

Chapter 2

Music in the United States Before the Great Depression

Background: The United States in 1900-1929

In 1920 in the US

- Average annual income = \$1,100
- Average purchase price of a house = \$4,000
- A year's tuition at Harvard University = \$200
- Average price of a car = \$600
- A gallon of gas = 20 cents
- A loaf of bread = 20 cents

Between 1900 and the October 1929 stock market crash that triggered the Great Depression, the United States population grew by 47 million citizens (from 76 million to 123 million). Guided by the vision of presidents **Theodore Roosevelt**¹ and **William Taft**,² the US

- 1) began exerting greater political influence in North America and the Caribbean.³
- 2) completed the **Panama Canal**⁴—making it much faster and cheaper to ship its goods around the world.
- 3) entered its "**Progressive Era**" by a) passing anti-trust laws to break up corporate monopolies, b) abolishing child labor in favor of federally-funded public education, and c) initiating the first federal oversight of food and drug quality.
- 4) grew to **48 states coast-to-coast** (1912).
- 5) ratified the **16th Amendment**—establishing a federal income tax (1913).

In addition, by 1901, the Lucas brothers had developed a reliable process to extract crude oil from underground, which soon massively increased the worldwide supply of oil while significantly lowering its price. This turned the US into the leader of the new energy technology for the next 60 years, and opened the possibility for numerous new oil-reliant inventions.

¹ Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919) was the 26th President of the United States [1901-09] and a distant cousin to Franklin D. Roosevelt (the 32nd US President).

² William Taft (1857-1930) was the 27th President of the United States [1909-13], and the only President who also served as a Justice of the US Supreme Court [1921-30].

³ This was due largely to the recent US victory in the Spanish-American War [1898—in which "Teddy" Roosevelt & his Rough Riders cavalry played a critical role], ultimately giving the US control of Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines, as well as ensuring Cuba's independence from Spain.

⁴ The French started work on the Panama Canal (1881-94) but gave up after over 20,000 workers died from malaria/accidents. The US completed the canal (1904-14) and kept control of it until 1999 when they returned it to Panama. Before this canal, a ship from New York City to San Francisco had to travel all the way around the lower tip of South America—a 13,000-mile trip that took over 60 days. The Panama Canal cut it to just 5,000 miles and less than a month. Trade between the US west coast/Europe and the US east coast/Asia increased substantially as a result of this modern marvel. An expanded Panama Canal opens in 2016, and will be able to handle today's modern mega-ships.

In 1917, under President **Woodrow Wilson**,⁵ the US belatedly entered World War I on the eventual winning side⁶ (1917-18), and ratified the **18th and 19th Amendments**, which prohibited the manufacture and sale of alcohol (18th, 1919) and gave women the right to vote (19th, 1920). Meanwhile, federal agents battled notorious gangsters and mafia figures for control of several major US cities.

During these three decades, American ingenuity gave birth to many inventions that would soon transform life and culture in the US and many other parts of the world:

- Escalator (Seeberger, 1900)
- Safety razor (Gillette, 1901)
- Improved process for oil drilling led to massive expansion of US oil production (Lucas, 1901)
- Air conditioner (Carrier, 1902)
- Motorized manned airplane (Wright Brothers, 1903)
- Washing machine (Fisher, 1904)
- Automobile assembly line (Ford, 1908)
- Motion pictures with sound (Edison, 1910)
- Home refrigerator (General Electric, 1911)
- AM radio (DeForest, 1917)
- Tommy-gun/machine gun (Thompson, 1920)
- Traffic signal (Morgan, 1923)
- Frozen food (Birdseye, 1924)
- Dynamic loudspeakers (Rice/Kellogg of General Electric, 1924)
- First working TV system (Farnsworth, 1927)

All this heralded in the "**Roaring 20s**"—a decade of major socio-political upheaval in the United States. By 1920, the US had become the leading industrial nation in the world, driven to ever-growing heights by its free market capitalist system during the presidencies **Warren Harding**⁷ and **Calvin Coolidge**.⁸ For the first time, more Americans lived in cities than on farms. Many African-Americans made a "Great Migration" from Southern plantations & docks to Northern cities in the industrial upper Midwest where there were better-paying manufacturing jobs. "Flappers" (radical young women with their short bobbed hair and relatively short skirts) were pushing social boundaries and wielding their newfound political power.

America's first commercial radio news program was broadcast in August 1920 by 8MK (AM) from Detroit. Within a few months, a variety of commercial radio stations in major US cities were broadcasting news, sports, and entertainment programs. By 1922 there were 600 radio stations across the US, and by the end of that decade 60% of American families had purchased radios. America was now truly "united" as a

⁵ Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924) was the 28th President of the United States [1913-24], and a former President of Princeton University with a PhD in political science.

⁶ After decades of intentional isolation from international politics, in 1917 the US joined forces with the "Allied Powers" (Britain, France, Russia), who eventually won the war on November 11, 1918 (this is why Nov. 11 is celebrated as "Veteran's Day" in the US). Just as World War I was ending, the worst influenza pandemic in human history hit from 1918-19, killing 20% of the world's population including nearly 700,000 Americans—five times the number of US deaths in World War I (116,516).

⁷ Warren Harding (1865-1923) was the 29th President of the United States [1921-23], whose term was cut short when he died from a brain hemorrhage at age 57 after just 28 months in office.

⁸ Calvin Coolidge (1872-1933; Harding's vice president) was the 30th US President [1923-29]. For 19 months, he finished the rest of Harding's term without having a vice-president to take his place.

consumer market, with ready-to-wear clothing and home furnishings sold through mail-order catalogs and big-city department stores, as advertised by radio stations, newspapers and magazines.

Urban mass transit had been introduced in 1904 with the opening of the first underground subway line in New York City, but just 25 years later Americans had become even more mobile after Henry Ford's \$260 Model T made it possible for one in five US adults to own their own car. New industries such as gas stations and motels arose to meet the needs of on-the-go Americans exercising their new sense of freedom. This rapid change was evident in the music emerging across the US.

American Music from c1900-1929

Much of the impetus for the new energy and innovation in American music in the early 1900s came from African-American musicians through spirituals, ragtime, blues, and jazz. The magnitude of these breakthroughs is best understood by considering the full picture of **Roots Music**, **Popular Music**, and **Classical Music** in the United States during this period of rapid stylistic and technological change.

A Brief History of Early Recording Technology and Copyright

In 1878, the great American inventor Thomas Edison perfected the **phonograph**, which played a vertical wax cylinder instead of a disc. In 1887, the German-born American inventor Emile Berliner patented the **gramophone**, which played **78 RPM** flat shellac-plastic discs that were much easier and cheaper to mass-produce (the term "**Grammy**" is still used today for major awards in the recording industry). Both machines used a hand-cranked wind-up spring motor to rotate the playback device, and a single ceramic cone-shaped horn to amplify the sound. Each recording could hold only about 4 minutes of sound. Piano music was often recorded on "paper rolls" to be played back "live" on mechanical **player pianos** which reproduced an authentic piano sound, but phonograph disc recording technology was extremely limited and "tin-ny" at this time because performers sang or played into a large acoustical horn that vibrated a diaphragm to cut grooves into the wax master disc, which lost most of the higher/lower frequencies in the process.

A major breakthrough came in 1925 with the development of the electric microphone by Bell Labs and Western Electric in the US, which finally **made it possible to capture more realistic live sound** and convert it for playback on electric-powered phonographs through an electric stylus/needle and dynamic loudspeakers. **This finally made it possible to add sound to motion pictures.** With this new and improved technology so much in demand, music publishers turned their attention from selling sheet music to making records. Sales of phonographs rose from just 190,000 in 1923 to 5 million in 1929, and the most popular songs were now selling in the hundreds of thousands, both in print and recorded formats. Recorded sound was still mono/1-channel until 1934 when stereo/2-channel sound was invented.

The **1909 Copyright Act** gave composers rights to "mechanical" royalties for the reproduction of their music in player-piano rolls and phonograph records

American "Roots Music" of the Early 1900s

I. African-American Roots Music of the Early 1900s

Spirituals

Gospel music of the 20th and 21st centuries had its roots in black oral traditions dating back to American slaves in the 1600s. While toiling in the fields, they

improvised expressive work songs —some of which ornamented simple Christian hymns with repetitive "call and response" exchanges from native African tradition. This grew into the rich tradition of sacred **Negro spirituals**,⁹ such as "Deep River", "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot", "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen", and "Every Time I Feel the Spirit" which have been immortalized and preserved through authentic performances by the **Jubilee Singers of Fisk University** from 1871 to the present.

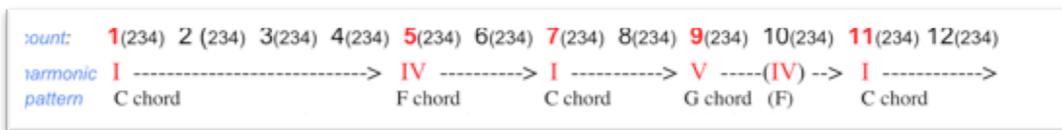
In 1875, the white Methodist singer-composer Ira Sankey (1840-1908) published the book *Gospel Hymns* to be sung and sold at evangelical tent "revival gatherings" led by the minister Dwight Moody. During its first ten years in print, this book made over \$350,000 in royalties used to support their ministry. By 1915, this tradition reached an even wider multi-racial audience through the African-American composer **Harry Burleigh** (1866-1949) and his beautiful classically-oriented solo and choral arrangements of Negro spirituals—the first internationally-beloved examples of characteristically "American" music.

The Blues

The "blues" itself is an extremely influential type of American *roots music* that originated in the Deep South by the late 1800s, as African-American musicians developed a style called **the blues**¹⁰ that helped them release their troubles through singing/playing a painful story. It blended a basic 3-chord European harmonic pattern ("I-IV-V"; see "12-bar blues," below) with the unaccompanied oral traditions of American slaves and the vocal music of free rural African-Americans to create a wide variety of subgenres, with regional variations across the United States. Over the years, the blues became an "underground aquifer" that from this root impacted all of the major streams of American popular music after 1900, including jazz, R&B, soul, rock & roll, and rap.

Blues songs are usually based on a simple *strophic* text (having several verses) in "A A B" form.¹¹ The vocal melody is sung over basic instrumental harmonic patterns such as the "12-bar blues," in a style characterized by expressively bent "blue notes."

Here is a very basic chord progression of a 12-bar blues in the key of "C":



[\(click here to see an animated YouTube clip with basic piano chords\)](#)

* * *

⁹ "Negro spirituals" is a time-honored term that is still used by the African-American groups that perform them, as a way to remember those slaves who suffered to create these songs.

¹⁰ Although American blues combines a European harmonic structure and African traits such as "call-and-response" and bent "blue" notes, the blues bears no resemblance to the melodic styles of the West Africa, and no specific African musical form can be identified as its single direct ancestor.

¹¹ In "A A B" form, the 1st melodic idea is stated and repeated, then a 2nd contrasting idea is stated but NOT repeated).

II. The Folk Styles of American Roots Music in the Early 1900s

Cowboy Songs of the American West

American folk songs often tell stories of how our nation developed—especially the westward expansion of the 1800s—through songs about miners, gunslingers, and cowboys. One example is the famous cowboy song from the old American West, "Home On the Range," which had its words and music published together for the first time in 1905, and which has been the official state song of Kansas since 1947.

Lyrics:

Oh, give me a home where the buffalo roam, and the deer and the antelope play,
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word, and the skies are not cloudy all day.
Home, home on the range, where the deer and the antelope play,
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word, and the skies are not cloudy all day.

Labor Songs

Songs about American labor came from the minstrel show tradition. Some are still famous today, such as "I've Been Workin' On the Railroad" (first published in 1894):

Lyrics (Note: Dinah is the cook who blows a whistle when lunch is ready):

I've been working on the railroad, all the live-long day,
I've been working on the railroad, just to pass the time away,
Can't you hear the whistle blowin', rise up so early in the morn',
Can't you hear her captain shouting, "Dinah, blow your horn!"
Dinah, won't you blow, Dinah won't you blow, Dinah won't you blow your horn?"
Dinah, won't you blow, Dinah won't you blow, Dinah won't you blow your horn?"
Someone's in the kitchen with Dinah, someone's in the kitchen, I know.
Someone's in the kitchen with Dinah, strummin' on the old banjo, a singin'
Fee-fie, fiddle-e-i-o, Fee-fie, fiddle-e-i-o-o-o-o,
Fee-fie, fiddle-e-i-o, Strummin' on the old banjo.

Appalachian Music

Many of America's folk music traditions come from **Appalachia**— a 12-state region of the eastern and southern US around the Appalachian Mountains (See Figure 2).

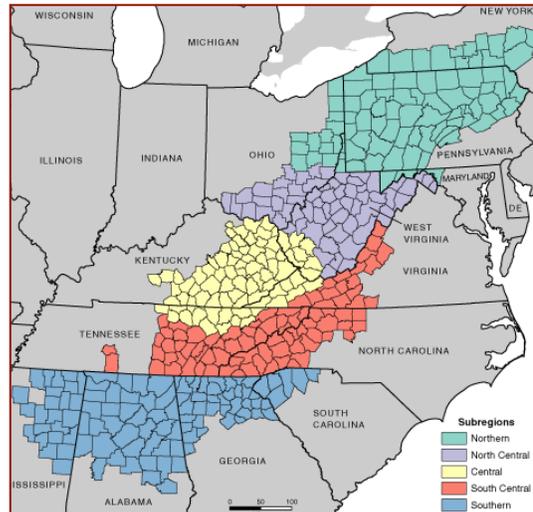


Figure 2. Appalachia

Appalachian Music is derived from various European influences, including sacred hymns, English ballads, Irish and Scottish traditional music (especially fiddle music), and sometimes incorporated elements of African-American blues.

Authentic Appalachian musicians were first recorded in the 1920s, which led to a renewed interest in "**Old-Time Music**" (which can feature fiddle, mandolin, guitar, banjo, bass, dulcimer, harmonica, jaw harp, accordion, jugs, washboards, and spoons), as well as spawning the new popular styles of "**Country & Western**" and **Bluegrass** ("hillbilly") music in the 1930s and 40. In recent years, roots music has been the focus of popular programs such as the long-running live radio variety show *A Prairie Home Companion* (hosted by Garrison Keillor from 1974-2016)

One famous traditional American folk group was **The Carter Family** from the Appalachian area of southwest Virginia. The original trio was comprised of **A.P. Carter** (who played fiddle, sang bass, and collected hundreds of American folk songs), his wife **Sara** (who played autoharp and sang lead alto), and Sara's cousin "**Mother Maybelle**" (who played guitar and sang harmony). From 1927-1943, the original Carter Family trio recorded over 300 old-time ballads, traditional tunes, country songs, and Gospel hymns—all representative of America's southeastern folklore and heritage. Their famous 1928 recording of "**Wildwood Flower**" (an adaptation of a song from the Civil War era) became a standard that has been performed and recorded ever since by numerous folk and country singers in "**cover versions**" (which are sung by someone other than the original artist).

The Carter Family also became early country music stars when the "Country & Western" style began to break away from traditional folk music (see "Early Country & Western Music" in the discussion of "American Popular Music," below).

* * *

III. Other Prominent Types of American Roots Music in the Early 1900s

Cajun Music

Cajun music is rooted in the ballads of Louisiana's French-speaking "Acadian" people who are direct descendants of French colonial settlers from eastern Canada's Maritime Provinces. The first recording of authentic Cajun music was made in 1928 by the Creole accordion player/singer **Amédé Ardoin**.

In the 1920s, Cajun music blended with blues and rhythm & blues styles to create **zydeco** music, which is widely popular. The earliest recorded use of the term "zydeco" came from the Country & Western musical group called the **Zydeco Skillet Lickers**, who recorded the song "**It Ain't Gonna Rain No Mo**" in 1929.

These French-Louisiana sounds have influenced American popular music for many decades, especially country music, and have influenced pop culture through annual mass media coverage of Mardi Gras (which is the "Fat Tuesday" celebration that occurs each year on the day before the 40-day Lenten season of Christian self-sacrifice that starts with "Ash Wednesday").

Native-American Music

There have been over 550 different Native-American tribes, which may be classified into four major tribal regions that have distinctly different musical styles: the Plains, Southwest, Eastern Woodlands, and Pacific Northwest. Ever since the invention of sound-recording technology, researchers have tried to document and understand its rich traditions.

Native-American singers use their tribal languages as well as *vocables* (sounds that have no specific meaning, such as "hey-ya") to intone their songs, which were used in ceremonies and to communicate with supernatural powers to cure the sick, bring rain, or ensure success in battle. For many tribes—especially the Plains Indians—the drum represents a "heartbeat" that can be traced back to tribal hunting, warfare, and sacred activities. After being relocated to reservations by the US government, Native-Americans have frequently used music to relieve boredom and despair. As neighbors gathered to exchange and create songs and dances, the basis of the modern inter-tribal powwow was born.

Although Native-American music has not had much of a direct influence on other music in the United States since 1900, a reverse influence has led to distinct Native American subgenres of popular music including rock, blues, hip hop, classical, film music, and reggae, as well as unique popular styles like *waila* ("chicken scratch").

Mexican-American Music

For centuries, people of Mexican heritage inhabited parts of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, and California. Their music traditions such as *rancheras* (traditional Mexican songs sung by only one performer with a guitar) and the *Mariachi* (traditional Mexican dance music played by a small band with singers, violin, trumpet, and a full range of acoustic guitars) were engrained in the culture of those areas in various ways and are still widely heard.

American Popular Music in the Early 1900s

I. Traditional Popular Styles in the Early 1900s

American Pop Songs around 1900

From 1890 to 1905, commercial songs in the US were carrying on the conservative "Gay '90s" style, represented by such turn-of-the-century standards as "After The Ball" (1891), "A Bicycle Built for Two" (1892), "Bill Bailey, Won't You Please Come Home" (1902), "In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree" (1905), and "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" (1906—a transition to the "Tin Pan Alley" era, which raised the sophistication of popular song composition in many ways, see below)

Barbershop Singing

In the last half of the 1800s, US barbershops often served as community centers, where most men would gather. Barbershop quartets originated with African-American men harmonizing spirituals, folk songs and popular songs while waiting

their turn. This generated a new style of unaccompanied, tight 4-part-harmony singing. White minstrel singers adopted the style, and in the early days of the recording industry their performances were recorded and sold. Early standards included "Shine On, Harvest Moon", "Hello, My Baby", and "Sweet Adeline".

Barbershop quartets typically dress in straw "boater" hats and vertical red-and-white striped vests. Barbershop music was very popular between 1900 and 1919 but gradually faded into obscurity in the 1920s—although it has enjoyed a revival in recent years through the efforts of the Barbershop Harmony Society. Tight "barbershop harmonies" also remain in evidence in the *a cappella*¹² music of the black church, and in various popular vocal groups from the 1940s to the present.

Minstrelsy

In the mid-to-late 1800s, a type of variety entertainment called **minstrel shows** criss-crossed America in big and small music halls, saloons, beer gardens, and variety theaters. These shows were comprised of comic skits, music and dancing, usually performed by whites wearing "blackface" makeup and mimicking black traditions in stereotyped derogatory fashion. Although minstrelsy was opened up to African-American performers after the Civil War, the uncomfortable racial overtones led to a rapid decline in popularity.

Vaudeville

Around 1900s, a new type of variety entertainment called **vaudeville** emerged. These shows featured a wider range of performers such as comedians, jugglers, acrobats, actors, animal trainers, magicians, dancers, singers, and instrumentalists of all different nationalities, who introduced all Americans to a national humor and repertoire through the same jokes, songs and routines. Many of these vaudeville acts garnered enough popularity to make them stars on radio, television, and the movies in the decades to come, including the Marx Brothers, George Burns, Abbott and Costello, and Milton Berle, to name a few.

The Ziegfeld Follies

The Ziegfeld Follies were annual high-class vaudeville variety shows conceived and mounted as elaborate theatrical productions on Broadway in New York City by Florenz Ziegfeld from 1907 to 1931. The Follies were famous for its large chorus of beautiful Ziegfeld Girls who paraded up and down flights of stairs on lavish sets in extravagant costumes by major fashion designers—dressed as anything from bird feathers to battleships. Many of the top entertainers of the era (W. C. Fields, Eddie Cantor, Fanny Brice, Bob Hope, Will Rogers, Ray Bolger, Helen Morgan, Marilyn Miller, Ed Wynn, Sophie Tucker, and others) appeared in the shows.

Tin Pan Alley

Various US cities were centers for publishing printed music for choirs, orchestras, bands, smaller "chamber" ensembles, and piano, but by the late 1880s, New York City had become the capital of a new kind of music publishing focused exclusively on

¹² The term "*a cappella*" refers to music that is sung without instrumental accompaniment.

sheet music for *popular* songs. The term "**Tin Pan Alley**" refers to the original center of this activity (West 28th St., between Broadway and 5th Avenue), where so-called "song-pluggers" plinked their "tin-pan" pianos all day in hopes of getting a publisher interested in their songs. From the 1920s through the 1950s, the greatest hits of the Ziegfeld Follies, Broadway shows, movies, and radio were written and sold in sheet music form through companies located in Tin Pan Alley.

The most successful Tin Pan Alley figure and perhaps the greatest songwriter in American history was **Irving Berlin**, who composed 1,500 songs in his 60-year career, including the scores for 19 Broadway musicals and 18 Hollywood movies. He wrote uncomplicated music with direct lyrics aimed at the heart of the average American. His first major hit, "**Alexander's Ragtime Band**" (1911), sparked an international dance craze. Many of his songs became standards that are still famous today, such as "**God Bless America**" (1918), "**How Dry I Am**" (1919—written in response to the national prohibition of alcohol), "**Easter Parade**" (1933), and "**White Christmas**" (1942—the best-selling song of all time).

Early "Country & Western" Music

The Carter Family (discussed above in "Appalachian Music") were the first vocal group to become early country music stars when the "Country & Western" style began to break away from traditional folk music in the late 1920s. Their music as heard on radio and recordings had a profound impact on many bluegrass, country, Southern Gospel, pop, and rock musicians. The Carter Family expanded to include younger family members in the 1940s and 50s, who were more in-tune with the newer emerging styles. One of the younger daughters of this family—the multi-talented June Carter became the wife and musical partner of legendary country singer Johnny Cash.

Another leading figure who made the transition from folk roots to early "Country & Western" stardom was **Jimmie Rodgers** (1897-1933)—a railroad brakeman known for his "Country Blues" style that featured singing, yodeling, and simple "thumb-and-brush" guitar playing, such as heard in his famous "Blue Yodel No. 8 (1930).

The Grand Ole Opry

One of the biggest reasons this American folk/early country & western music gained such rapid popularity was the **Grand Ole Opry**, which was started in 1925 in Nashville, Tennessee as a weekly stage concert of amateur performers. By the 1930s, it became a 4-hour Saturday night nationally-broadcast radio showcase for legends and rising stars of country music that is still heard by millions all across the nation, earning Nashville the nickname "Music City" and making it the country music capital of the world.

Musical Theater and Film Music

During this era, **musical theatre**—a light, staged theatrical play interspersed with songs and dancing—became more and more popular, blending aspects of extravagant vaudeville-style productions and light opera. By the early 1900s, the

popularity of these types of musicals in the Broadway theater district of New York City eventually led to a network of national show tours involving over 700 theaters across the US. After the first film with sound, *The Jazz Singer* (1927)—with Al Jolson introducing six hit songs—composers began writing new musical scores for Hollywood films, and many musical comedies were adapted from the Broadway stage to the movies, where they gained a much wider audience (see Chapter 3).

One of the most successful American theatrical composers **George Gershwin** wrote numerous hit songs, musical comedies, an opera, and film scores with traditional and blues/jazz elements¹³. A great example of his exciting new style is "**I've Got Rhythm**" from the Broadway musical *Girl Crazy* (1930).

The songwriting team of **Jerome Kern** and **Oscar Hammerstein II** wrote the most influential musical of the era, as exemplified by the mega-hit Broadway musical *Showboat* (1927), featuring "I Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man" and "Ol' Man River".

II. New American Popular Styles in the Early 1900s

Ragtime

Ragtime—a style of lively piano music that was prominent between 1895 and the end of World War I—emerged out of the so-called "honky-tonk" style played in saloons west of the Mississippi River. It is recognized by "ragged" syncopated rhythms in the right-hand melody, accompanied by strong straight-beat "oom-pah" chords in the left-hand. It began as improvised dance music in the "red-light" prostitution districts of St. Louis and New Orleans, but it became immensely popular all across America after the publication of *Maple Leaf Rag* (1899) and *The Entertainer* (1902) by the African-American pianist-composer **Scott Joplin**, who almost single-handedly made the style famous. Joplin did not make any actual *disc* recordings, but his ragtime music made its way across America through his recordings on perforated "paper rolls" that were able to be performed "live" on the **nickelodeon** (a self-playing mechanical "player piano").

The First "Commercial Blues" Styles ¹⁴

In the early 1900s, a widely-disseminated and *popular* style known as the "**Classic Blues**" developed, featuring a black female singer accompanied by either a pianist or a small in New Orleans-style back-up band (trumpet, bass, piano). The most renowned singers in this early style are **Gertrude "Ma" Rainey** and **Bessie Smith**. In the 1920s and '30s, Classic Blues, early jazz, and other types of black roots music were recorded by small *independent* record companies who put the label "**Race Music**"¹⁵ directly on their records to specially market them to African-American and

¹³ The lyrics of many of Gershwin's hit songs were written by his older brother Ira Gershwin.

¹⁴ The original "blues" is a type of roots music, but later derivative types such as the "Classic Blues" and "Delta Blues" were specifically written as popular music to be sold by record companies.

¹⁵ Although the term "Race Music" may sound derogatory today, it was not viewed that way at the time because a supporter of racial equality was often referred to as a "race man" or "race woman." The term died out after World War II, because the blues and jazz had become part of the mainstream.

interculturally-aware White listeners—since these recordings were not available on any *major* record label at the time.

In the 1930s, another style called the "**Delta Blues**" ("Country Blues") emerged from the Mississippi Delta region (from Memphis, Tennessee to Vicksburg, Mississippi). The most famous "Delta Blues" musician is **Robert Johnson**, a singer/guitarist/songwriter who learned by mimicking *race music* recordings in the late 1920s, and then went on to make several landmark recordings such as "Cross Road Blues" (1936) just before he died mysteriously at age 27.

Jazz

Jazz is America's most unique and enduring popular musical tradition, with its special blend of American/West African/Western European harmony, structure and instrumentation. Starting in the early 1900s, various jazz and traditions have sprouted up in different parts of the US, and their distinct American sound has fascinated listeners, performers and composers around the world.

In New Orleans in the early 1920s, African-American musicians made the transition from ragtime to early jazz, creating a style known as "**Dixieland Jazz**" or "**Hot Jazz**", with snappy syncopated rhythms, a fast tempo (speed), and greater focus on the soloist improvising over standard blues patterns. The greatest figure of early jazz is the trumpeter-singer **Louis Armstrong**, who began in New Orleans, then took Hot Jazz to nightclubs in Chicago and New York City that were owned by gangsters selling illegal alcohol during the Prohibition era. Armstrong was not only the first great trumpet virtuoso of jazz, but he became its most influential singer, inventing the "scat" singing style of improvising on nonsensical syllables to make the voice sound like an instrument. His recording groups, The Hot Five and The Hot Seven, were small combos featuring a trumpet, trombone, clarinet/saxophone, and a rhythm section of piano and guitar/banjo.

All Jazz styles have two common features: "Swing" feeling and Improvisation.

"Swing" feeling is a rhythmic phenomenon that is projected through the way the drums and bass express the beat, how the piano interacts with the bass and drums, and how the beat is divided up in complex ways.

Improvisation can be best described as "composing and performing at the same time."

A jazz musician relies on three basic elements of the song to develop an improvisation: melody, harmony, and form (which is usually a basic blues pattern).

Jazz combo groups usually feature virtuoso performers on the following instruments:

Rhythm Section:

- a **Bass instrument**, plucked by the fingers, often providing a "walking bass"
- **One or more Harmony instruments** (Piano, Guitar, Organ, Banjo)
- **Drums**

Soloist(s): one or more instruments

- saxophone, trumpet, clarinet, trombone, flute, vibraphone, etc.)

American "Classical" Music in the Early 1900s

Traditional Band Music

The US did not have an international musical reputation until **John Philip Sousa**. He was Director of the **United States Marine Corps Band** ("The President's Own") from 1880 to 1892, and then conducted his own 70-piece **Sousa Band** in over 15,000 concerts around the world from 1892 to 1931. He is known for setting the standard for American military and nationalistic patriotic marches, such as *The Stars and Stripes Forever* (1897), which is the official national march of the USA.

Blending of Art-Music and Popular Music

George Gershwin was also the first American composer to successfully combine popular and serious styles. In 1924, Gershwin premiered *Rhapsody in Blue*—his ground-breaking merger of jazz and "classical" music, orchestrated by Ferde Grofé,¹⁶ and commissioned by bandleader Paul Whiteman as part of a four-hour concert advertised as "An Experiment in Modern Music." The enormous success of this work compelled Gershwin to write two other significant jazz/classical mergers: 1) the symphonic poem¹⁷ *An American in Paris* (1928), and 2) the monumental American "folk-opera" *Porgy and Bess* (1935; more on this in Chapter 3).

American "Classical" Art-Music

Around the start of the 1900s, several New England-based composers such as **Edward MacDowell**, **Horatio Parker**, and **Amy Beach** were writing American symphonic, chamber, keyboard, art-songs and choral music¹⁸ based on 19th-century European models. MacDowell's *Suite No. 2 for Orchestra* (1897)—often referred to as the "*Indian Suite*"—is a 5-movement work based largely on Native-American traditions¹⁹:

Movement 1: "Legends"

Movement 2: "Love Song" (based on a love song from the Iowa tribe)

Movement 3: "In War-Time"

Movement 4: "Dirge" (a threnody)

Movement 5: "Village" (based on two Iroquois melodies)"

By this time, the Metropolitan Opera in New York City (which opened in 1883), had become internationally known by producing the late 19th-century Romantic-era stage works of Germany's Richard Wagner, as well as the light operettas of England's

¹⁶ Ferde Grofé was a renowned American composer, arranger, and pianist. He did many arrangements for the Paul Whiteman Orchestra but is best known for his *Grand Canyon Suite* (1931).

¹⁷ A "symphonic poem" is a 1-movement art-work for orchestra intended to project a specific image or story through sound (without sung words).

¹⁸ "Symphonic Music" is for orchestra; "Chamber Music" is for small groups of instruments; "Keyboard Music" includes works for piano or organ; "Art-songs" are pieces set to high-level poetry for a singer accompanied by piano or orchestra; "Choral Music" is for choir.

¹⁹ A "suite" is a multi-movement work for orchestra or keyboard, featuring contrasting picturesque movements or dances.

Gilbert and Sullivan. Between 1900 and 1920, Enrico Caruso, the famed operatic tenor from Italy, made over 850 appearances at "the Met," as well as over 250 early 78-rpm phonograph recordings that were heard all across America.

Experimental American "Art-Music" of the Early 1900s

An insurance salesman from Connecticut named **Charles Ives** used a much more daringly musical approach, such as stating several completely different melodies/rhythms/keys at the same time, and often quoted famous American patriotic and Civil War melodies in his works. During his lifetime, his musical experiments were mostly rejected by audiences, but today his innovative genius is widely recognized. One of his earliest and most famous works is ***The Unanswered Question*** (1908), which shows humankind struggling to contemplate the age-old question that we so often choose to ignore: "Why do we exist?/"Why are we here?" Ives depicts this by simultaneously presenting three completely different ideas:

- 1) "**The Silence of the Druids**": a slow descending tonal²⁰ melody representing ancient Celtic priests who practiced animal and human sacrifices and were so "sure" of what they believed that they refused to hear anything else.
- 2) "**The Question**": A short, jagged atonal²¹ melody played by a single trumpet that periodically makes its presence known.
- 3) "**The Fighting Answerers**": a quartet of woodwind instruments who try their best to answer the question, but when they disagree, their music becomes more dissonant and they give up.

An even more experimental American composer during this time was **Henry Cowell**, who employed extremely unusual techniques for expression and intensity, such as those seen in *The Banshee* (1925) and *Aeolian Harp* (1930), which must be played by the performer directly on the open strings of a grand piano using their hands and fingernails!

* * *

²⁰ "Tonal" music has a "home" key, and was the tradition in western culture from c1600-1900.

²¹ "Atonal" music intentionally avoids a home key and is much more *dissonant* (harsh-sounding).

Review of Important Terms From Chapter 2

- **"Cover"**: A version of a song NOT done by the original artist
- **12-bar blues**: a standard blues structural design that has a I-IV-V- I chord/harmony pattern.
- **Appalachia**: a 12-state region of the eastern and southern US where much of America's folk music traditions come from.
- **Atonal music**: music that intentionally avoids a home key and *dissonant* (harsh-sounding)
- **Barbershop Quartet**: a men's group that sings in tight 4-part harmony, typically dressed in straw "boater" hats and vertical red-and-white striped vests.
- **Cajun Music**: southern Louisiana music of French Acadian origin
- **Classic Blues**: an early style of commercial blues that began in the 1920s as performed by small groups with a black female singer accompanied by a pianist (and sometimes trumpet and bass).
- **Cowboy Songs**: traditional songs of the old American West
- **Delta Blues**: an early type of raw commercial blues that developed in the area from Memphis, TN to Vicksburg, MS, represented by the music of Robert Johnson.
- **Electric microphone**: a major breakthrough in 1925 that made it possible to capture more realistic sound to playback on electric phonographs, and add sound to motion pictures.
- **Gramophone**: the earliest version of the phonograph
- **Grand Ole Opry**: A staged music concert featuring country stars that has run in Nashville, TN every week since 1925.
- **"Hot" Jazz**: an early style of Dixieland jazz made famous by trumpeter-singer Louis Armstrong.
- **Minstrelsy**: a mid-to-late 1800 type of American live variety show with comic skits, music and dancing, usually done by white performers wearing "blackface" makeup.
- **Musical Comedy**: a light, humorous staged theatrical play with songs and dancing.
- **Old-Time Music**: a type of Appalachian folk music played on fiddle, mandolin, guitar, banjo, bass, dulcimer, harmonica, jaw harp, accordion, jugs, washboards, and spoons.
- **Player piano**: a mechanized upright piano that could perform music by itself from a perforated "piano roll" recording.
- **Race Music**: A term put directly on record labels in the 1920s and '30s by small *independent* companies that marketed black roots music specifically to African-American listeners.
- **Ragtime**: a style of lively, syncopated early 1900s piano music made famous by Scott Joplin.
- **Spirituals**: Sacred and expressive work songs improvised by African-American slaves.
- **Suite**: a multi-movement work for orchestra or keyboard, featuring contrasting picturesque movements or dances.
- **Carter Family**: a famous traditional American folk group from Appalachian Virginia who became early Country & Western stars.
- **Tin Pan Alley**: The nickname for the area of New York City that became the center for sheet music publishing of popular songs.
- **Vaudeville**: a type of American live variety show that emerged around 1900, featuring comedians, jugglers, acrobats, actors, animal trainers, magicians, dancers, singers, etc.
- **Ziegfeld Follies**: annual high-class vaudeville variety shows from 1907 to 1931 conceived and mounted as elaborate theatrical productions on Broadway in New York City.
- **Zydeco**: a blending of Cajun, blues, and R & B styles, created by southern-Louisiana Creoles of French, Spanish and African descent.

Review of Important Musical Examples from Chapter 2

Roots/Folk Music

Cowboy Song

"Home On the Range" (published 1905)

Traditional American Folk Music

The Carter Family: "Wildwood Flower" (1928)

Early "Country & Western" Music

Jimmie Rodgers: "Blue Yodel No. 8--Muleskinner Blues" (1930)

Popular Music

Early "Classic" Blues (commercial blues)

Bessie Smith: "Lost Your Head Blues" (1926)

"Delta" Blues (commercial blues)

Robert Johnson: "Cross Road Blues" (1936)

"Tin Pan Alley" Popular Song

Irving Berlin: "God Bless America" (1918)

Songs from Broadway Musicals

Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein: "Ol' Man River" from *Showboat* (1927)

George Gershwin: "I've Got Rhythm" from *Girl Crazy* (1930)

Ragtime piano music

Scott Joplin: *The Entertainer* (1902)

Hot Jazz (Dixieland Jazz)

Louis Armstrong: *Hotter Than That* (1927)

"Classical" Music

American Band Music

John Philip Sousa: *The Stars and Stripes Forever* (1897)

Blended Classical and Early-Blues/Jazz Styles

George Gershwin: *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924)

American "Classical" Music from c1900

Edward MacDowell: *Suite No. 2 for Orchestra* ("Indian Suite," 1897)

Experimental Art-Music

Charles Ives: *The Unanswered Question* (1908)

Henry Cowell: *The Banshee* (1925)