

MUSIC

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America's musical history is an artistic reflection of the country's developing identity. For over two hundred years, American music has served as evidence of ethnicity, regionalism, economic status, and religious beliefs. Historians have attempted to explain these musical phenomena through terms such as "cultivated," "vernacular," "classical," and "popular." Such terminology, however, has failed to define concretely the eclectic nature of America's music.

MUSICAL PRACTICES IN THE COLONIES

Early musical practices in America remained tied to England long after governmental alliances were severed. This early American music consisted primarily of psalmody, based on existing hymn melodies, and broadsides, which were secular songs sung to well-known melodies. The immigration of various religious and ethnic groups would alter, over time, these traditions.

Initially, the musical focus of the colonists was sacred music. Musical practices were communal, with an emphasis on congregational singing. Tune books such as the **Bay Psalm Book** (Boston, 1640) and the **Ainsworth Psalter** (Amsterdam, 1612) defined the content and stylistic features of the tradition. The creation of the first singing school in Boston in 1722 suggests a desire to elevate the quality of colonial music. Promoting the development of musical skills, the singing school became the center of musical and social life, and its popularity spread beyond the New England colonies. By the late eighteenth century, singing schools were established in Maryland, New York, South Carolina, and Philadelphia.

The sacred music tradition continued to evolve as new forms were created. Dr. Isaac Watts contributed to these changing styles with his opposition to the strict, old-fashioned style of English psalmody. His compositions, primarily hymns and spiritual songs, reflected new developments in American religious life promoted by the Great Awakening in the 1740s. A significant religious revival movement headed by James Davenport, Jonathan Edwards, and George Whitefield, the Great Awakening revitalized religion in the colonies. Watt's hymnody consisted of paraphrased versions of psalms that were selected because of their feasibility for Christian worship. The compositional efforts of Watts, John Wesley, John Cennick, and John Newton resulted in a new form of American hymnody.

This hymnody tradition, over time, came to represent a vast and diverse tradition as more religious groups established themselves. Most notable were the Shakers, signified by their unique practice of dancing, shaking, running, and singing. The Shakers left some eight to ten thousand religious songs and dance tunes that were preserved in over eight hundred manuscripts and tune books. Their community cultivated a unique musical and religious experience that included singing in unknown tongues while gyrating violently. The German-speaking Moravians, however, were one of the first independent Protestant sects to compose and perform both sacred and secular music. Their focus was on not only congregational music but concert music as well. The principal Moravian music service, the Love Feast, was a nonsacramental meal that consisted of continuous music in the form of anthems, hymns, and solo songs. The music of the church consisted mainly of hymns accompanied by horns, trumpets, flutes, and violins. However, as the church expanded into other areas of the country (Nazareth and Lititz, Pennsylvania, and Salem, North Carolina) organs were built and orchestras (*collegia musica*) organized. These ensembles not only accompanied the choir but often

performed European chamber music. With few exceptions, the music composed in the church was written for performance on specific occasions by amateur performers, and only a small amount was published before 1950. Sacred music retained a central role in the development of American music throughout the nineteenth century, but other factors soon overshadowed these existing traditions, and new forms emerged.

MUSICAL AND CULTURAL CHANGES

An influx of European immigrants, expansion beyond the coastal settlements of the colonies, and the Atlantic slave trade would provide the most significant cultural stimuli to music in America. The importation of African slaves, beginning in 1619, introduced a culture unlike that of America's European émigrés. The Africans brought a musical tradition that expanded beyond the boundaries of the European tonal system and that relied heavily on polyrhythms. Slaveholders, attempting to eradicate the slaves' cultural traditions, restricted African musical instruments as well as linguistic and religious practices. Despite these attempts, African cultural forms influenced other musical traditions. The banjo (**banjar, banjer, banshan**), an African instrument retained in the slave's music making, was later adopted into Euro-American musical practices, including minstrel shows and bluegrass and country music. Syncopation, the irregular accenting of beats, is one of the polyrhythmic elements of West African music that would later find its way into Tin Pan Alley songs, ragtime, and minstrel show tunes. Eventually, the acculturation of Africans in America and their changing sense of identity would be reflected in various forms of music: the African American interpretation of Christianity produced the spiritual; emancipation and life after the Civil War cultivated the blues; and these forms later developed into gospel, jazz, rhythm and blues, and hip-hop.

The British tradition, represented by two varying practices, developed as colonists no longer viewed themselves as displaced Europeans but as American citizens. These traditions are generally described as "cultivated" and "vernacular," or "classical" and "popular." Development of the cultivated, or classical, tradition began in the late eighteenth century as American music started to reflect culture and social status. The so-called gentlemen's culture encouraged the study of dancing, art, and music as an accompaniment to wealthy landowners' central role in national and regional politics. Benjamin Franklin, Francis Hopkinson, and Thomas Jefferson personify the "gentleman amateur," as they were well versed in the musical arts and contributed greatly to the cultivation of America's early concert tradition.

Musical societies, which increased the general public's access to concert music, became an important aspect of musical life in eighteenth-century America. The oldest was formed in 1762 in Charleston, South Carolina, and sponsored subscription concerts as well as other cultural events in the city for several years. Southern society cultivated a strong musical environment until shortly after the Revolutionary War. The focus of concert life then shifted to northern cities such as Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. In Boston, the Handel and Haydn Society, founded in 1815 by J. C. Gottlieb Graupner, was one of the more prominent organizations dedicated to the advancement of musical taste and practices.

America's concert environment grew as large numbers of professional European musicians and performers immigrated to America. America's concert taste, as a result, shifted; many resisted the music of American-born composers and instead embraced European performers and composers. English ballad operas and concerts of Germanic-based music dominated the musical scene. Increasingly, the British musical ideals of the past were replaced with the Germanic masterpieces of Bach, Haydn, and Mozart. The American composer and performer, juxtaposed between the gentleman amateur and the European professional, soon found that the opportunities for performing were waning.

The vernacular or "popular" tradition developed from a similar cultural foundation. The influx of immigrants from England, Ireland, and Scotland in the early eighteenth century contributed greatly to this tradition. Many of these immigrants were indentured servants who eventually migrated away from the urban areas. They resettled in the mountainous areas of the East and survived as farmers and laborers. Most were illiterate and their musical tradition, much like the Africans', was orally based. The ballad was the chief musical form, detailing the folklore, superstitions, and social mores of its performers. These songs included the so-called "Child Ballads," which were named after Francis James Child, who collected the older songs. Although the basis of the ballad tradition was European, the genre eventually reflected a new American context. The texts of traditional songs were appropriated for analysis of life in America, and melodies, generally pentatonic,

were sung with a highly embellished nasal tone.

Commonly referred to as Appalachians, these individuals also developed a strong sacred tradition. Their sacred music was initially based on an oral tradition—similar to the psalmody and hymnody traditions of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries—known as “lining out.” “Lining out” consisted of a leader singing the first line of a psalm or hymn and the congregation repeating it. This would continue until the song was completed. This method of singing flourished in the South and cross-culturally influenced black sacred traditions in the nineteenth century.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century (ca. 1795-1835), the Second Great Awakening began. Revivals held in small towns and larger cities gave birth to the camp meeting hymn. The focus of this movement was the increase of church membership, the winning of souls, and the advancement of moral reforms. In addition, the singing school tradition of the New England colonies had spread to the South and West, and the “lining out” practice was altered with the introduction of “shape-note” hymnody. Organized in the early nineteenth century, the shape-note tradition flourished among many whites and some blacks in the South and Midwest. Much of the music was written by late-eighteenth-century singing school composers of New England, and it was notated in a system that consisted of various shapes designating pitches. This practice, sustained by the publication of tune books and singing guides, allowed musically illiterate singers to participate without trepidation. Although many of these shape-note books retained the repertoire of New England tune books, their melodic structure and harmonization were very different. Shape-note singing grew in popularity and shape-note singing conventions (two-day festivals) developed throughout the South, Southwest, and Midwest.

In the nineteenth century, Americans continued to develop a diverse musical identity. Music making during this time seemed to affect every aspect of life in America: the rising middle class continued to cultivate a concert tradition; marching bands and dance music became increasingly important in amateur and professional music making; a music curriculum was added to the public education system; and women were being urged to pursue musical instruction.

A central figure in the early-nineteenth-century American music scene was Lowell Mason. Mason, with Thomas Hastings, advocated a strong concert tradition in America. However, their crusade did not champion the cause of American composers, but Germanic. Mason also opposed the shape-note tradition of the New England singing schools. As a composer, he concentrated on sacred music. His most famous hymns are “My Faith Looks Up to Thee” and “Nearer My God to Thee.” During his career, he published some twenty collections of Protestant church music that dominated American hymnody for over one hundred years. Mason is best known for his integration of music education in the public school curriculum. He convinced the Boston school system to institute music instruction and established the Boston Academy, which provided teacher training, classes in sacred music performance, and voice instruction. The efforts of Lowell Mason created a legacy of music education that significantly increased the number of people with musical training in nineteenth-century America. The expansion of music making opportunities and the introduction of the music curriculum into the educational system deepened the need for materials. The printing and publication of music in America increased throughout the nineteenth century, and music served as an important social stimulus.

MEDIA AND THE DISSEMINATION OF MUSIC

The publishing industry (and later, the broadcasting and sound recording industries) has had considerable influence in the advancement of both the cultivated and vernacular musical traditions. Music publishing in America was established with the printing of Yankee tune books and psalters in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Sheet music publishing was a stable industry by the 1790s, with the repertoire centered on theater songs. In the late nineteenth century, the popularity of piano sheet music and vaudeville songs ignited the publishing industry. Both became important to Victorian family life in the 1890s, when technology made the piano more affordable and conducive to domestic use. New York City became the center of popular music as many publishing houses and instrument manufacturers relocated there in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although there were successful publishers in other cities, New York publishers concentrated on popular music and significantly shaped the taste of the musical public. America's

music industry grew between 1890 and 1930 as “Tin Pan Alley” (West 28th Street in New York) became the cradle of the American popular song. The compositions of Tin Pan Alley composers George Gershwin, Jerome Kern, Cole Porter, and others reflected the urbanization of the American song and appealed to the white urban middle class. The invention of the first sound recording device by Thomas Edison in 1877 would change the manner in which Americans consumed music. Edison's invention, coupled with the contributions of Alexander Graham Bell (1886) and émile Berliner (who received the patent for the disc phonograph in 1888), increased the possibilities of the reproduction of sound. Of the three inventors, Berliner was apparently the only one who envisioned sound recordings as entertainment. By the end of the nineteenth century, several companies were established to manufacture recordings and the equipment necessary for playback. Initially, recording involved sound-wave patterns being stored as lateral deviations from a basic spiral path on a rotating disc. Electronic amplification, introduced in 1925, furthered the capabilities of the industry. Electrical recording is similar to acoustic recording in that sound waves are converted by a transducer into electrical current. After the current is amplified, it is applied to another transducer that cuts the spiral groove into the disc. As sales of recordings grew and eventually displaced sheet music, the American public over time converted from active performer to passive listener. Tin Pan Alley, following public taste, turned its focus to recording and broadcasting.

The early twentieth century marked an important period in the recording industry. Before 1920, most of the recordings made were of sentimental songs, dance music, and operatic and symphonic works. After World War I, however, the recording industry took interest in many of the vernacular forms that had developed throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Victor Recording Company in 1917 recorded the Original Dixieland Band, sparking an interest in jazz bands. In 1920 Okeh Records produced the first blues recording— “Crazy Blues” by a Cincinnati-based singer named Mamie Smith—which has been deemed the most significant recording of the period. Its success inspired the creation of a series of records that were marketed primarily to the black community. The “race record” series expanded the market for the blues, which previously had been heard only at live performances at tent shows, dance parties, and theaters. Several record companies, including Gennett, Paramount, Columbia, Blue Note, Vocalion, Brunswick, and Okeh, began to enlist black performers for their profitable race series. This marketing strategy peaked from 1927 to 1930 with approximately five hundred recordings issued annually. Record companies expanded their target areas beyond New York and Chicago and traveled to the Southeast, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Delta. White southern folk traditions were “discovered” and recorded in 1923 by Okeh Records. This recording of Fiddlin’ John Carson (“The Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane”) marked the beginning of the country music industry. By the end of the 1920s, recordings of fiddlers, banjo players, and singing groups were sold all over the United States. Country music, black vernacular forms, and immigrant music became important branches of the American recording industry. Before long, however, phonographs lessened in popularity. The Great Depression reduced the buying power of most Americans, who turned to a cheaper form of entertainment: radio. Then, World War II depleted sources of the shellac used to make phonographic discs.

Radio, by the end of the 1920s, had become widespread, and more Americans were buying units. The depression increased radio's popularity, and its influence on musical taste grew as it programmed everything from pop singers to dance bands to operas and concert music. This popularity led to the enactment of copyright laws and the establishment of organizations to protect the rights of composers and songwriters. The American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) served as a collection agency for music royalties. During the 1940s, when ASCAP and the National Association of Broadcasters disagreed on payment amounts, the networks banned the broadcast of music licensed by ASCAP. Since most composers and mainstream performers belonged to ASCAP, radio stations began to look to other forms of music for programming. Country (hillbilly), folk music, and black music forms (urban blues and rhythm and blues) not controlled by ASCAP filled programming voids. The result was the diversification of radio and popular music.

Radio eventually lost its promotional power with the arrival of television in the late 1940s. The promotional power of television was not fully recognized until the appearance of music shows such as Ed Sullivan's Sunday evening program, Dick Clark's “American Bandstand,” and Don Cornelius's “Soul Train.” These shows reinforced the musical style heard on radio and through recordings. Television became more important to music in the 1980s with the emergence of MTV, a cable music station, and the introduction of

the music video. Initially, the impact of the music video was minimal, as only a few artists used the venue for promotional purposes. However, by the late 1980s, the commercial power of short, two- to three-minute videos was realized. The music video propelled artists like Madonna into superstardom, and record companies poured money into short vignettes. Record sales increased during the late 1980s and early 1990s, though they later dropped considerably as the target age group changed and as more successful independent labels were bought by larger companies. By the 1990s, music videos had become modifiers of public taste and style.

In the late twentieth century, technology advanced with the creation of compact discs. These increased the quality of recorded material and the availability of music through Internet websites. The advent of MP3 files and rewriteable CDs has increased opportunities for listeners to customize their own recordings.

THE GENDER FACTOR IN MUSIC

Music scholarship has primarily focused on the contributions of male composers, performers, and entrepreneurs. Scholars have largely excluded women musicians from serious analysis, discussing primarily the roles of women in popular music. The contributions of women in popular music should in no way be ignored; however, this is a limited perspective. The gender factor in music has done much to define and shape Americans' conceptions of their sexual as well as national identity. However, despite having been limited to public performances of sacred music before the twentieth century, women have held important roles in music making in America.

As musical instruction and private performances became more important in identifying America's upper class, the trend to educate women musically increased. Female seminaries in the nineteenth century included instrument and vocal instruction in their domestic curriculums. Proficiency in "feminine" instruments such as the piano, harp, and guitar—which were well suited for domestic entertainment—symbolized status and culture. Some female seminaries educated their female students in "male-oriented" instruments (strings and brass instruments). This resulted in an increase in the number of female string and brass players and provided the stimulus for the creation of female professional orchestras during the early twentieth century. The proliferation and popularity of such organizations in cities such as New York, Chicago, and Boston provided an impetus for the female composer. Women as composers were initially rejected in musical circles and by the press. Critics asserted that because women's musical education focused primarily on performance and not on harmony and the principles of composition, they could not adequately compose music.

Despite such criticisms, there were many women composers who earned a place in American history. Amy Marcy Cheney Beach (Mrs. H. H. A. Beach) had a prominent role in the second New England school of composers during the late nineteenth century. She was not the first woman to compose music, but she was the first American woman to have a symphony performed by a major orchestra. The success of Beach's compositions opened the door for others, such as Mary Howe and Marion Bauer, whose compositional style embraced French impressionism; Ruth Crawford Seeger, whose radical approach to composition and activism yielded a style defined by short compositions with highly chromatic melodies, repeated patterns, and no key signature; Julie Smith and Radie Britain, who embraced the eclectic musical culture of the rural West and Southwest; and Florence Price, Undine Smith Moore, and Margaret Bonds, who combined European form with African American melodies. Yet for all of the advances women made in the field of art music, they have never equaled the status of women in popular music forms.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, women participated in minstrel shows and vaudeville performances. Center stage, however, was not given to such performers until the arrival of the classic blues style of the 1920s. Ma Rainey (née Gertrude Pridgett), "Mother of the Blues," virtually patented the classic blues. Her songs of lost loves and hardships struck a chord with poverty-stricken and disenfranchised blacks. The arrival of records, coupled with live performances on the Theater Owners Booking Association (TOBA), established the blues market. Bessie Smith, Maime Smith, Ethel Waters, Victoria Spivey, Alberta Hunter, and others would follow Rainey's successful path. However, by the mid-1930s, the classic blues could no longer compete with the emerging jazz style and faded into the unknown.

Although the primary focus of jazz is instrumental music, the female vocalist was an important part of the jazz tradition. One of the first influential and significant jazz singers was Billie Holiday. Most female vocalists of the time were hired for their physical assets and had limited musical talent. Holiday was different. After a short stint with Count Basie and Artie Shaw, she embarked on a successful solo career. Her career, however, was plagued by her addiction to drugs and alcohol, and she would never attain the acceptance of later singers such as Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan. Nevertheless, she set the musical standard for female vocalists in the 1930s and 1940s.

Female vocalists were not the only successful women in music during the 1930s and 1940s; instrumentalists were working as well. Jazz women Lil Hardin (Lil Hardin Armstrong) and Mary Lou Williams infiltrated the fraternalistic ranks of the jazz world and were members of significant jazz bands. Their careers spanned several decades and their success inspired generations of female drummers, pianists, trumpeters, and bassists. The advent of World War II provided more opportunity for female jazz musicians. There were several all-female swing bands that performed throughout the 1940s. Ina Ray Hutton and the Melodears, a successful all-white female band, and the International Sweethearts of Rhythm, which at several times boasted an interracial personnel, recorded extensively and were featured in cameo appearances in various film shorts and movies. Their success, however, was short-lived: it ended with the return of male musicians from the war. The new roles women had taken on during the war effort had created a new sense of womanhood outside the domestic sphere. Popular culture, however, would try to eradicate such notions in the 1950s.

Domesticated femininity in the 1950s was personified in the films and pop songs of Doris Day, who presented an image of white women as chaste and glamorous without blatant sexuality (“the dream babe”). The music was light and satirical with some occasional adult themes. Black female performers, outside jazz, were perceived as the exotic “other,” whose overt sexuality and tough exterior made her the antithesis of the “dream babe.” Although these images lasted throughout the 1950s, by the end of the decade the focus had shifted to the doo-wop, rhythmically driven “girl group” sound. As empowering as the “girl group” image was for young American women, it was, as were these previous phenomena, a representation of male fantasy: black glamour with crossover appeal (the Supremes and Martha and the Vandellas), the tough, rebellious street-wise white girls (the Shangri-Las) and the exotic Puerto Ricans (the Rondells). These images both embraced and rebelled against the previous female personas of 1950s pop. Few, however, could have been prepared for the boisterous entrance of the women of rock in the 1960s.

Janis Joplin integrated women into the male-dominated field of rock music. Grace Slick, Cher, Pat Benatar, Joan Jett, and Tina Turner would follow Joplin and cultivate the image of the “rock chick.” Cher and Turner would not only achieve superstardom after parting with their husbands/partners, but would show that women over twenty could be successful in a field governed by perceived beauty and sexuality. Loretta Lynn, Tammy Wynette, and Dolly Parton would bring to life the struggles of a background of poverty and unhappy relationships, establishing a major place for women in country music. By the year 2000 women's musical experiences reflected participation in various genres, from hip-hop to gospel to grunge to rock, country, and pop.

MUSIC IN THE NEW CENTURY

As America entered the twenty-first century, its musical tastes were as diverse and unique as its ethnic population. Music in twentieth-century America reflected the political, economic, and racial ideologies of its inhabitants. The classical tradition continued to develop, although much of the standard repertoire remains European-focused. The works of various American composers, including Charles Ives, William Grant Still, Gunther Schuller, George Gershwin, and others are programmed in concert halls throughout the country. This tradition has increased significantly, as performers such as Beverly Sills, Leontyne Price, Itzhak Perlman, Kathleen Battle, and others have achieved “star” status comparable to their colleagues in popular music forms. The increased popularity of musical theater performances such as **Rent**, **The Lion King**, **Bring in ‘da Noise, Bring in ‘da Funk**, and **Ragtime** have increased the number of Americans enjoying live music performances and have also ignited ticket sales for similar performances and adjoining record sales. Diversity among concert audiences has also increased as major symphonic and operatic organizations and music conservatories have instituted community outreach initiatives. Despite such efforts,

the classical tradition, for many, still remains a signifier of “high” culture and economic status.

Popular music in its various hybrid forms has come to mirror more realistically the everyday experiences of Americans. With the appearance of early rhythm and blues and rock and roll in the 1950s, the racial boundaries that had marginalized popular music performances were slowly being eradicated. The popularity of the two genres with both black and white audiences and the eventual desegregation of performance venues signaled gradual changes. In the 1960s and 1970s, black racial pride was ignited by the soul music recordings of James Brown (“I’m Black and I’m Proud”) and Marvin Gaye (“What’s Going On,” “Inner City Blues”). Political messages advocating racial equality, gender equality, and the end of the Vietnam War also peppered the popular music scene of the 1960s, though they were later eclipsed by the British rock invasion of the Beatles and Rolling Stones. In the 1970s, disco music and the popularity of the discotheque provided a musical platform for all ethnicities and sexual orientations. The 1980s signaled a splintering of popular music styles into various genres such as hard rock, rap, pop, alternative, grunge, and rhythm and blues. It has also been deemed the decade of the “superstar,” as performers such as Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston, Bruce Springsteen, and Madonna propelled the recording industry to its zenith and defined popular culture with their hairstyles and fashion. Musical tastes from the late 1980s to mid-1990s began to reflect more than ever geographic location in addition to racial and economic status: the grunge movement centered in the Northwest (Seattle, Washington) gave voice to the anguish of the white, pessimistic, twenty-something generation; hip-hop reflected the black and Latino urban experience in America; and rock music split into camps of heavy metal (a large West Coast contingent led by groups such as Poison and Motley Crüe) and alternative (Duran Duran and U2); and pop music continued to sustain its popularity through Madonna’s changing sound and image, the advent of the male group sound (Backstreet Boys and N’Sync), and the sex kitten/bubble girl image of Britney Spears and the Spice Girls in the late 1990s. Popular music at the turn of the century came to reflect a generational attitude and its identity.

Although the racial identities of many groups are still rooted in specific genres and styles, music in America has come to reflect generational, economic, and political ideology, more than racial distinction. Hip-hop culture has expanded beyond the boundaries of the African American and Latino communities and can be heard on the car radios of suburban white teenagers as well. Salsa, samba, and Tejano music has increased in popularity among all Americans, as Latino populations have increased their numbers as well as their influence. The advent of the Madonna age has shaped the position of women in popular music; many have become sought-after producers (Lauryn Hill and Missy Elliot), have sponsored and sustained an all-women music festival (Sarah McLaughlin, the Lilith Fair), have dominated nominations for music industry awards, and have headed divisions and subsidiaries of major record companies (Madonna: Maverick Records; Tracey Edmonds: CEO of Yub Yum Records; Frances Preston: President of BMI). Whether it is the latest Andrew Lloyd Weber musical, Lauryn Hill rap, symphony, or rock tune, music in America is reflecting to the world its diverse cultural and artistic identity.

See also [Urban Cultural Institutions](#); [The Popular Arts \(volume 1\)](#); [Popular Culture in the Public Arena](#); [Postmodernism and the Arts \(volume 2\)](#); [Elite vs. Popular Cultures](#); [Culture for Mass Audiences](#); (in this volume); and other articles in this section.

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