

- A. The golden age of Tin Pan Alley song, 1920s and 1930s
- a. During the 1920s and 1930s certain characteristic musical structures and styles of performance dominated popular song
 - b. Jewish immigrants, particularly from Central and Eastern Europe, played a central role in the music business during the early twentieth century as composers, lyricists, performers, publishers, and promoters
 - c. Some of the hundreds of Jewish performers who worked the vaudeville circuit went on to become major celebrities on Broadway and in Hollywood: *Al Jolson*, Sophie Tucker, George Jessel, Jack Benny, George Burns, and Milton Berle
 - d. The rise of anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe during the 1880s encouraged the emigration of millions of Jews
 - e. Lower-class immigrants, denied the possibility of upward mobility for centuries, poured their ambition into music, dance, and comedy, perfecting their skills on the streets of New York
 - f. Important Tin Pan Alley composers included Irving Berlin, Richard Rodgers, George Gershwin, and Cole Porter
- B. Irving Berlin (born Israel, or Isadore, Baline) (1888–1989)
- a. The most productive, varied, and creative of the Tin Pan Alley songwriters
 - b. Professional songwriting career started before World War I and continued into the 1960s
 - c. Most famous songs include “Alexander’s Ragtime Band,” “Blue Skies,” “Cheek to Cheek,” “There’s No Business Like Show Business,” “White Christmas,” and “God Bless America”
 - d. Born in Temun, Russia, in 1888; his family fled the anti-Jewish pogrom there in 1892
 - e. Began his career as a song plugger
 - f. “Alexander’s Ragtime Band,” published in 1911, first brought him mass acclaim
 - g. Wrote songs for the Broadway stage and for the new medium of sound film
 - h. The most prolific and consistent of Tin Pan Alley composers, with an active songwriting career spanning almost sixty years
- C. Tin Pan Alley song form

- a. Composers and lyricists explored the possibilities of song forms inherited from the nineteenth century, including the AABA structure of “Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair” and the verse-and-chorus form of “After the Ball”
- b. The verse usually sets up a dramatic context or emotional tone
- c. Verses were regarded as mere introductions by the 1920s, and today the verses of Tin Pan Alley songs are infrequently performed
- d. The **refrain** is the part usually considered “the song” today
 - i. Usually made up of four sections of equal length, in the pattern **A A B A**
 - ii. The A section presents the main melody, the basic pattern of the lyrics, and a set of chord changes to support them
 - iii. The music of the A section is then repeated with new lyrics; often some slight melodic changes will be introduced, making this A' (i.e., a variation of A)
 - iv. The B section, or “**bridge**,” is then introduced; the bridge presents new material—a new melody, chord changes, and lyrics
 - v. Finally, the A melody and chord changes are repeated with new lyrics
- e. Composers, singers, and arrangers fulfilled listening expectations while introducing just enough unexpected variation to keep the listener’s attention
- f. The best songwriters were able to work creatively within the structural limitations of standard popular song forms

D. What were Tin Pan Alley Songs about?

- a. Tin Pan Alley songs did not, by and large, deal directly with the troubling issues of the 1920s and 1930s: racism, massive unemployment, and the rise of fascism in Central and Eastern Europe
- b. Both the lyrical content of Tin Pan Alley songs and their typical mode of performance were linked to the prominence of *privacy* and *romance* as cultural ideals
- c. This move toward privatization—which has culminated in the development of aural cloisters such as the portable CD player and the hermetically sealed automobile—is reflected in embryonic

form in the content and style of popular songs of the 1920s and 1930s

- d. The ideal of romantic love (inherited from European song and poetic traditions) is reflected in the lyrical content and performance style of Tin Pan Alley songs
- e. The first-person lyrics characteristic of Tin Pan Alley songs allowed the listener to identify his or her personal experience more directly with that of the singer
- f. Lyricists took a vernacular approach to describing the loved one's physical charms

E. Crooning

- a. Emerged after the introduction of the electric microphone in the mid-1920s
- b. Suggests a private musical experience
- c. Reflected the efforts of professional composers to tap into the aspirations of an expanding and ethnically mixed but predominantly white middle class
- d. Exerted an appeal that crossed boundaries of race, region, and class

F. Listening to "My Blue Heaven"

- a. Gene Austin's interpretation of the George Whiting-Walter Donaldson song "My Blue Heaven," released by the Victor Company in 1927, was the bestselling record of its era
- b. Austin was one of the first crooners
- c. The verse has two clear sections, both of equal length and with nearly identical music
- d. The refrain of "My Blue Heaven" falls into four sections, which produce the typical AABA design
- e. Each "A" section ends with the crucial words of the title, "my blue heaven"
- f. The lyrics present a familiar and comfortable version of the "American dream"
- g. Poetic touches added to the sense of "classiness"
- h. The choice of a solo cello set the record apart immediately from the norm of its time

- i. Vocal techniques offer variety, intimacy, and informality

G. Listening to “April Showers”

- a. Recorded in 1921 by Al Jolson and reveals the sound and style of the premicrophone period
- b. A slow, sentimental ballad with a verse–refrain structure
- c. Jolson’s dominating, bigger-than-life approach turns this gentle song into a grand statement
- d. Demonstrates the dominating character of his voice and interpretive style
- e. The refrain can be divided into four sections, showing a pattern of repetition of ABAC
- f. Possesses a memorable refrain in which the melody leaps repeatedly upward
- g. Accompanied by an orchestra that plays an elaborate and decorative accompaniment suitable to the flowery sentiments of the song
- h. Jolson’s emphasis on theatricality has endured in the work of such disparate later entertainers as Elvis Presley, Tina Turner, Michael Jackson, Madonna, and Metallica

H. Al Jolson

- a. Billed himself as “The World’s Greatest Entertainer”
- b. Born in Russia in 1886 and grew up in a Jewish immigrant enclave in New York City
- c. Rose to success as a singer of “coon” songs in blackface
- d. Starred in the film *The Jazz Singer* in 1927
- e. Style was derived from the nineteenth-century traditions of minstrelsy and vaudeville
- f. Used exaggerated gestures appropriate for the large theaters in which he had learned his craft
- g. The first superstar to use fully the possibilities of all the new media available to him

I. Listening to “How Deep Is the Ocean?” (performed by Bing Crosby)

- a. A fine example of Bing Crosby’s style

- b. Constantly varies his *dynamics* within individual phrases
- c. Delicate vocal ornaments to emphasize certain words
- d. Willing to place words just ahead of, or just behind, the beat
- e. Uses the ABAC form
- f. Refrain moves from a beginning in a minor key to an ending in a different major key

J. What makes a song a standard?

- a. Songs that possess a continuing appeal that surpasses nostalgia
- b. The period of the 1920s and 1930s yielded a sizable body of *standards*, songs that have remained in active circulation for more than seven decades

K. "I Got Rhythm" (the song)

- a. Illustrates the impact of African American musical styles on Tin Pan Alley composition
- b. Combines structural elegance with rhythmic vitality
- c. First introduced in the stage show *Girl Crazy*
- d. Refrain is in a typical AABA form
- e. Consistent syncopation conveys a jazz-influenced flavor
- f. Length and complexity of its verse are distinctive
- g. Verse and the refrain differ both in key and in mode
- h. The four-note rhythmic pattern first introduced on the words "I got rhythm" is applied over and over to changing words and changing note patterns
- i. This technique of "playing off the beat," commonly used in African American music, serves to intensify the listener's experience

L. "I Got Rhythm" (Ethel Merman recording)

- a. Features Ethel Merman's full-throttle approach
- b. In the repetition of the refrain, Merman's long-held high notes create a sense of climax
- c. Merman introduces some spontaneous small variations in the prevailing rhythmic pattern

M. George Gershwin

- a. The most widely known of American composers
- b. Achieved success in the world of concert music as well as popular music
- c. Whiteman commissioned “Rhapsody in Blue” from Gershwin for a 1924 concert
- d. Demonstrates a sophisticated incorporation of stylistic devices derived from African American sources such as syncopated rhythms and **blue notes**
- e. Gershwin’s greatest composition, *Porgy and Bess* (1935), represents his most thoroughgoing synthesis of European classical, mainstream popular, and African American stylistic influences

N. Tin Pan Alley and Broadway

- a. Exemplifies a long-standing and mutually beneficial relationship between popular songs and Broadway shows
- b. Relationship was most fruitful in the 1920s and 1930s—the so-called golden age of Tin Pan Alley song
- c. Broadway revues featured sequences of diverse skits, songs, dances, and performers
- d. Plot and characterization in the vast majority of Broadway productions were secondary to the emphasis on good songs and dancing
- e. Most of the Gershwin standards have their origins in his Broadway musicals
- f. The musical *Show Boat* (1927, with music by Jerome Kern and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II) was a new kind of musical show of unprecedented seriousness and depth
- g. The trend toward musicals in which plot, character, and musical numbers are conceived as a highly integrated whole was in the ascendancy by the 1940s
- h. Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers wrote *Oklahoma!* in 1943, which marked the triumph of this conception
- i. With the triumph of *Oklahoma!*, the intimate ties between Tin Pan Alley and Broadway were becoming frayed
- j. When rock ’n’ roll took over the pop charts in the later 1950s, any

close relationship between Broadway music and mainstream pop hits
essentially dissolved