

NORTH AMERICAN MUSIC

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Overview Music has played a unifying and differentiating role in American culture, beginning with the earliest tribes, who developed unique ceremonies, ceremonial centers, and belief systems, all accompanied by music and musical instruments. Later, with the arrival of the Europeans, African slaves, and other cultures, American music represented a fusion and manner of embracing (or at times, appropriating) diversity and cultural fecundity.

PreHistory

Clovis culture (18,000 – 8,000 BC): We do not know much about the music of the Clovis culture, except we do know that they used turtle shell rattles and had drums which they used (most likely) in ceremonies.

Classical

Southwest Pueblo (1200 BCE – 1500 AC): Dances were performed and musical instruments such as rattles, shell shakers, and turtle shell rattles were used. It is very likely that the music accompanied rituals and tribal gatherings, often in conjunction with healing ceremonies which incorporated the use of hallucinogens.

Eastern Woodlands (1000 BCE – 1500 AD): As in the case of the Southwest Pueblo, anthropologists have reconstructed ceremonies and rituals that were accompanied by musical instruments, including flutes, pipes, rattles, and drums. The Iroquois, Cherokee, and Mound Builders were a part of the Eastern Woodlands. There is evidence that human sacrifice accompanied playing music during shaman-led religious ceremonies. Not all music-making was accompanied by sacrifice; there is evidence to suggest that drums, rattles, and flutes were used for ceremonies honoring deities and also phases of the sun and moon.

Colonial (Early Modern)

Southern religious: Charles Theodore Pachelbel: Charles was the son of the famous German composer, Johann Pachelbel, who is very well known for his Canon in D. His son, who lived in Boston and later in Charleston, South Carolina. His most famous work is Magnificat.

Pilgrims: Songs from the Book of Psalms, Henry Ainsworth, 1612 The Pilgrims came together with their own songs, many of which were focused on the Psalms and were monophonic rather than polyphonic. The Ainsworth Psalter (hymns based on Psalms) were cherished by the Pilgrims who came to America.

Puritans: Bay Psalm Book, 9th edition, 1698. The Puritans also treasured their hymns based on verses in the Old Testament book of Psalms, which they called a Psalm Book or a Psalmody. Many times, the Psalms were worship-focused verses that praised the glory of God and God's creation and the satisfaction of following God's will. The Puritans collected their favorite Psalms in the Bay Psalm Book.

Yankee Doodle (1750s): Yankee Doodle is one of the earliest and most popular American song which dates before the American Revolution. It was first written even before the French-Indian Seven Year Wars. The melody is a very old one and can be traced back to European folk tunes. The lyrics refer to an unsophisticated man who would like to be seen as a dandy. The lyrics capture life as it was during the Revolutionary War, and its general jolliness has made it a great favorite.

Appalachia Broadside Ballads: In the Appalachia, ballads developed and were very popular. They were circulated by one-page broadside. They brought their music with them from England and Scotland, and they eventually evolved into the distinctive style we now know as Bluegrass.

Barbara Allen: It is possible that this popular folk song originated in England and was further developed in small towns in the Appalachias and in the coastal areas of the South. Barbara Allen is a sad ballad about a hard-hearted woman who becomes aware of how her rejection harmed her love-sick suitor as he lies dying.

Matty Groves: The song, "Matty Groves" first appeared as a folk song / bluegrass in the Appalachias in the early years of the American republic. It was very popular and the melody was later used in the song, "House of the Rising Sun," made popular in the 1960s.

Banjo: The banjo was developed by the African slaves who modified their "kora" to create what was known as a "mbanza" or "banza" in Portuguese. It was modified with more strings and a bigger body (round) and used in folk music. It was later incorporated into bluegrass music as well as in other traditional American folk music.

Dulcimer: The hammered dulcimer is a kind of stringed instrument that can be played with a kind of keyboard. It has the advantage of being able to be played with a bow and also strummed and hammered. It's considered an ancestor of the piano and has the advantage of being very portable.

Nineteenth Century

Folk Music: Secular folk music used typically American instruments that were portable, and included keyboard (hammer dulcimer), clarinet, trumpet, fife, drum and fiddle. Much of the regional folk music in the U.S. was developed in Appalachia, where bluegrass, old time gospel, and jug bands thrived. They played the music for gatherings and it often involved dancing (clog dancing, square dancing, and more). However, in the American West, cowboy music became very popular, usually involving a single guitar and a singer (or chorus of singers). Cajun music blended French dance music and folk music to develop zydeco. Roots music, primarily that developed by the African American slaves involves field hollers, gospel music, spirituals, and even songs developed for dance halls and "honky tonks." Work songs were another important source of folk music, and different groups developed their own characteristic songs, often with humorous or nostalgic lyrics. They include sea shanties, railroad worker songs, cowboy songs, and union organizer songs. It is worth noting that many of the worker songs developed in fields that required people to travel together in small groups for long periods of time.

Classical Music: Music composed for public events, church, and theatre for use in cultural settings. It was considered the music of the wealthier Americans, and for that reason, most classical music played in the U.S. was imported from Europe. There were, however, exceptions.

Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829–1869): Born in New Orleans, Gottschalk wrote a number of virtuoso piano compositions which were in the Romantic school. He spent much time in the Caribbean islands as well as in the American South. His piano compositions evoke a romantic, even exotic sensibility, as they incorporate Latin American and Creole folk rhythms and themes. His music for piano include compositions such as *Deuxieme Banjo*, *Solitude*, *Souvenir de la Havane*, *Manchega*, and *La Savane* (a Creole ballad for the piano).

Edward MacDowell (1860 – 1908): MacDowell was classically trained in New York, Paris, and Frankfurt. The enterprise of his life was to develop a uniquely American musical idiom for the piano which reflected and incorporated European Romantic forms, and placed them within a "miniaturist" framework of small tone poems which evoked the American landscape. His most popular and recognizable pieces are from *Woodland Sketches* (with the famous "To a Wild Rose"), *Sea Pieces*, and *New England Idylls*. Something terrible happened in his private life which is still not known, and MacDowell suffered an emotional collapse, resulting in his living out his days in a mental institution. In appreciation for his idyllic, soothing and uniquely American compositions, his wife dedicated funds to establish the "MacDowell Colony" in Peterborough, New Hampshire, where American composers and writers could spend the summer dedicated to writing compositions.

John Philip Sousa (1854-1931): Often associated with American nationalism and patriotism, Sousa's preferred ensemble was that of brass instruments, leading to its popular use with military functions. Considered the king of military marches, Sousa's compositions are widely used even today, especially *The Stars and Stripes Forever* (1897) and *Semper Fidelis* (1888). His compositions are played at graduations, Fourth of July events, the Marine Corps birthday, and in military gatherings.

Stephen Foster (1826-1864): A prolific composer of extremely popular minstrel songs and sentimental ballads, Stephen Foster's compositions were ubiquitous in nineteenth-century American life. Despite the extreme popularity of "Oh! Susanna," "Old Folks at Home" (Swanee River), "Camptown Races," "My Old Kentucky Home," "Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair," and "Beautiful Dreamer," Foster, a terrible money-manager and negotiator, died in poverty and alone after his wife left him due to financial difficulties.

Twentieth Century

Classical: The 20th century was a time of the blending of popular forms and classical music structure. It took the nineteenth-century Romantic incorporation of folk tunes even further because it had as its goal the desire to destabilize the form and to radically alter taste and aesthetics (rather than colonize it, which Romanticism did). It was also a time of extreme expressionism with fragmentation of classical forms in order to express emotions, human states of being, and beingness in the world.

Scott Joplin (1867/68–1917): As an African-American, Scott Joplin was a revolutionary figure whose works were extremely popular, both in popular venues and in more elite settings, such as ballet. Born in Texarkana, Texas in 1868 just a few years after slaves were freed, Joplin composed ragtime for the piano, which was published as sheet music and sold quite well. The *Maple Leaf Rag* was perhaps his most well-known. He later wrote and published work for the opera. Unfortunately, his experiments were not financial successes. Nevertheless, his piano compositions and his opera (*Treemonisha*) were great successes in the 1970s when they were used in conjunction with the movie, *The Sting*.

Charles Ives (1874–1954): Like many innovative composers, Ives achieved most of his success posthumously (which, given the miserable lives of most of the composers seems like a cruel trick of fate). Ives, however, was not indigent, thankfully enough. He was a successful insurance broker in New York City, where he helped develop what we now know as estate planning. While he was doing innovative work in insurance / estate planning, Ives was also a prolific composer of modernist music, much of which was shockingly outre, including highly dissonant songs such as "The Majority." His compendium (the bulk of his oeuvre) was published in 1922, and was entitled *122 Songs*. Shortly after that, he had a series of health problems and composed very little more after that time. His highly experimental *Holiday Symphony* (1911) and *Three Places in New England* (1915), as well as *Fourth Symphony* (1917) are remarkable examples of modernism.

George Gershwin (1898–1937): Spanning both popular and classical music, Gershwin was one of the first composers to openly incorporate African-American ragtime, jazz, and traditional folk tunes in his classical compositions. He worked with his brother, Ira, and they became perhaps the most famous and successful songwriters of the early twentieth-century, with songs such as *Summertime* and the longer works *An American in Paris* (1928) and the opera, *Porgy and Bess*. Later, he wrote for Hollywood films, as he became one of the powerhouses behind the success of New York's "Tin Pan Alley." He might have continued writing, but began displaying bizarre behavior, attributed at first to mental illness, but later to the large brain tumor that killed him in 1937 at the age of 37.

John Cage (1912–1992): Taking the experimentation of Charles Ives even further, and combining it with Abstract Expressionism and a philosophy of randomness, John Cage's aleatory (chance) composition methodology pushed the boundaries of music and simple sound and/or noise. A leading figure of the post-WWII avant-garde, Cage's work interrogated the notion of music, and also the reasons for designating one type of organized sound as "music" and another as either "noise" or "pure sound." The music was used to deconstruct the notion of dance as well, and Merce Cunningham's collaborations with Cage transformed modern dance.

Aaron Copland (1900 – 1990): One of the most influential classical American composers of the twentieth-century, Copland embraced the great American myths and expressed, with wild, expansive musical scores, the feelings of boundlessness of the American West and the American Dream. He incorporated jazz, African-American field hollers, spirituals, square dances, Mexican folk tunes and hymns to create a unique sound. His most famous are his ballets, *Billy the Kid* (1938), *Appalachian Spring* (1944), and *Rodeo* (1942). In addition to writing symphonies, Copland wrote scores for films, including *Of mice and Men*, *Our Town*, *The Red Pony*, and *Letter from Home*. He later experimented with the 12-tone school of Arnold Schoenberg.

Popular Music: Ranging from music sold as sheet music and played at home or in dance halls, to showtunes for Broadway plays and Hollywood, and then later, music for the radio, television, and music video, popular music in North America has been very influential, primarily because of its extreme commercialization and means of distribution. A few of the most popular genres appear below:

Ragtime: Ragtime derived its name from its syncopated or “ragged” rhythm, which made it very catchy and up-beat for dance halls. Not surprisingly, new kinds of dances were developed with it, and were performed at home dances and also in dance halls. It is of African American origin.

Jazz: Jazz took ragtime a few steps further and incorporated syncopation and a great deal of improvisation. The first emergence of jazz was in Memphis (Dixieland) and also in New Orleans. Later, more improvisatory forms prevailed and jazz came to denominate any kind of experimental, improvisatory music.

Swing: Emerging in the 1930s, the “swing” is the movement (in dance) when the emphasis is placed on the off beat, resulting in a powerful, anchoring rhythm and an often euphoria-producing energy, with much room for vocal improvisations and solos.

Rock ‘n’ Roll: Essentially a fusion of a large number of African American musical styles and genres, “rock and roll” is basically built on a rhythm that emphasizes an accentuated backbeat, accompanied by drums (including snare and bass). The main instruments of rock and roll were the electric guitar (lead and rhythm) and electric bass guitar. It has been one of the most influential musical genres, and its popularity has always affiliated itself with social, cultural, and commercial movements and trends.

Country-Western / Country: Taking its place in purely North American music, country-western music evolved from Appalachian folk and Western cowboy songs. It has been embraced as the music of the working class, and the lyrics often focus on tragedy, lost love, broken lives, and heartache. The instruments are primarily electric and acoustic guitars, steel guitars, fiddles, harmonicas, and banjos.

Discussion/Questions

1. In early cultures of North America, we have evidence that music was used in conjunction with ceremonies and religious rites. We can extrapolate their activities and what they were doing by examining the artifacts found with the musical instruments. Describe two different situations in which music would be used by members of Clovis, Southwest Pueblo, or Eastern Woodlands civilizations.
2. Music during colonial times often was performed in conjunction with religious ceremonies. However, not all religious music was the same. Compare and contrast the music used by the early Puritans in their gatherings with those used by those of other religious groups, such as Anglican (Episcopalian), Catholic, or Lutheran.
3. In the 19th century, American music started to take on its own shape and form which differentiated it from other regions of the world. For example, the African American slaves and freedmen developed their own forms of music which incorporated some African elements and fused them with others. Please describe the kinds of music developed by African Americans in the 19th century and discuss how they served social purposes.

4. In the 20th century, classical music in North America tended to follow either one or another track. Either it tended to move toward experimental, innovative, and abstract music, representing a break from previous classical forms, or, it followed earlier forms (opera, for example), while incorporating folk songs, dance rhythms, and impressionistic tone poems corresponding to myths and landscapes. Identify one composer from each group and describe his or her work.

Readings

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