

Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman with Brad Osborn

American Popular Music

From Minstrelsy to MP3

SIXTH EDITION



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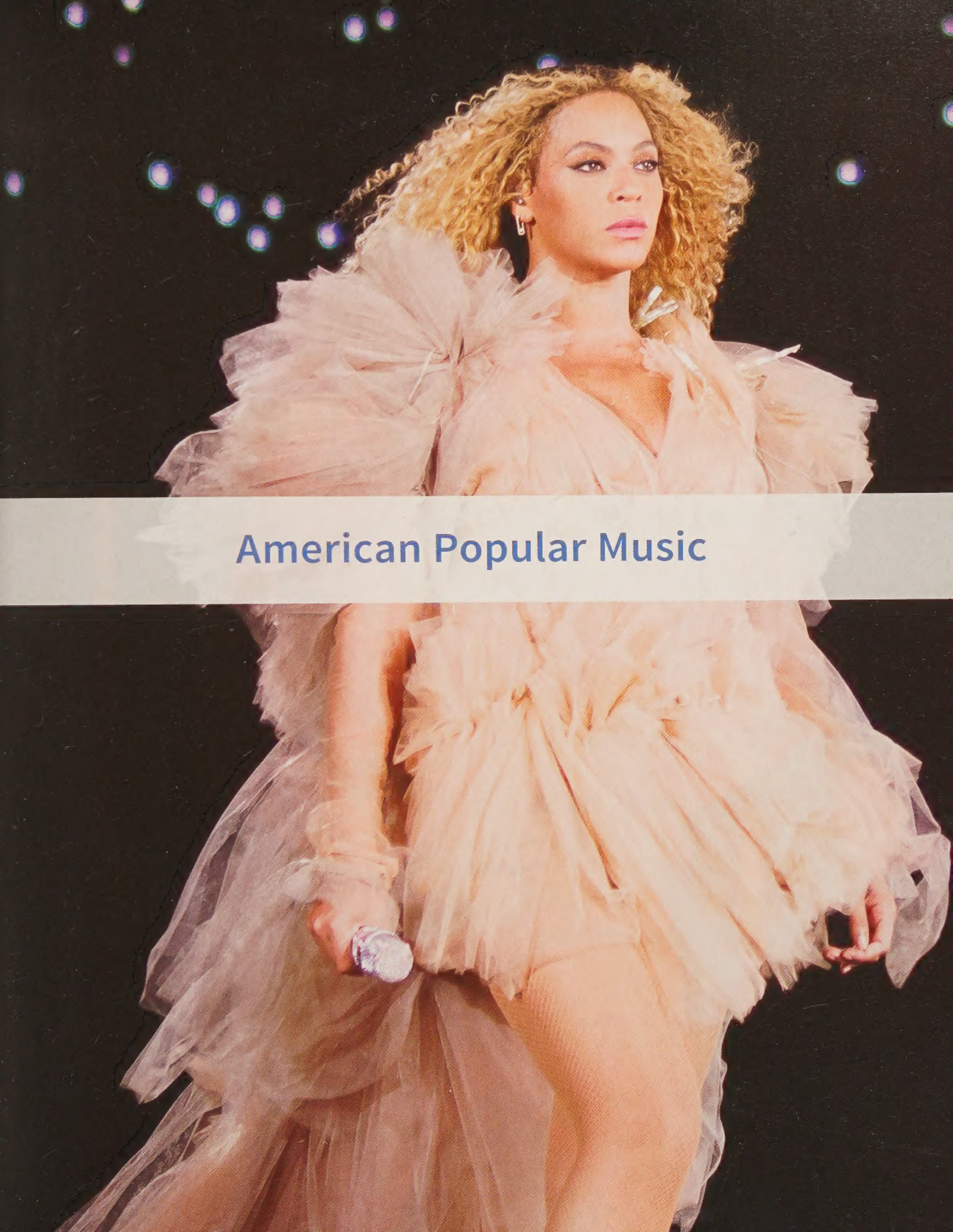
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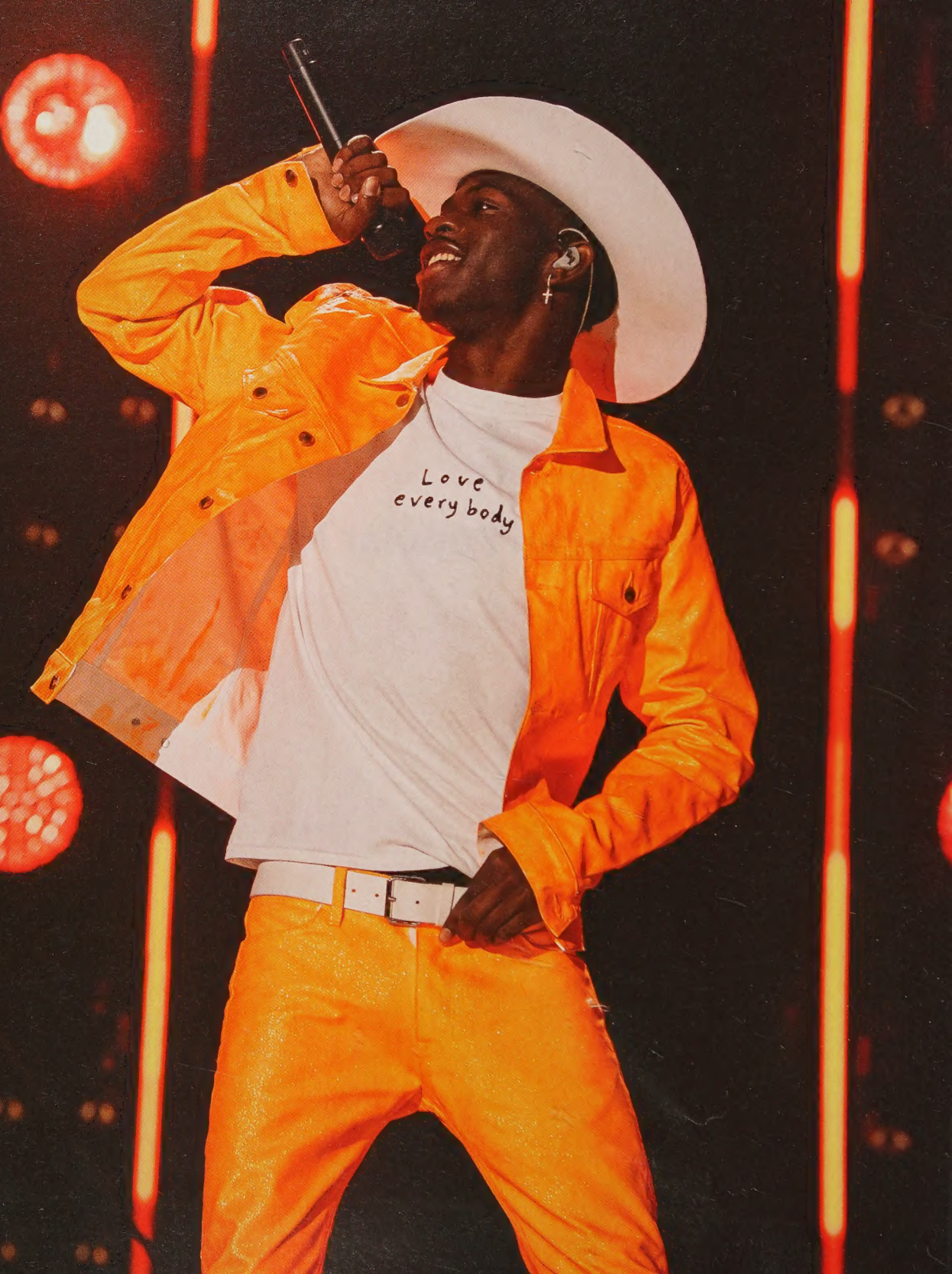
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American Popular Music



Love
everybody

American Popular Music

From Minstrelsy to MP3

SIXTH EDITION

Larry Starr

University of Washington

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University of California, Los Angeles

with Brad Osborn

The University of Kansas

New York Oxford

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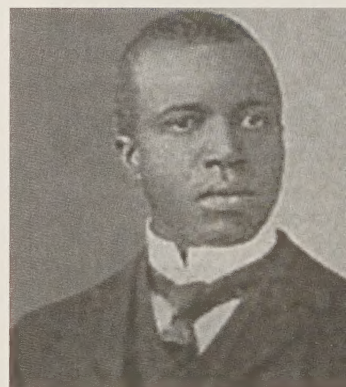
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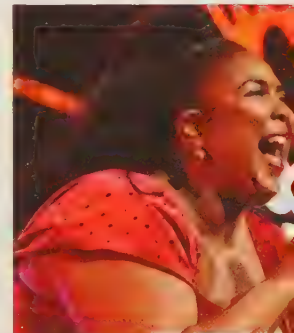
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Preface

IT SEEMS SCARCELY POSSIBLE THAT WE ARE NOW AT THE POINT OF presenting the sixth edition of *American Popular Music: From Minstrelsy to MP3*, nearly twenty years after the book's initial publication. 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 popular 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 strive 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 sixth edition of *American Popular Music* features exciting new digital teaching and learning tools that will prove essential to any popular music course:

- A new enhanced e-book includes links to stream every recording in the text with a free Spotify account, as well as in-text review questions, flashcards, historical performance videos, and more.
- New, regularly updated popular music activities that ask students to apply concepts discussed in the text to recent music. Popular music activities are updated every year, so they always feature music that will be familiar to students.

Even more flexible purchase and delivery options, allowing students to access material through their own learning management systems, via Oxford Learning Cloud, or in a stand-alone enhanced e-book. See the “Flexible Delivery Options” section of this preface for more details.

With the sixth edition, we’ve also made numerous updates to the text of *American Popular Music*:

- The text includes new, detailed discussions of significant female artists, such as Sister Rosetta Tharpe (Chapter 7), Bikini Kill (and the riot grrrl movement, Chapter 14), and Missy Elliott (Chapter 15).
- Chapter 15 has been completely reworked to accurately reflect the current landscape of American popular music, as the twenty-first century enters its third decade. This includes major new material: on technology and the music business; on contemporary rock stars, such as the Yeah Yeah Yeahs and TV on the Radio; on emo music; and on hip-hop (in addition to Missy Elliott, Drake, and updated material on Beyoncé).
- Also in Chapter 15, a generous new section on “Popular Musicians Who Endured—and Endure!” allows readers an overview and review of major trends and styles covered in the book’s preceding chapters, by virtue of a summary of the careers of artists such as Louis Armstrong, Aretha Franklin, Bob Dylan, and Tony Bennett.

Finally, with this new edition, we welcome Brad Osborn (University of Kansas) as a contributing author. Brad’s expertise in popular music of the twenty-first century and music videos has been central to the revision of the book’s last chapters.

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 typically 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 study. Important names are introduced 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.

Digital Tools to Build and Enrich Your Course

All new print and electronic versions of *American Popular Music*, Sixth Edition, come with access to a full suite of engaging digital learning tools that work with the text to bring content to life and help students experience popular music actively.

Digital Access to *American Popular Music*, Sixth Edition, includes:

- An enhanced e-book that integrates the text's engaging narrative with a rich assortment of multimedia resources, including links to stream every recording in the text with a free Spotify account, as well as in-text review questions, flashcards, historical performance videos, documentaries on specific artists, and more.
- Assignable, regularly updated popular music activities that ask students to apply concepts discussed in the text to recent music. Popular music activities are updated every year, so they always feature music that will be familiar to students.
- Assignable chapter quizzes including written and audio questions.

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Larry Starr, Professor Emeritus, University of Washington
Christopher Waterman, UCLA



American Popular Music



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	
		
George Washington elected first president of the United States	1789	
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	
		
Fully steam-powered textile mills established in Waltham, Massachusetts	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

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	
		
	1843	First performances by the Virginia Minstrels lead to the standardized pattern for the minstrel show
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 <i>Walden</i> , promoting a return to a more natural life	1854	Publication of Stephen Foster's sentimental "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	
	1865	
	1869	
	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	YEAR	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	Publication of Charles K. Harris's "After the Ball," the first "mega-hit" pop song
Pullman porters—mostly African Americans—strike for better wages and working conditions	1894	Producer B. F. Keith opens the New Theater in Boston, the first major vaudeville house
 <i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> decision of U.S. Supreme Court affirms the legality of "separate but equal" (i.e., segregated) facilities for blacks and whites	1896	"All Coons Look Alike to Me," composed by the African American songwriter Ernest Hogan, launches the craze for "coon songs"
	1897	 Publication of John Philip Sousa's "The Stars and Stripes Forever," which becomes the official march of the United States
Spanish-American War	1898	
	1899	 Publication of Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag"; its popularity helps to kick the "ragtime craze" into high gear



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. Country and western. Rock 'n' Roll. Alternative. Easy listening. Punk. Hip-hop. EDM. Indie. Americana. Emo. Crunk. Cowpunk. And so on, and on, and on . . .

But think for a moment. Why all these categories? Who listens to them? How do formats such as classic rock, urban contemporary, adult alternative, and Latin tropical take shape? What does this dividing up of musical genres and audiences tell us about 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 recordings of the Weavers, the Kingston Trio, or Peter, Paul, and Mary—was performed by professional urban musicians and profoundly shaped by market forces.

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 pre-existing 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” VERSUS 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 sometime in the future—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 such 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 “background music” industry pioneered by the Muzak Corporation in 1934). Many 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 methodologies, which focus on the analysis of written musical scores, are 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 “sound-print” of a performer. Play just five seconds of a recording by Louis Armstrong, Frank Sinatra, Johnny Cash, Aretha Franklin, Bruce Springsteen, Dr. Dre, Beyoncé, or Adele, 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, and Eddie Van Halen—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 “mainstream” (white American) dialect. 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 musical 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 (Individuality, Gender, and Race)

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, a portable CD player at the beach, or on an audio streaming service such as Spotify or YouTube Music. The person playing that song may have been one of your parents, or an older brother or sister. Family members often influence our early musical values, and it is their values that 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. 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.

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 "common-sense" 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—James Brown's "Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud," Merle Haggard's "Okie from Muskogee," Dolly Parton's "Dumb Blond," and the Village People's "Y.M.C.A." are only a few illustrations.

Pop music provides images of gender and sexual identity. In recent years, members of the LGBTQ communities have frequently employed popular music as a means of asserting, and expressing pride in, group and individual identities. For example, the

lesbian sisters who perform as Tegan and Sara are a prominent Canadian pop/rock duo that has achieved significant commercial success well beyond the borders of their native country. While their music doesn't overtly discuss gay issues, their videos and their image explore sexual identity and the "love is love" theme, as in "Closer" from the 2013 album *Heartthrob*. The duo has also gained wide recognition with the song "Everything Is Awesome," from *The LEGO Movie*, and with a colorful Oreo commercial. In 2012, the album *Trespassing* by openly gay artist Adam Lambert (who appeared on *American Idol* in 2009) debuted at Number 1 on the *Billboard* 200. And an open letter published that same year by hip-hop/R&B artist Frank Ocean on his Tumblr blog, recounted his love for a young man when he was nineteen years old, and gained the public support of hip-hop figures such as Jay Z, Beyoncé, and Russell Simmons. This was a truly notable event in the field of hip-hop music, where homophobic slurs have long been an idiom of verbal aggression. And in 2019 Lil Nas X, whose hip-hop/country track "Old Town Road" became the longest-running hit in the history of the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart, became the first and only openly LGBTQ artist to win a Country Music Association award.

It is important to note that there is a distinction between openly LGBTQ artists and their "allies." Lady Gaga is a notable example of an LGBTQ ally. Her Born This Way Foundation, named after Gaga's 2011 hit single "Born This Way," is dedicated to empowering young people to create a "kinder and braver world." The LGBT Academy of Recording Arts and its OUTmusic Awards serve the community through political and social activism and artist recognition.

Ethnicity and race—including notions of "Black," "Latino," or "white" cultural authenticity—are also powerfully represented in popular music. Recent examples include Taylor Swift's "22" (2013), which is about being an upper-middle class white woman with very few things to worry about, and Kendrick Lamar's "Alright," from his album *To Pimp a Butterfly* (2015), a track that deals with race relations, police brutality, and growing up Black in Compton. Beyoncé's 2016 album *Lemonade* addresses issues of racism and sexism through both music and accompanying videos. And although the Black Lives Matter movement and associated protests against systemic racism (2020) did not have an unifying anthem such as "We Shall Overcome," participants sampled classic protest songs, including "Strange Fruit," composed by Abel Meerpol and recorded by Billie Holiday in 1939; Public Enemy's "Fight the Power" (1989); "Inner City Blues [Make Me Wanna Holler]" by Marvin Gaye (1974); and Kendrick Lamar's "Alright" (2015), and stimulated immediate musical responses such as Beyoncé's "Black Paradise" and Lil Baby's "The Bigger Picture" (both released in June 2020). While the anti-racist protest movement of the 1950s and 1960s found its musical heart in a hymn composed by a Black Methodist preacher, Charles Albert Tindley, and published in 1901 under the title "I'll Overcome Some Day," the new generation of activists and allies sampled recordings from the past and composed songs specifically relevant to contemporary concerns.

People value music for many reasons: 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 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 long-term 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



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

keyboards and drum pads—suggest that millions of people in the United States today are busy making music. The onset of quarantining in response to the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020–2021 encouraged a marked increase in the purchase of music creation software such as Apple’s GarageBand, as well as musical instrument sales by online vendors such as Sweetwater, Guitar Center, Reverb, and other retailers.¹ And more and more people are using portable and distributed technologies to create their own 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 their voice or on-stage movements? Have you ever unconsciously sung along with your smartphone in a public setting? When you listen to music on headphones or earbuds, 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, LPs, and CDs—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 (1989–present), on which, for over thirty years, rockers such as Eric Clapton, R.E.M., Nirvana, and Miley Cyrus have demonstrated their “real” musical ability and sincerity by playing on acoustic instruments. (In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, MTV launched *MTV Unplugged at Home*.) However, there are also many examples of contemporary technologies being used in ways that encourage active involvement, including **digital audio workstations** (DAWs), music creation software, karaoke machines, and technologies whose effectiveness depends upon the active participation of listeners. While revenues from musical instrument sales in the United States were relatively flat during the 2010s, the Covid-19 pandemic and the imperative to sequester at home has catalyzed a big increase in both profits and number of instruments sold. 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.

The latest method of music dissemination is online **streaming**, including services such as Spotify (by far the largest), Apple Music, and Tidal, an artist-owned company

1. Samantha Hissong, “Sales of Instruments and Music Gear Are Soaring. Will Quarantine Spark a Renaissance?” *Rolling Stone*.com (April 24, 2020).

whose investors include Shawn “Jay Z” Carter, Beyoncé, Jack White, Madonna, and Daft Punk. Subscription-based streaming services, projected to reach 1 billion paying customers by 2021, feature a wide range of artists and content, and offer high-definition audio quality. While a number of streaming services have pursued the strategy of offering restricted artist content—for example’s Tidal’s exclusive release of Kanye West’s *The Life of Pablo* (2016) and Beyoncé’s *Lemonade* (2016)—it seems clear that many buyers have not been willing to subscribe to multiple services in order to access the latest albums by superstars. While some of these services have been growing, even Spotify, founded in 2008, didn’t turn an annual profit for a decade, and by the 2020s was facing robust competition from YouTube Music, rooted partly in the latter’s appeal to younger consumers, indicating that the business model for music streaming is still evolving.

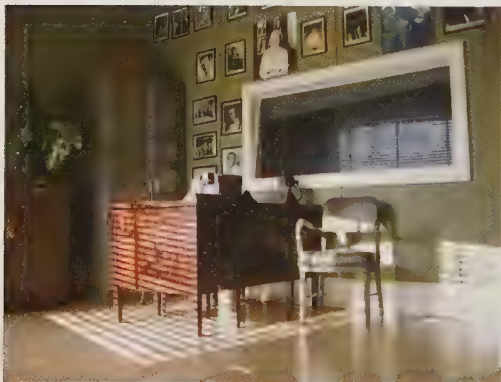
In the end, there is no easy way to summarize the evolving relationship between popular music, music-making, and technology. If it is true that technology has long been used in cynical ways to manipulate the public into buying certain kinds of music, it also remains the case that people frequently seek 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



The interior of the offices of the original Sun Studios as it has been restored as a museum.

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 re-examine 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 has splintered 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 twenty-something 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. Initially, downloadable audio was the dominant new format. As Apple'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. More recently, however, iTunes revenue fell dramatically from recorded music sales; growth dropped 14 percent in the first half of 2014 while streaming revenue rose 28 percent. Whether through downloads or streaming, the impact on the recording industry has been dramatic. The decline in physical sales caused large-scale layoffs within the industry, forced the closure of retailers such as Tower Records (2006), 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. 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 2016, three transnational corporations—Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment, and Warner Music Group—controlled 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. The market for recorded music has been predicted to decline from \$57.3 billion in 2019 to \$55.8 billion in 2020, due mainly to a massive economic slowdown across countries related to the Covid-19 outbreak and the measures to contain it.²

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

2. https://www.marketwatch.com/press-release/insights-on-the-music-recording-global-market-to-2030—featuring-universal-music-group-sony-music-warner-music—researchandmarketscom-2020-08-28?mod=mw_more_headlines&tesla=y.

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, the LGBTQ communities, 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, as we have recently been reminded, the people most responsible for creating the music that people in the United States and elsewhere consider quintessentially American have often 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 broad “streams,” and in this book we will focus on three very prominent ones: European American music, African American music, and Latin American music. Each of these three 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



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

down in unwritten form, ballads were eventually circulated on large sheets of paper called **broad­sides**, 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 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.

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 lone-some 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