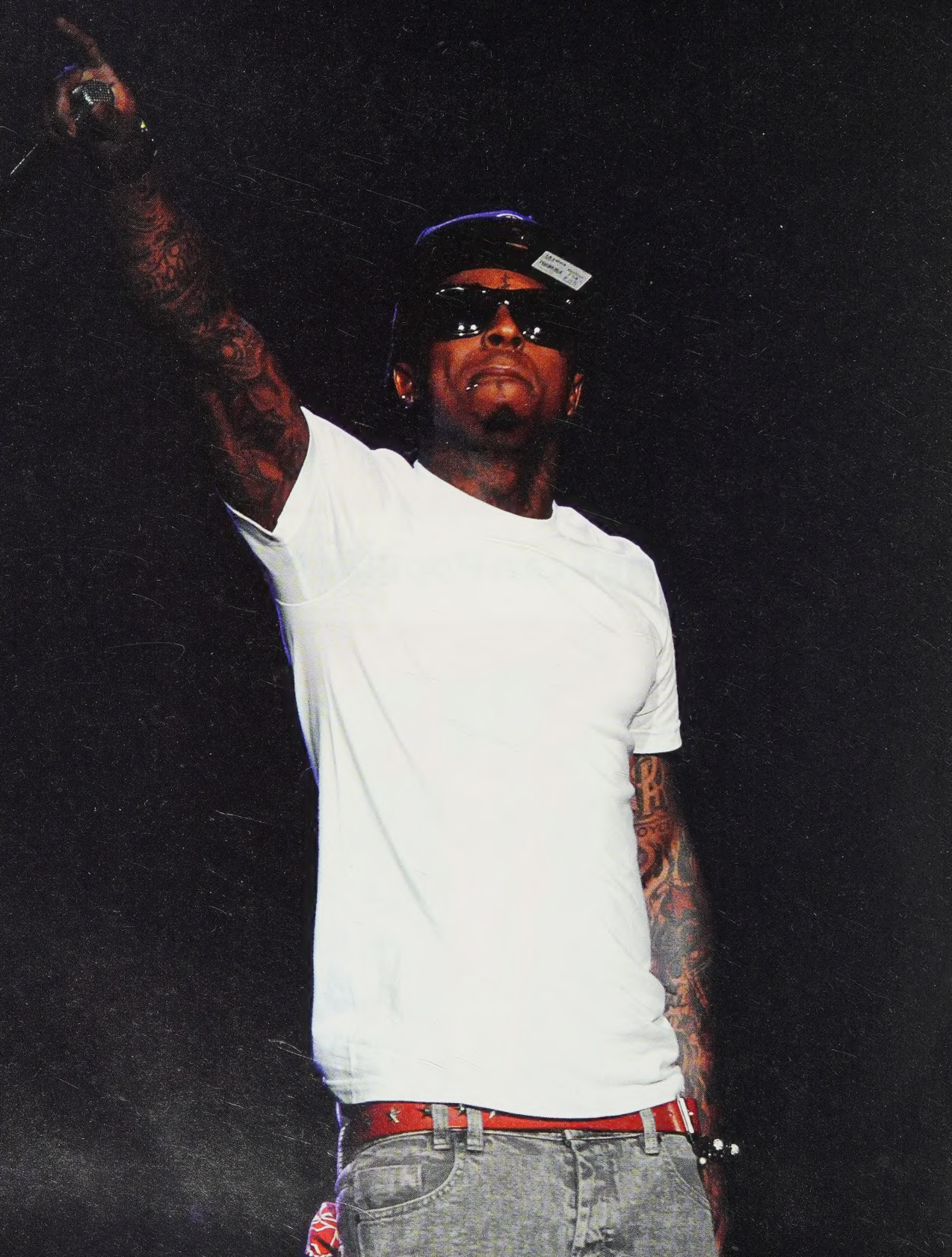
Larry Starr Christopher Waterman

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for details



American Popular Music





American Popular Music

From Minstrelsy to MP3

FOURTH EDITION

Larry Starr

University of Washington

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University of California, Los Angeles

New York Oxford

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford. It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship, and education by publishing worldwide.

Oxford New York
Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in
Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
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Published by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016
www.oup.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Starr, Larry, author.

American popular music : from minstrelsy to MP3 / Larry Starr, University of Washington, Christopher Waterman, University of California, Los Angeles. — Fourth edition.
pages cm.

ISBN 978-0-19-985911-5 — ISBN 978-0-19-985912-2 — ISBN 978-0-19-985913-9 —
ISBN 978-0-19-985914-6 — ISBN 978-0-19-931669-4 1. Popular music—United States—History
and criticism. I. Waterman, Christopher Alan, 1954-, author. II. Title.

ML3477.S73 2013
781.63—dc23

2013020563

Frontispiece credits—Rapper, Lil Wayne—Copyright 2011 Jason Moore. © Jason Moore/ZUMAPRESS.com.
ZUMA Wire Service/Alamy
Katy Perry—International Artists/Alamy

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

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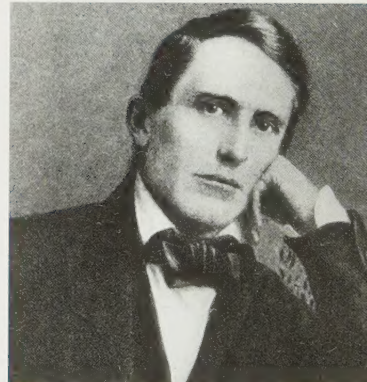
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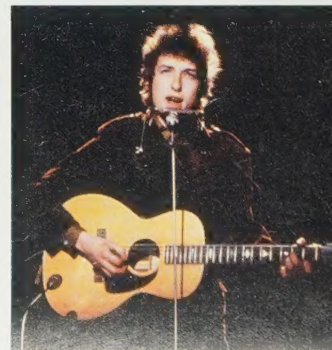
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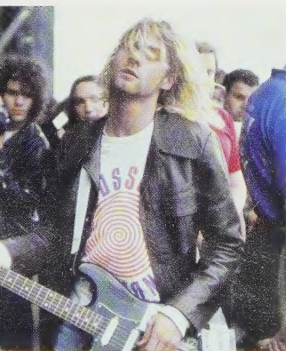


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Preface

IT SEEMS SCARCELY POSSIBLE THAT WE ARE NOW AT THE POINT OF PRESENTING the fourth 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 dialog 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 popu-

lar music, we anticipate that our particular perspectives, and particularly our choices of artists to emphasize and 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 rather than 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, ensuring that our narrative focus and strategy are articulated at the outset.

Throughout the book, we have striven to take as broad a view as possible of “popular music,” but it is inevitable that some readers will find certain genres and styles either excessively prominent or underestimated, depending on their own tastes and viewpoints. We have tried in particular to avoid the trap of viewing the period from the 1960s to the present as exclusively “the age of rock.” Those wishing a study of rock music per se are directed to our companion text, *Rock: Music, Culture, and Business* (Oxford University Press, 2012), written in collaboration with Joseph G. Schloss, which offers a different perspective on the American musical landscape from the period following World War II to the present day.

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 our 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?

The fourth edition of *American Popular Music* offers a significant quantity of new material to enrich our text:

- Chapter 1 has been rethought, reworked, and enlarged in order to present a much more detailed overview of the roots of American popular music in European, African, and Latin American sources, accompanied by a thorough discussion of several illustrative recordings.
- The treatment of early jazz in Chapter 3 has been expanded to include the remarkable early work of Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, and to stress the influence of that work on emerging trends in American pop.
- There is new material on Broadway musicals throughout the text, designed to illuminate the complex and often-changing relationship between the music heard on Broadway and the music that dominated the hit parade during the same time period.
- We have enhanced our coverage of contemporary country music—arguably the most popular music in present-day America!

- In our dizzying digital world, revision and updating are always necessary in the sections on music technology and the music business.
- Study Questions: A brief list of questions is provided at the end of each chapter for further study and discussion.
- Key Terms and Names: Lists of key terms and figures are included at the end of each chapter.
- Downloadable Audio: Because students mostly listen to music online, we have replaced the two-CD set with a downloadable file of MP3 audio for the key examples in the text. A special code is offered to purchasers of new copies of the text to access these files without charge. For those who do not purchase new texts, an access code card for the listening examples is available for separate purchase.
- All of the material from the third edition of the book has been reviewed and, of course, revised and updated wherever necessary.

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 are relevant to the developing narrative; this approach seemed to us both logical and functional. Given the enormous diversity of the music covered, these listening guides follow various formats adapted to the nature of the material under consideration. For example, Tin Pan Alley songs lend themselves readily to discussions that separate out the song as a composition from any specific recording of the song; this approach seems counterproductive, however, for examples in which the recording itself is the song—that is, the primary document. Accompanying charts are used to represent and summarize, in outline form, the most important elements of many recordings that are discussed in some detail in the text. In some of the more general discussions in which the emphasis is on the impact of the recording as a whole rather than on its various parts, these charts are not as useful, so we have not provided them. 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.
- **Key Terms and Names.** 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. Important and frequently employed terms appear in **boldface** and are defined in the text when first introduced, as well as given extensive definitions in the glossary at the end of the book. These terms will also be listed at the end of each chapter to aid in your study. Important names are intro-

duced in ***boldface italics*** and will also be found in lists at the ends of chapters, as well as in the index.

- **Boxes.** Boxes are used occasionally throughout this book to provide further insight and information on significant individuals, recordings, and topics in cases in which such material—although it may be useful—would interrupt the flow of narrative.
- **Timeline.** An illustrated timeline provided at points throughout the text surveys important landmarks in American popular music and places them in historical context.
- An appendix that illustrates basic musical concepts, including beat, tempo, rhythm, and form, is offered for students who do not have a background in musical analysis.
- At the front of the book following the Table of Contents, you'll find a list of all the listening guides, with page numbers for ease of reference.

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 he prepared for the previous editions with Patrick Roulet of Southern Utah University.

- **Instructor Resources.** The book's **Companion Website** at www.oup.com/us/starr 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 for instructors.
- **Student Resources.** Students will also find many helpful resources on the Companion Website, www.oup.com/us/starr, 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.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank our families, who put up with a great deal as our work underwent its extensive prenatal development: Leslie, Dan, Sonya, and Gregory Starr; and Glennis and Maxfield Waterman. We extend our gratitude to Maribeth Payne, our initial, ever-patient editor at Oxford University Press, to Jan Beatty, our second, ever-enthusiastic and helpful executive editor at OUP; to our current ever-insightful editor

Richard Carlin; and to his gifted associates Sheena Kowalski and Theresa Stockton; and to copyeditor Sarah Vogelsong.

We owe a substantial debt of gratitude to the many readers who offered extensive and helpful comments on our work in its various stages: Mark Bergman, George Mason University; Richard Birkemeier, California State University, Long Beach; Michael Boyd, Chatham University; Robert Webb Fry II, Vanderbilt University; Howard Goldstein, Auburn University; Joseph Harchanko, Western Oregon University; Thomas Harrison, Jacksonville University; John Irish, Angelo State University; Stephen Marcone, William Paterson University; Bradford D. Martin, Bryant University; Gregory Reish, Roosevelt University; and Robert W. Templeman, Xavier University.

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, Jun Akutsu. We would like to thank Richard Caceres at UCLA, who designed the charts in the 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. Sharon Clark at UCLA provided logistical and clerical support, and Scott Wardinsky helped us with the interpretation of Afro-Cuban song texts. 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

TIMELINE: 1760s-1899

MAJOR EVENTS IN U.S. HISTORY

YEAR

IMPORTANT LANDMARKS IN AMERICAN POPULAR MUSIC

1760s

First "pleasure gardens" open in American cities



American Revolution begins

1775

Declaration of Independence adopted by delegates from the thirteen American colonies

1776



American Revolution ends as Great Britain recognizes American independence

1783



Constitution of the United States of America ratified

1788

Importation of slaves from Africa to the United States officially becomes illegal

1808

Slave rebellion in Louisiana

1811

War of 1812 between United States and Great Britain

1812-1814



Inspired by a battle during the War of 1812, Francis Scott Key publishes the lyrics for "The Star-Spangled Banner," which eventually becomes the U.S. national anthem

Fully steam-powered textile mills established in Waltham, Massachusetts

1814

TIMELINE: 1760s–1899

MAJOR EVENTS IN U.S. HISTORY

YEAR

IMPORTANT LANDMARKS IN AMERICAN POPULAR MUSIC



Erie Canal constructed 1817–1825

Andrew Jackson elected president 1828

New York debut of George Washington Dixon, first prominent white “blackface” entertainer

1829

Thomas Dartmouth Rice introduces the song “Jim Crow,” the first American pop song to become an international hit

Nat Turner leads slave rebellion in Virginia 1831

ETHIOPIAN SERENADERS



First performances by the Virginia Minstrels lead to the standardized pattern for the minstrel show

1843

War with Mexico 1846–1848

1847

First performance of “Oh! Susanna,” Stephen Foster’s first big hit (plantation song)

Uncle Tom’s Cabin published 1852



Henry David Thoreau publishes *Walden*, promoting a return to a more natural life 1854

Publication of Stephen Foster’s sentimental song “Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair”

MAJOR EVENTS IN U.S. HISTORY

YEAR

IMPORTANT LANDMARKS IN
AMERICAN POPULAR MUSIC

- Abraham Lincoln inaugurated as first Republican president
- Civil War: Union victory secures end of slavery within the United States

1861–1865

The Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution officially outlaws slavery in the United States

1865

The Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution gives all citizens the right to vote, regardless of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude"

1869

- Custer's last stand at Little Bighorn
- National Baseball League founded, beginning "professional" baseball

1876



1877

Thomas Edison invents his phonograph

1878

African American composer James Bland, among the first black composers to publish a popular hit song, publishes "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny"

1877

Emile Berliner introduces the first flat disc records, which soon become the industry standard

National strike held in support of an eight-hour work day

1886

c. 1890

- Birth of New York's Tin Pan Alley, which becomes the center of popular music publishing
- The first "nickelodeons"—machines that play the latest hits for a nickel—are set up in public places. (These machines later become known as "jukeboxes.")

TIMELINE: 1760s–1899

MAJOR EVENTS IN U.S. HISTORY

TELEVISION

IMPORTANT LANDMARKS IN AMERICAN POPULAR MUSIC



Massacre of Native Americans at Wounded Knee,
South Dakota

1890

Strike by steelworkers in Homestead,
Pennsylvania, against Andrew Carnegie leads to
the crushing of the union

1892

Pullman porters—mostly African Americans—strike
for better wages and working conditions

1894



Plessy v. Ferguson decision of U.S. Supreme Court
affirms the legality of “separate but equal” (i.e.,
segregated) facilities for blacks and whites

1896

Publication of Charles K. Harris’s “After the Ball,”
the first “mega-hit” pop song

Producer B. F. Keith opens the New Theater in
Boston, the first major vaudeville house

“All Coons Look Alike to Me,” composed by the
African American songwriter Ernest Hogan,
launches the craze for “coon songs”

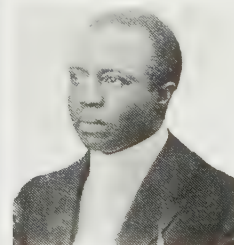


Publication of John Philip Sousa’s “The Stars
and Stripes Forever,” which becomes the official
march of the United States

1897

Spanish-American War

1898



Publication of Scott Joplin’s “Maple Leaf Rag”; its
popularity helps to kick the “ragtime craze” into
high gear

1899



Themes and Streams of American Popular Music

1

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. Ragtime. Race music. Hillbilly. Swing. Rock. Hard rock. Soft rock. Classic rock. Alternative rock. Country and western. 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 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 to the present. 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 begin to deal 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.” There have been times in American history when what we think of as classical music—say the operas of nineteenth-century Italian composers like Verdi and Bellini—were in effect popular music. Much of the music that people regard today as “folk music”—the records of the Weavers; the Kingston Trio; or Peter, Paul, and Mary—was performed by professional urban musicians and profoundly shaped by market forces. In many cases stylistic categories are themselves partly the product of marketing strategies by record companies, which 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.

BOX 1.1 WHAT KIND OF STORY IS HISTORY?: “YOU ARE THERE” VS. WE ARE HERE

History is always a “story” of some kind, a story shaped in countless conscious and unconscious ways by the tellers. In writing a history like the present one, we have been consistently aware of the push and pull between what might be called “objective” factual data and what might be termed “subjective” contextualization and interpretation of that data. Of course an additional complication is that the apparent total opposition between “objective” and “subjective” viewpoints is deceptive and ultimately false. Objectivity is inevitably a relative, rather than an absolute, concept, and it is impossible to avoid subjectivity completely. (That doesn’t mean, however, that there is no distinction between relatively objective and markedly subjective presentations of historical material.) Examples of relatively objective phenomena in our present field of study are: written records of recording dates,

songs, and performers; the sound recordings themselves; data in the form of sheet music and record sales, airplay charts, and related indexes of popularity; and reliable contemporaneous accounts of popular music, performers, and culture at specific times (although such accounts are unavoidably colored by the subjectivity of their authors). Subjectivity manifests itself most obviously when evaluations of the aesthetic merit and long-term cultural impact of styles, trends, performers, and recordings are offered by the authors of histories.

A 1950s television program called *You Are There* attempted to place viewers at important historical events as they were occurring, as if time travel were literally possible—and with TV cameras in attendance! This exemplified an “objective” approach to the presentation of history. Many would argue, however, that what is most

important is not the presumably “objective” data, but our assessment of historical *meaning* from the standpoint of the present—emphasizing in effect that “we are *here*,” rather than trying to pretend that “you are *there*.” And some would go further, asserting that our present-day assessment of meaning is not simply what is most important, but is also the only approach to the past we can realistically take! This dichotomy is encountered most powerfully in the study of popular music when we attempt to reconcile the data of past popularity with our present understanding of what music and which performers have proved most enduring and arguably significant over time. We will be referring to these issues at many points throughout this book.

Here is an illustration of the complexities involved: All indexes of popularity from the 1920s tell us that bandleader Paul Whiteman and singer Al Jolson were superstars—arguably *the* superstars of that decade—and that while trumpet player and bandleader Louis Armstrong and blues singer Bessie Smith certainly were contributors to the popular culture of that time, they ultimately were more marginal and less important figures. Yet in the twenty-first century, Armstrong and Smith are regarded as iconic central artists, essential immortals in the history of popular music, while Whiteman and Jolson have been relegated to the realm of nostalgia. Had you told a 1920s pop music fan that such an evaluation would come to pass in due time, that fan would probably

have been surprised, if not incredulous—and if you were to tell a present-day jazz fan or cultural historian that you esteemed Whiteman or Jolson over Armstrong or Smith, you would probably be laughed out of the room. But our present perspective makes it far too easy to forget—or ignore—that Whiteman and Jolson were both very good at what they did, that there were significant cultural reasons for their popular acclaim, and that in fact they helped prepare the way for a broader public to fully appreciate the artistry of Armstrong and Smith. Belittling Whiteman and Jolson can lead us to significantly oversimplify and distort both history and aesthetics.

We find instances of this phenomenon of changing valuation throughout the history of popular music. In the later 1950s Pat Boone’s records vastly outsold those of Chuck Berry, and for a time in the later 1960s albums by the TV-fabricated Monkees were outselling those of the Beatles!

You might stop to wonder how your present feelings about the value and importance of today’s pop artists and recordings might seem to you decades hence—and how those feelings might come to be viewed by cultural historians in the future. Appreciating the extent to which such information is now unknowable, and understanding the complexity of the issues and perspectives that this uncertainty throws into relief, will enhance your grasp of the richness and multidimensionality of our subject.

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 that you must adopt a negative attitude. Rather, critical listening is listening that consciously seeks out meaning in music by drawing on 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 by 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 to not 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 these blocks 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,” the Beatles’ “Yesterday,” and the theme of the 1960s cartoon show (and 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 draw an analogy to biology, there is an important difference between 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 use in helping us to understand popular music. In this book we frequently use concepts that are directly relevant to popular music itself: for example, the **riff**, a repeated pattern designed to generate rhythmic momentum; the **hook**, a memorable musical phrase or riff; and **groove**, a term that evokes the channeled flow of “swinging,” “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—such as Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, Eddie Van Halen, and 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, including 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 studios in the history of hip-hop. 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—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 in the process of figuring out their meaning.

Dialect has been a crucial factor in the history of American popular music. Some musical genres are strongly associated with particular dialects (e.g., 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 to not be understood by the majority.

These are some of the dimensions of popular music 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. These are what make 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 is devoted to individual recordings, we offer separate Listening Guides to assist in your comprehension and appreciation of the musical elements of each selection.

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 that song may have been one of your parents, or an older brother or sister. Family members 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 vs. girls, fifth graders vs. first graders, cool kids vs. 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, or 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, or convenient ways of organizing people into categories. It is easy to find examples of stereotyping in American popular music: the common portrayal of women as sexual objects; the association of men with violence; the image of African American men as playboys and gangsters; the characterization of southern white musicians as illiterate, backwoods “rednecks”; the use of supposedly Jewish musical characteristics in songs about money; 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 I’m Proud,” “Okie from Muskogee,” “The Happy Polak Polka,” and “Y.M.C.A.” are only a few illustrations.

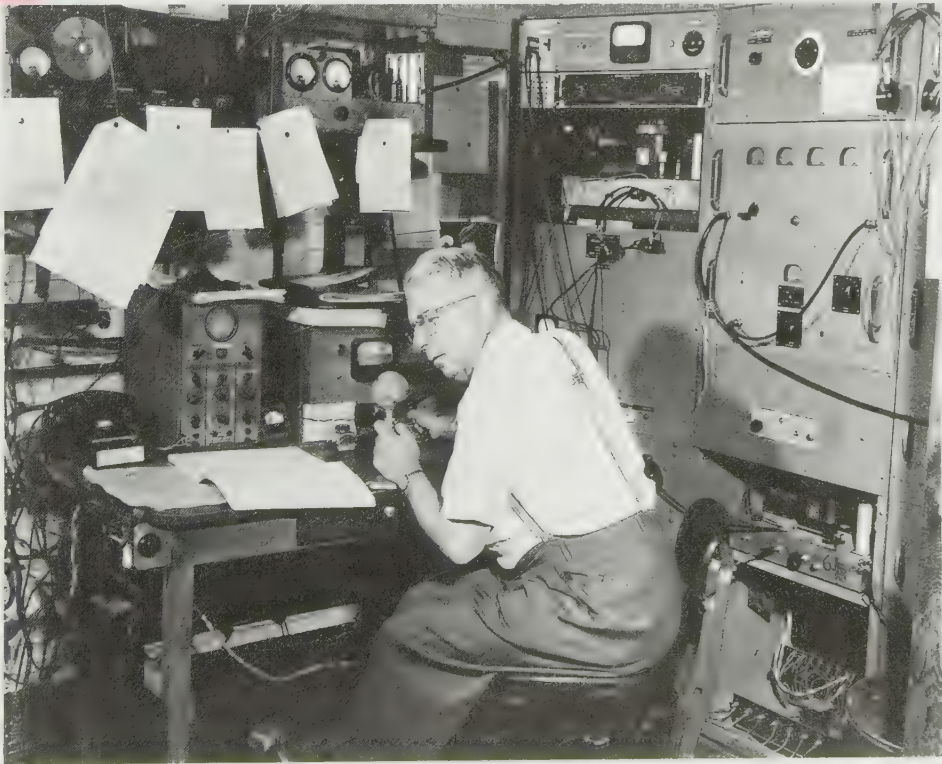
Why do people make and listen to music? What do they want from it, and what does it give them? These questions take us beyond the central concern of classic aesthetic theory, the creation and appreciation of “beauty for beauty’s sake.” People value music for many reasons that include but go far beyond a desire for beauty: 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 and right up to the present era of digital recording, computerized sampling, and Internet-based radio, technology has shaped popular music and helped disseminate it, more and more rapidly, to more and more people. Technology doesn't determine the decisions made by musicians or audiences, but it can make a particular range of choices more available to them.

It has often been argued that the mass media create a gap between musicians and their audiences, a distance that encourages us to forget that the music we hear is made by other human beings. To what degree has technology affected our relationship to



One of the earliest FM radio stations, Alpine, New Jersey, 1948. Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-126078.

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 today 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 in private, 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 to music using 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 new technologies. 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 this technology produces "warmer," "richer-sounding," and somehow "more human" music than digital recording.

Sometimes the rejection of electronic technology functions as an emblem of "authenticity," as, for example, in MTV's *Unplugged* series, on which, for over twenty years, rockers such as Eric Clapton, R.E.M., Nirvana, and Korn have demonstrated 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, technologies whose effectiveness depends upon the active participation of listeners. Though worldwide sales of musical instruments were impacted by the economic recession that began in 2008, both in-store and Internet sales began to pick up again in 2011 and 2012, suggesting that even when times are hard, music-making remains an important part of many people's lives. Almost a billion dollars worth of guitars were sold in the United States in 2011, an increase of over 11 percent from the previous year. And even a cursory tour of the video-sharing website YouTube, launched in 2005, will confirm the existence of tens 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 commercial success of the *Guitar Hero* video game between 2005 and 2010 was a perfect instance of the multiple contradictory possibilities built into the latest musical technologies. Playing *Guitar Hero* probably did help nonmusicians develop their sense of musical form and their rhythmic skills, since the game involved touching buttons on the guitar controller's neck within certain windows of time that were determined by the structure and speed of the music. However, it can also be argued that racking up a high score on *Guitar Hero* is not a musical accomplishment at all, but rather demonstrates the development of skills useful mainly for playing other video games, and that the game may in fact have directed some aspiring musicians away from the sustained discipline required to master a musical instrument. As *Entertainment Weekly* put it in its 2009 "Best of the Decade" list, *Guitar Hero* provides "the illusion of musical mastery for even the least gifted. How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Tap, tap, tap."

Snarkiness aside, there can be no doubting the commercial impact of *Guitar Hero*, both in terms of sales (more than 25 million units and \$2 billion in profits as of 2012) and in terms of 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*, the Internet download sales of every song included in the *Guitar Hero III* and *Rock Band*



Guitar hero controller and package. © David Lee/Alamy.

game packages increased during 2007 by 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 musical machines in their own lives.

Theme Four: The Music Business

In order to understand the history of American popular music, it is necessary for us to 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; the 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 a circuit of theaters controlled by still 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. Up until the beginning of the twenty-first century, the process of making popular music was organized around a well-defined set of roles. In mainstream pop music, the **composer** and **lyricist** were important as the first creators of a work; the songs they wrote were then reworked to complement a particular performer's strengths by an **arranger**, who decided which instruments to use as accompaniment, what key the song should be in, how many times it should be repeated, and a host of other details. The advent of rock 'n' roll in the mid-1950s introduced a variation on this model, in which performers—think of Chuck Berry, Bob Dylan, and the Beatles—were also songwriters. The **A&R** (artists and repertoire) personnel of record companies sought out talent, often visiting nightclubs and rehearsals to hear new groups. The **producer** of a record played 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 worked 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 shaped the overall sound of a record. The publicity department planned the advertising campaign to promote the record, and the public relations department handled interactions with the press. Business agents, video producers, graphic artists, copy editors, stagehands, truck drivers, the companies that designed and produced T-shirts and other forms of concert "swag," and the companies that produced musical hardware—often owned by the same corporations that produced the recordings—were also important links in the chain of popular music production and dissemination.

Of course, many of these roles are still important in popular music today, although the advent of digital distribution has in recent years profoundly challenged the music industry's fundamental modes of operation. The traditional lines that once divided artist, publisher, record company, distributor, and consumer electronics manufacturer have become blurred. New modes of digital music distribution have forced both government and industry to reexamine the definitions of intellectual property and the rights of all the parties involved. It is in fact hard to know where to draw the boundaries of an industry that seems to be splintering into a myriad of specialized styles, audiences, markets, and start-up companies while at the same time moving forcefully toward even greater levels of corporate consolidation.

Compared to other industries that make and disseminate consumer products, the music business has always been quite unpredictable. In the 1890s a new generation of twentysomething immigrants created novel techniques for promoting and disseminating popular songs, generating a business that had barely existed before then. By the mid-1920s annual sales of recordings had surpassed sheet music sales, and radio had provided a new means of promoting them, but the business was still loaded with risk. By the 1980s and 1990s only about one out of eight records produced made a profit, and a handful of platinum albums—certified million-sellers like Michael Jackson's *Thriller* (1982), Madonna's *Like a Virgin* (1984), Nirvana's *Nevermind* (1991), and Dr. Dre's *The Chronic* (1992)—had to compensate for literally hundreds of unprofitable recordings made by less widely known musicians or faded stars.

During the first decade of the twenty-first century the music industry was profoundly impacted by the rise of Internet-based digital technologies and the replacement of the compact disc by the downloadable file. As the Apple Corporation's online iTunes Store (founded in 2001) rose to become the largest music retailer in the world, revenues from sales of recorded music in the United States dropped precipitously, from a high of \$14.6 billion in 1999 to \$6.3 billion in 2009. This dramatic decline in sales caused large-scale layoffs within the industry; forced the closure of retailers such as Tower Records; and impelled record companies, producers, studios, recording engineers, and musicians to seek new business models. As music technology and software increasingly made it possible for artists to create their own home studios, many recording studios in cities like New York and Los Angeles were driven out of business. Increasingly, live performance became the most profitable aspect of the industry. In the era of classic rock, a band would go on the road in order to promote their new album. Today concerts bring in the majority of profits, and the sale of recorded music is an important but secondary source.

While the Internet has encouraged the establishment of small artist-owned music labels and publishing companies, it is also important to realize that the music industry is at the same time becoming more consolidated on a global scale. As of 2012 four transnational corporations—Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment, Warner Music Group, and EMI Group—control at least 80 percent of the world's legal trade in commercially recorded music. Each of these music corporations is part of a larger business conglomerate, and each has bought up smaller labels, using them as incubators for new talent. This trend toward consolidation shows every sign of continuing: as of July 2012, Universal Music's

parent company Vivendi was attempting to gain approval for a proposed acquisition of EMI, a move that would reduce the number of global music industry powerhouses to three.

Even as it undergoes potentially revolutionary change, the music industry continues to permeate our daily lives. Any time you hear music in a restaurant or bar, at a mall, on an airplane, at a football or baseball game, or while waiting endlessly for a human voice on the telephone, the music industry is involved, and someone is reaping profits. We are almost continuously bathed in music, whether we are fully conscious of it or not, and modern technology places the entire history of recorded sound at our fingertips, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. To be sure, it is easier now than ever before to explore, expand your taste, and experience new sounds from all around the world. At the same time, the very ubiquity of music raises the risk that we will come to take it for granted, diminishing its deep and enduring significance as a means of individual and cultural expression, one of the hallmarks of being human.

Theme Five: Centers and Peripheries

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 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.

Until the mid-1950s the stylistic mainstream of American popular music was largely oriented toward the tastes of white, middle- or upper-class, Protestant, urban people. In economic terms, this orientation 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 come? The sources, as you shall see, are 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 music 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

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 broadsides provided only the words to a song, along with an indication of a traditional melody—for example, “Greensleeves” or “Barbara Allen”—to which they were to be sung. Balladmongers hawking the broadsides sang the tunes 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.

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 song sheets were illustrated with sketches of these 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. In ballad operas the main characters 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.



Castle Garden, New York City, in 1848, as depicted in a lithograph by Nathaniel Currier. Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-USCC2-1758.

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 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 traditions of the British Isles (England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales) were able to record dozens of versions of the old 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 to be used in music today as markers of southern white identity.

Published collections of Irish, Scottish, and Italian songs also influenced the development of early American popular song. Copies of Thomas Moore’s multivolume *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 had also become 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 impact on the development of popular singing style.

Dance music was another important area of American popular music that was shaped by European influences. Until the late nineteenth century European American dance was closely modeled on styles imported from England and the Continent. Country dances—such as the contra dance, quadrille, reel, and square dance, in which dancers arranged themselves into circles, opposing rows, or squares—were popular. In the United States the country dance tradition developed into a plethora of variants, both urban and rural, elite and working class, black and white. It continues today in country and western line dances and in the contra dances that form part of the modern folk music scene.

The nineteenth century 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, the fox-trot, the bunny hug, and the Charleston (see Chapter 3).

In addition to the songs and dance music that were 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 17 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 (band music originally played for dances and weddings in central European Jewish communities), and the Polish polka—an energetic dance that was quite different from the “refined” style of polka discussed previously—each contributed to mainstream popular music while maintaining a solid base in their particular ethnic communities.

The Europeans who came to America also brought many traditions of religious music to our shores. The first distinctively American body of sacred music arose in the middle of the nineteenth century as part of a wave of Protestant religious activity and conversion that has been called the “Great Awakening.” The type of music most closely associated with this period was a body of sacred songs called **spirituals**, which originated in breakaway movements such as that of the Separatist Baptists, who believed that their musical texts, like their religious expression, should be intensely personal, exuberant, and free from doctrinal restraints. The nineteenth century saw a series of widespread revivals led by evangelical ministers and characterized by the formation of new religious movements and denominations. “Camp meetings”—multiday, open-air religious services

that attracted thousands of people from all denominations—spread in popularity during this period. Camp meeting hymns were designed to encourage religious fervor and commitment among participants and often featured **call-and-response** singing, with the preacher “lining out” or singing each line of a given song and the congregation repeating it in turn. (It should be noted that each of these developments also influenced the development of African American sacred music, discussed later in this chapter.)

Gospel music, a large body of sacred song with texts that reflect aspects of the personal religious experience of Protestant evangelical groups, first appeared in the 1850s in collections published for Sunday schools. (It is important to note that here we are discussing the white gospel music tradition. African Americans developed their own distinctive approach to gospel music, which we will discuss later.) The rise and expansion of gospel singing as a popular movement took place in the last three decades of the nineteenth century and was closely associated with both the intensification of Pentecostal revivalism after the Civil War and the work of the evangelist Dwight L. Moody and his musical associate Ira D. Sankey, who produced influential collections of gospel songs for use by congregations in cities such as Chicago. As compared with the Sacred Harp tradition, gospel music is more strongly influenced by popular songs, particularly in its use of repetition and memorable combinations of melody and text designed for mass consumption, and is usually accompanied with musical instruments, rather than sung a cappella. By the mid-twentieth century the boundary between gospel and secular popular music had become less pronounced, although country music stars often chose to make religious recordings under a pseudonym.

Of course, other religious traditions coexisted with Christianity, although their influence on American popular music was generally less explicit than that of gospel music. The style of Jewish folk songs and klezmer, as well as the sacred Jewish tradition of **cantillation** (chanting of scripture), influenced some of the melodic lines composed by the great Jewish songwriters of Tin Pan Alley and in so doing became part of the broader stylistic vocabulary of American popular music. (The plot of the very first sound film, *The Jazz Singer* [1927], is centered on a young Jewish cantor who becomes a pop music star, much to the consternation of his rabbi father; see Chapter 4.)

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 non-sectarian seasonal character. Popular musicians from the most wide-ranging ethnic, national, and religious backgrounds have regularly made contributions to Christmas music, often creating major hit records in the process. The seasonal tribute “White Christmas” (composed by Jewish songwriter Irving Berlin) is the most famous example of this crossover, 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 each brought forth their own successful versions of the song—which, we should recall, is an English translation of a German song of Christian devotion originally composed in 1818.



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"Barbary [Barbara] Allen" (Child Ballad #84), performed by Jean Ritchie; recorded 1960

"Soldier's Joy," performed by Gid Tanner and the Skillet Lickers; released 1929

"Soldier's Joy," fiddle solo performed by Tommy Jarrell; recorded early 1980s

Of the various strains of European music that fed into American popular music, the most widely distributed and lastingly influential came from the British Isles. The British music that played such a large role in the formation of country music, urban folk music, and other popular genres was itself made up of multiple traditions—English, Highland Scots, Scotch-Irish, Catholic Irish, and Welsh—but these musical sub-streams had much in common historically and stylistically and were often blended together by immigrant musicians in the New World. Musicians and fans of these early American styles often lump them together under the rubric of **old-time music**, a category that comprises string band music (ranging from fiddle and banjo duets to larger dance ensembles with guitar, mandolin, and autoharp); ballad songs, performed with or without instrumental accompaniment; sacred songs and church hymns; and a variety of functionally specialized music genres such as lullabies and work songs.

British settlers in America composed new songs and styles that reflected their own experiences and drew upon the music of other peoples with whom they came into contact, including German immigrants, the French-speaking Acadians of eastern Canada and Louisiana (where they are known as Cajuns), the Mexicans of Texas and the Southwest, and slaves from West Africa who were imported to fuel the growth of plantation agriculture in the Deep South. Certain aspects of the old British traditions—songs about Robin Hood or witchcraft, for example—fell by the wayside, but many other aspects, including certain melodies, song texts with references to "lords" and "fair-haired maidens," and specific musical scales and techniques, were preserved through a continual process of cultural adaptation that married the old with the new.

The rural "backcountry" of the American South—a huge area reaching from the coastal tidewaters of Virginia and isolated communities of the Appalachian Mountains to the "piney woods" of east Texas and the Ozarks region of Arkansas and Missouri—has been called "the fertile crescent of country music" (Peterson and Davis 1975). In the early twentieth century, when scholars began to seek evidence of the deep Anglo-Celtic roots of American music, they found many of the strongest links to the past in small communities located

in relatively inaccessible areas such as the Appalachian and Ozark Mountains. This is not to say that these communities were completely cut off from contemporaneous developments in American popular music that were occurring in cities such as New York and Chicago. Just as it is impossible, despite the profound impact of racial segregation, to draw a strict boundary between "white" and "black" traditions in the American South, so even the most isolated southerners were exposed to the latest urban popular songs by way of traveling carnivals and "medicine shows"; gramophone recordings; and, beginning in the early 1920s, radio. One thing is certain: the people of the South shared a passionate commitment to music, and this commitment helped to preserve many aspects of the old traditions they and their forbears brought to America.

The **British ballad tradition** is one of the main roots of American music and is the predecessor of such diverse genres as urban folk music, country music, and rock 'n' roll. One of the most widely performed songs in this centuries-old tradition is "Barbara Allen," first definitively documented in London in 1666 and first published as a broadside ballad there around 1690 under the title "Barbara Allen's Cruelty; or, the Young-Man's Tragedy." Knowledgeable aficionados of folk music know the song as "Child Ballad #84," a reference to its inclusion in Francis J. Child's five-volume *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882–1898), still the definitive anthology in its field.

It is impossible to know precisely when "Barbara Allen" was introduced to the English colonies in North America, but it is not unreasonable to speculate that the song was in wide circulation there by the eighteenth century. The ballad was included in some of the earliest recordings of rural American folk music and has been performed by popular artists as diverse as Bob Dylan, Dolly Parton, the Everly Brothers, Trini Lopez, big band singer Doris Day, the Grateful Dead, the Irish bagpiper Paddy Keenan, and film star John Travolta.

Ballads typically tell a story in a series of verses sung to a more-or-less set melody, and "Barbara Allen" is no exception. The outline of the story is relatively simple and varies little in its essentials from performance to performance. A

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young man (usually named William) is dying of unrequited love for the beautiful Barbara Allen, but when she is called to his deathbed, all she can say is, “Young man, I think you’re dying.” When he perishes of heartsickness, Barbara Allen is stricken with guilt and dies soon after. The song’s final verses typically describe a thorny briar growing from her grave and a rose from his; eventually the two twine together, a symbol of the power of love to defy even death.

In order to stay alive, all traditions must change to some degree. Over the centuries, individual performers have embellished the melody of “Barbara Allen” and altered details of the story to accord with their own taste and the demands of their audiences. In some versions additional stanzas have been introduced to help listeners understand the young woman’s cruelty, explaining that she had become jealous when she overheard William in a tavern making a toast to all of the young women in town, save her. Despite these minor variations, the essential narrative of love, rejection, death, remorse, and more death, concluding with an affirmation of the transcendental power of love, is what has defined “Barbara Allen” for generations of performers and listeners. It is, so to say, an enduring soap opera in song form.



Jean Ritchie. Photograph by George Pickow.

To gain a more immediate understanding of the sound and sensibility of “Barbara Allen,” we will explore a version of the ballad by the folk singer and song collector **Jean Ritchie** (b. 1922). Ritchie performs her version of the song—entitled “Barbary Allen”—in the style she learned growing up in an isolated, mountainous region of Kentucky. One of thirteen children born to a farming family, she began her performing career as a teenager at local country fairs and dances, and in the late 1940s became an inspiration for the first generation of urban folk musicians playing in the nightclubs and coffeehouses of Greenwich Village, a group that included both Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger (see Chapters 5 and 7).

In the liner notes to the album *British Traditional Ballads (Child Ballads) in the Southern Mountains* (1961), Ritchie provides a first-person perspective on the ballad tradition:

All of us, Mom, Dad, and all thirteen children could write, but these old songs and their music were in our heads, or hearts, or somewhere part of us, and we never needed to write them down. They were there, like games and rhymes and riddles, like [butter] churning-chants and baby-bouncers and gingerbread stackcake recipes, to be employed and enjoyed when the time came for them. Nobody got scholarly about them and I have a feeling that’s why they have been genuinely popular all these years.

Ritchie’s solo rendition of “Barbary Allen,” sung a capella (without instrumental accompaniment), is unaffected, beautiful, and haunting. She sings twelve four-line verses, and her vocal style includes subtle use of the melodic ornamentations typical of Appalachian hill country singing (and still in evidence in some contemporary country music). Her pronunciation of some words in the lyrics (including “slow-lie” for “slowly” and the name “Barbary”) reflects the local dialect she grew up speaking in Kentucky.

*All in the merry month of May
When the green buds they were swellin’
Young William Green on his deathbed lay
For the love of Barbary Allen.*

*He sent his servant to the town
To the place where she was dwellin’
Sayin’, “Master’s sick and he sends for you
If your name be Barbary Allen.”*

*So slow-lie [slowly], slow-lie she got up
And slow-lie she came a-nigh [near] him
And all she said when she got there
"Young man, I believe you're dyin'."*

*"Oh yes, I'm low, I'm very low,
And death is on me dwellin'
No better, no better I'll never be
If I can't get Barbary Allen."*

*"Oh yes, you're low and very low,
And death is on you dwellin'
No better, no better you'll never be
For you can't get Barbary Allen."*

*"For don't you remember in yonder's town
In yonder's town a-drinkin'
You passed your glass all around and around
And you slighted Barbary Allen."*

*"Oh yes I remember in yonder's town
In yonder's town a-drinkin'
I gave my health to the ladies all around
But my heart to Barbary Allen."*

*He turned his pale face to the wall
For death was on him dwellin'
"Adieu, adieu, you good neighbors all
Adieu, sweet Barbary Allen."*

*As she was goin' across the fields
She heard those death bells a-knellin' [ringing]
And every stroke the deathbell give
Hard hearted Barbary Allen.*

*"Oh Mother, oh Mother, go make my bed,
Go make it both long and narrow
Young William's died for me today
And I'll die for him tomorrow."*

*Oh she was buried 'neath the old church tower
And he was buried a-nigh [near] her
And out of his bosom grew a red, red rose,
Out of Barbary's grew a green briar.*

*They grew and they grew up the old church tower,
Until they could grow no higher
They locked and tied in a true lover's knot,
Red rose wrapped around the green briar.*

Another important branch of old-time music is the **string band tradition**. Like the ballad song tradition, the repertoire of old-time string bands provides rich evidence of the impact of new environments on the traditions that English,

Scots, Irish, and Welsh immigrants brought with them to the Americas. Some fiddle tunes—for example, "Soldier's Joy"—survived the transit across the Atlantic with their basic musical forms and titles intact. The names of other tunes, such as "Cumberland Gap" and "Cripple Creek," reflect the circumstances of the musicians who created them. In America, tunes from Britain also intermingled with black fiddle styles, which had roots in equally ancient and complex West African traditions. The banjo, a plucked stringed instrument with a piece of animal skin or plastic stretched over a circular frame, was an African American invention based upon African prototypes (see below). Beginning in the eighteenth century, the banjo was adopted by white players, who developed their own approaches to playing the instrument. By the early twentieth century instruments such as the guitar, mandolin, autoharp, and double bass (and its country cousin the one-stringed bass, made with a broomstick and a metal washing tub) were being combined in various configurations as southern farmers, mineworkers, ranchers, lumberjacks, railroad workers, and sharecroppers used their musical skills to generate additional income. These semiprofessional practitioners played at dances, fiddling contests, political rallies, and "house parties."

"**Soldier's Joy**" (also known as "The King's Head") is one of the most venerable, popular, and widely distributed fiddle tunes in the old-time repertoire. The tune is believed to have originated in Scotland, first appearing in an English collection of dance music published in the 1770s, but was doubtless in wide circulation as part of oral tradition considerably before that date. The basic melody, consisting of two contrasting phrases repeated over and over with variations, is found in Scotland, Ireland, Wales, England, France, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland and is played by old-time fiddlers in the Americas from Canada to the Deep South. Though lyrics have been added to the song at various points in its development, the tune is often performed without them and remains closely associated with social dancing. "Soldier's Joy" is still included in the repertoires of many bluegrass string bands. In 1959, the height of the rock 'n' roll era, it reached number fifteen on the country music charts in a rendition by Hawkshaw Hawkins, and in 2010 the tune appeared as the theme of a Monster.com advertisement during Superbowl XLIV, performed by a fiddling beaver.

We provide here two versions of "Soldier's Joy": first, one of the earliest commercially successful recordings of the song, performed by a string band made up of entertainers from Georgia; and second, a solo recording by a veteran performer

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from Kentucky who has preserved aspects of an older style of fiddle playing. Listening to two versions of the same tune will help give us an idea of both the stable, shared elements that define “Soldier’s Joy” and the different approaches that individual performers have taken to the tune.

The *Skillet Lickers* were one of the very first southern string bands to appear on commercial recordings. Their leader, **James Gideon (Gid) Tanner** (1885–1960), was a chicken farmer and part-time fiddler. In 1926, Tanner and three other musicians from northern Georgia—the blind guitarist and singer George Riley Puckett (1894–1946), fiddler Clayton McMichen (1900–1970), and banjo player Fate Norris (1878–1944)—came together to become Columbia Records’ first successful “hillbilly” act (as southern rural music was then marketed by the entertainment industry; see Chapter 5). Members of the Skillet Lickers had grown up steeped in the old southern ballad and string band traditions and had gained experience performing at dances, house parties, and fiddle contests. Their stage act and recordings were distinguished by a high level of technical skill; a rough, hard-driving, dance-oriented sound; and the inclusion of raucous comedy skits that played upon stereotypes of the “country bumpkin” or “hayseed.” In fact, the members of the Skillet Lickers were more musically sophisticated than many in their audience knew, and they were well aware of developments in urban popular music of the time, including early jazz.

The Skillet Lickers’ recording of “Soldier’s Joy,” made in Atlanta in 1929, begins with a short comic recitation by fiddler

Clayton McMichen that was intended to evoke the sensibility of the rural house parties enjoyed by so many of their southern listeners:

Well folks, here we are again, the Skillet Lickers, red hot and rarin’ to go. Gonna play you another little tune this morning, want you to grab that gal and shake a foot and moan. Don’t you let ‘em dance on your new carpet. You make ‘em roll it up!

The usual form of the fiddle tune is relatively simple, beginning with a musical phrase that is repeated almost exactly and is followed by a second, contrasting phrase, which is also repeated. This pattern, with its alternation of two basic musical phrases (which we call A and B), continues through the entire performance, with verses being sung only over the first (A) phrase each time through. The style is designed to accompany (and inspire) communal dancing, with the guitar playing a strong, steady bass pattern; the fiddle players attacking their strings vigorously with their horsehair bows; and the banjo playing rhythmic chords in the background.

After the instruments play through the entire form once, Riley Puckett sings the first verse, which is lifted from another popular old-time fiddle tune, “Chicken in the Bread Tray.” The fact that this “borrowed” lyric fits into the musical form of “Soldier’s Joy” so easily is a reflection of the fact that many old-time songs belonged to closely related **tune families**, the members of which could be interchanged in the flow of performance. The last two lines of this verse are traditional square dance calls, or lines shouted by a fiddler to give directions to the dancers:

*Chicken in the bread tray scratchin’ out dough,
Granny, will your dog bite? No, child, no.
Ladies to the center and the gents catch air [dance instructions]
Hold her noose, don’t let her rear [hold on to your partner,
don’t let her go out of control].*

After the sung verse, the fiddles take the lead on the second A phrase and play the two B phrases to finish the entire form of the tune. The melody is then picked up again by Puckett, who sings another verse, derived from a venerable oral tradition of animal stories that reaches back to Aesop’s Fables and finds its modern analog in Bugs Bunny cartoons.



The Skillet Lickers, c. 1928. L to R: Lowe Stokes, Clayton McMichen and Gid Tanner.

*Grasshopper sittin' on a sweet potato vine,
Grasshopper sittin' on a sweet potato vine,
Grasshopper sittin' on a sweet potato vine,
'long come a chicken and says "you're mine."*

The final two sung verses, separated by instrumental sections, are more specifically associated with the tune "Soldier's Joy."

*I'm a-gonna get a drink, don't you want to go?
I'm a-gonna get a drink, don't you want to go?
I'm a-gonna get a drink, don't you want to go?
Oh Lord, soldier's joy.*

*25 cents for the morphine
15 cents for the beer
25 cents for the morphine
That's gonna take me away from here.*

The precise origin and meaning of these verses has long been debated by aficionados of old-time music, but the reference to alcohol and the narcotic morphine as a means of escape (the "soldier's joy" of the title) probably stems from the period of the Civil War, when morphine was first used to treat battlefield wounds. The tune of "Soldier's Joy" is cheerful enough, but the lyric adds a tinge of dark, sardonic humor.

A second version of "Soldier's Joy" is performed by **Tommy Jarrell** (1901–1985), an influential old-time fiddler and banjo player from Mt. Airy, in the mountains of North Carolina. (The documentary film *Sprout Wings and Fly* [1983] is a touching portrait of the fiddler a few years before his death.) Jarrell precedes his performance with a brief verbal introduction:

Well, here's a little tune called "Soldier's Joy." I do it just a little bit different from anybody else. I do it up on the [Army] bases part of the time, and it's in old-time D tuning, here's your tuning [plays the open strings of the fiddle to demonstrate].

Without getting too technical in musical terms, it is worth noting that the "old-time D tuning" to which Jarrell refers is different from the standard violin tuning used in classical music. Retuning the lowest pitched string of his fiddle allows him to play a drone (that is, a single repeated pitch that runs throughout the performance, rather in the manner of a Scottish bagpipe) at the same time that he plays a series of ornate melodic inventions around the basic musical form of "Soldier's Joy." The manner in which he plays the fiddle—with strong rhythmic momentum; a vigorous, saw-like, scratchy-sounding bowing technique; and an inspired sense of melodic embellishment—was said by Jarrell himself to represent an older style of playing common in his area of the Appalachian Mountains. That attribution is likely accurate; on the other hand, the relative freedom exhibited in Jarrell's performance, as compared with the more predictable repetition of the tune in the Skillet Lickers' recording, may also reflect the difference between a solo performance and an ensemble performance, in which musicians have to coordinate amongst themselves in order to create a group sound. (It also seems likely that the three-minute time limit imposed by the recording technology of the 1920s impelled the Skillet Lickers, like other musicians of the time, to organize their performances with an eye on the clock.)

Listening to these two examples—one a popular commercial recording made at the very dawn of what would later be called "country music," and the other an informal recording by an octogenarian Appalachian fiddler who learned his craft in the first decades of the twentieth century—will serve to give us some sense of the deep historical continuity and creative vitality of the southern string band tradition.

THE AFRICAN AMERICAN STREAM

Not all immigrants to the United States came willingly. Between 1 and 2 million people from Africa, or about 10 percent of the total transatlantic traffic in slaves, were forcibly brought to America between 1619 and the official abolition of the slave trade in 1808 (though an illegal trade continued for some years afterward). By 1860, on the eve of the American Civil War, there were almost 4 million slaves in the United States, out of a total population of around 31 million.

Any discussion of the genesis of African American music and its impact on American popular music as a whole must engage with the painful topic of slavery and the culture that the slaves forged. To begin with, the population of newly arrived slaves in the Americas was made up of Africans from many diverse societies, speaking mutually unintelligible languages. The cultural mix among slaves in the United States was made even more complex by the fact that many arrived after spending some years in English, French, and Spanish colonies in the Caribbean. These conditions encouraged the development of syncretic or “creolized” forms of cultural expression that drew upon various African and European (and sometimes Native American) precedents.

The mix of other peoples with whom the slaves came into contact and the social and political structures that channeled their interactions also varied widely. In the South, home to the largest concentration of people of African descent until the northward migrations of the twentieth century, the mass production of crops such as cotton, tobacco, and sugarcane on plantations was made possible by the forced labor of thousands of slaves. People of African descent, who outnumbered whites in some parts of the Deep South, were usually confined to segregated quarters; forced to work long, grueling hours; and subjected to severe disciplinary action for violating the norms of a racially segregated society. In isolated areas like the Appalachian and Ozark Mountains, farms were much smaller, and slaves often lived in family units adjacent to their owners’ homes, creating the possibility of more nuanced day-to-day interactions across racial lines. In the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, a creolized culture comprising French, English, Irish, African American, and Caribbean elements and influences developed.

If we think of the genres of African American music that have come to quintessentially represent the Deep South, Appalachia, and New Orleans—the Mississippi Delta-based electric blues of Muddy Waters and Howlin’ Wolf, with its strong roots in West African aesthetics (see Chapter 7); the black banjo music of Kentucky and the Carolinas, born out of a continual interchange between black and white musicians (see the discussion of “Coo Coo” later in this chapter); and the uniquely hybrid style and sensibility of New Orleans jazz, captured in the early recordings of King Joe Oliver and Louis Armstrong (see Chapter 3)—we can glean a sense of how local geographical and social conditions helped to shape the development of African American music.

From the early eighteenth century on, observers cited the slaves’ skill in music, dance, and verbal improvisation, attributions that have played a role in subsequent racial stereotyping. However, even if the association between “blackness” and “musicality” has an ambiguous history, it cannot be denied that music, dance, and linguistic creativity were critical elements in the slaves’ struggle for cultural survival, providing avenues for community building, social criticism, and the creation of identity. Stripped of their institutions, material possessions, family structures, and often their very names, the first generation of slaves in America began the process of constructing a coherent, resilient culture in a hostile environment. African American culture was built first and foremost out of what the slaves carried in their memories and were able to reconstruct in America, a process that often involved an emphasis on the nonmaterial, spiritual, and aesthetic aspects of culture, including music.

It is important to realize that the huge region of Africa from which slaves were drawn—the areas bordering more than eight thousand miles of Atlantic coastline stretching from current-day Senegal to Angola—is home to hundreds of different languages, cultures, and musical traditions. The music of West Africa is very diverse, ranging from impromptu performances of songs with hand-clapping to percussion music used to accompany social and ritual dance, virtuoso solo performances of historical epics by singers who accompany themselves on stringed instruments, and large ensembles of trumpets or flutes associated with political leaders such as kings and chiefs.

During the course of the nineteenth century the music of African American communities comprised an array of genres and styles, including work songs; lullabies and game songs; story songs (a black parallel to the European American ballad tradition); and various instrumental types of music used to accompany dances and other important social events, ranging from fife-and-drum ensembles to brass bands and string band music that paralleled and influenced the old-time tradition discussed previously. However, it is widely agreed that the most impressive and extensive repertory created by the slaves was the **black spirituals**.

During the “Great Awakening” of the early nineteenth century, increasing numbers of slaves converted to evangelical Christianity. The credo that all Christians are equal in the eyes of God was adapted by the slaves to fit their own situation and provided the basis for a widespread belief in the inevitability of a “Jubilee Day,” on which all slaves would be freed. Though some white clergy complained about the enthusiasm with which the slaves performed the repertoire of spiritual songs that they learned in church, others encouraged enthusiastic call-and-response singing, improvisation, clapping, dancing, and even spirit possession (a phenomenon in which participants fall under the sway of the Holy Spirit, achieving a direct, personal communion with a higher power). All of these practices provided a bridge for the continuation of aspects of African worship within a framework of Christian belief.

The fear that slaves might use their own religious meetings to foment rebellion led many slave-owners to insist that they attend white-controlled churches. Whenever possible, however, the slaves organized their own informal spaces for worship (called “hush quarters”), where they forged alternative interpretations of the spirituals and the Bible itself that bore double meanings of religious salvation and freedom from slavery. When early white scholars of African American song wrote that the black spirituals were mere imperfect copies of the texts and melodies of the white spirituals, they failed to perceive a deeper “invisible” layer of cultural invention in which the hymns were reinterpreted in accordance with the slaves’ aspirations and beliefs, and performed in an energetic, improvisational, call-and-response style that invoked all the expressive power of African sacred traditions. In some cases the secret, encoded meanings of slave spirituals were quite specific, equating evil figures in biblical scriptures with slave masters and the notion of entering heaven (Canaan) with fleeing to the North. It was in this context that black preachers, in the absence of formal political power, became leaders of their communities, developing a style of semi-improvised, musically intoned sermonizing that was to shape the development of African American religious

practice and the performance styles of popular musicians such as James Brown and Ray Charles (see Chapter 10).

Despite the richness and variety of African American musical traditions, it is possible to point to certain unifying traits, features that were to exert an enormous impact on popular music in the United States. Call-and-response forms are a hallmark of African and African American musical traditions. One very common form of call-and-response, found in genres such as gospel music, big band jazz, and rhythm & blues, is one in which a lead singer (or instrumentalist) and a group of singers (or players) alternate phrases, with the leader usually being allowed more freedom to elaborate his part. In much African music-making repetition is regarded as an aesthetic strength, rather than a weakness, and many forms are constructed of relatively short phrases 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 focus of much African music lies in the interlocking of multiple repeating patterns to form dense **polyrhythmic** textures (i.e., textures produced by many rhythms going on at the same time). This technique is evident in African American musical styles such as funk, particularly the work of James Brown, and the digitally produced accompaniments (“beats”) of contemporary hip-hop recordings.

The commonly expressed notion that African music is “all about rhythm” is an oversimplification, since melodic creativity, textural complexity, and linguistic expressiveness (including not only songs with words but also the use of “talking” instruments that can communicate verbal content) are very important aspects of music-making throughout the African diaspora. Having said this, it is nonetheless the case that **rhythm**—the musical organization of time—is an important focus for performers and listeners within this broad tradition.

One unifying feature of many African musical genres that sets them apart from most music-making traditions of Western Europe is the frequent occurrence of syncopation, or “off-beat” patterns, in which the sounds produced by musicians are played very precisely apart from or against the underlying steady pulse of the music (which is often reflected in the movements of dancers). This technique is grounded in the ability of competent musicians and listeners to maintain an internalized pulse that acts as a framework for organizing and interpreting musical time. This skill—which has been called the “metronome sense”—is a learned, unconsciously carried ability that is acquired over time within a particular cultural and musical milieu and is critical to both listening to and playing West African music. It is part of the nonmaterial culture—concepts, values, and schemes for interpreting the world—that West African slaves brought with them to America.

The notion that the underlying pulse of music can be strengthened by playing against it, rather than with it, is reflected in the common practice of accenting the **back-beat** (as, for example, when a gospel choir claps on the second and fourth beats of a steady four-beat pulse) and in the syncopation that runs through every African American musical genre from ragtime, the blues, and jazz to soul music, funk, and hip-hop. Playing against the pulse also helps to create the sense of “swing” or groove—a powerful

but fluid sense of forward momentum—that is so often cited as a core aesthetic value in African American musical traditions. You will hear many examples of this rhythmic approach, which has deeply influenced American popular music, as we examine particular genres and songs.

Another important dimension of music is timbre, or “tone color,” in which one’s perception of the quality of a given sound is shaped by the relative strength of harmonics created by a fundamental frequency. (Without attempting to explain the physics involved in this phenomenon, we can say that timbre is what allows a blindfolded listener to tell the difference between a clarinet, a trumpet, a guitar, and a piano all playing the same pitch, say “middle C.”) In contrast to the aesthetics of Western classical music, in which a “clear” or “pure” tone is the ideal, African singers and instrumentalists often make use of a wide palette of tone colors. Buzzing sounds are created by attaching a rattle or snare made of shells, beads, or metal rings to a drum or stringed instrument, and singers frequently use growling and humming effects, vocal techniques that can also frequently be heard in African American genres such as blues, gospel, and jazz.

Another key aspect of African musical practice that has carried over into African American music is an emphasis on improvisation. This is not to say that African music lacks fixed structures; however, as we have already suggested, these structures often take the form of repeated motifs (musical ideas) that form the basis for myriad subtle variations or provide accompaniment for melodic improvisation. The notion that the form of a musical piece functions as a platform for extemporization and the development of ideas in response to the context of music-making is a core aesthetic value of African American music that can easily be identified in genres ranging from the blues to jazz and hip-hop.

Improvisation is linked to another signal feature of this tradition: the dynamic interaction between performers and their audiences, who in many cases function as co-performers, adding to the texture and momentum of a musical event. In many traditions of the African diaspora, the social aspect of music is not easily separated from its acoustic properties. Rather, the two are intimately connected by a holistic conception of music as a mode of interaction among human beings and as a privileged technique for building and defending communities.

The issue of continuities in musical instruments—both their physical structures and the techniques for playing them—is a complex one. African drumming traditions did not persist as explicitly in the American South as they did in the Caribbean (e.g., Cuba, Jamaica) and South America (Brazil), in part because the making and playing of drums were suppressed by slave-owners—who were aware that drums were used to transmit coded messages—and condemned by religious authorities as being tied to “pagan” beliefs. Nonetheless, the method of organizing percussion into complexly layered multipart rhythms was carried forward in traditions such as Mississippi fife-and-drum music and the polyrhythmic hand-clapping that accompanies the songs of many African American genres, from children’s game music to gospel music.

Other West African instruments were preserved in America and adapted to new circumstances. The diddley bow is an adaptation of the one-stringed zither, found in many