

INTRODUCTION

A textbook about rock music may seem like a paradox. A textbook is reflective, analytical, and mature. Rock is wild, rebellious, aggressive, and loud. A textbook is about bringing order to chaos. Rock is about bringing chaos to order. A textbook is about thinking; rock is about feeling.

But thinking and feeling do not have to be mutually exclusive. Understanding a phenomenon can help you experience it more fully and help you connect it more directly to your own life. Sometimes thinking about something can even be a *way* of experiencing it. In fact, the idea of rock as a kind of spontaneous burst of raw energy that refuses to be bound by the rules of culture is *itself* a cultural construct that has much in common with romanticist impulses in other art forms.

In reality, rock, like all expressive arts, is the result of decisions made by specific people in particular times and places, each of whom tried to make the best use of available resources to accomplish their personal goals. What were they trying to accomplish (and why)? What cultural and material resources were available to them? Why did they choose certain options and reject others? And how did they find themselves in those situations in the first place?

In this book we address these questions by focusing on three interwoven threads of rock history: the evolution of its specific *musical* characteristics, the growth of its *cultural* principles, and the development of its approach to the *business* of popular music. More importantly, we focus on the *interactions among* these three factors. At every stage of rock's development, the complex relationship of music, culture, and business has profoundly shaped both the options that people had and the choices they made.

On a musical level, we explore the forms, styles, and techniques that have been associated with rock music at each point in its history. We view these musical characteristics not as rules that have been set in stone, but as tools created by musicians to achieve their artistic and social goals. This, in turn, can tell us much about the goals themselves as well as the logic of the musicians'

strategies; moreover, a close analysis of rock's musical principles can show us the way both of these things have changed over time.

In looking at the cultural aspects of rock, we use the term "culture" in the broadest possible sense to include such things as historical and social context, the identities of individuals and groups, relationships between individuals and groups, technological developments, ideologies, and demographic issues including race, class, and gender. Each of these factors has shaped rock music profoundly.

The final thread of our discussion is business. When viewing rock as an art, there is a natural tendency to view the economic aspects of its production as marginal, and even—in certain circumstances—as parasitic. Our position is that, for better or worse, rock has always been a profession as much as it has been an art, and to ignore that fact is to distort the actual experience of those who have participated in it. This is not to say that the economic imperatives that have influenced rock have always—or even primarily—been positive, only that they are essential to understanding the decisions that artists have made throughout the course of rock's history.

We believe that this approach has several advantages, the first of which is simple accuracy. Almost all of the changes that have driven the evolution of rock were the result of the interplay among music, culture, and business, rather than any one of them in isolation. Another advantage is consistency. As the text moves chronologically through the history of rock, it systematically discusses these key elements in each subgenre and historical era. This, we feel, provides an analysis of each subgenre that is simultaneously reflective of its unique characteristics and fundamentally consistent with the others. Treating rock as a set of relationships also allows us to look critically at the ways different groups—both mainstream and marginal—have navigated and renegotiated these relationships to serve their own agendas. It also enables us to look at the influence of rock—as a concept—on musicians in other genres. Finally, looking at rock as a set of relationships makes apparent the organic connections between recent developments in the music industry and rock's earliest manifestations. Though much has changed between rock's earliest years and the present, the nature of the larger relationships that drive it has remained surprisingly consistent over the last half-century.

Taking such an approach naturally leads us to focus more on movements and issues and less on individuals. Although we do discuss the most prominent figures in rock history, our intention here is not primarily to recapitulate the careers of the "greatest" rock musicians of different eras. Musical quality is obviously a subjective phenomenon and can only be judged within the context of a specific set of expectations, and our goal is to discuss the development of those expectations themselves. For that reason, we have chosen to discuss artists primarily on the basis of their overall significance to the rock culture of their eras, as representatives of movements, subgenres and trends.

Underlying our exploration of rock music—its history and evolution, its styles, movements, and attitudes—are deeper questions about music itself, its cultural importance, social significance, and psychological impacts. Why do people make and listen to music? What do they want from it, and what does it give them? These questions take us beyond the central concern of classic aesthetic theory, the creation and appreciation of "beauty for beauty's sake." People value music for many reasons, including a desire for beauty, but also a great deal more: They use music to escape from the rigors of the work week, to celebrate important events in their lives, to help them make money, war, and love. In order to understand the cultural significance of rock, we must examine both the music—its tones and textures, rhythms and forms—and the broader patterns of social identity that have shaped Americans' tastes and values.

MUSIC AND IDENTITY

None of us is born knowing exactly who we are—we all *learn* to be human in particular ways, and music is one important medium through which we formulate and express our identity. Think back to the very first song you remember hearing as a child, when you were, say, five years old. Odds are you heard it at home, or maybe in a car, or (depending on your age) over a transistor radio or a portable CD player at the beach. The person playing it may have been one of your parents, or an older brother or sister. These are often the people who influence our early musical values, and it is they whose values we sometimes emphatically reject later in life. In elementary school, other kids begin to influence our taste, a development closely connected with the ways in which we form social groups based on gender, age, and other factors (boys versus girls, fifth graders versus first graders, cool kids versus nerds).

As we move into adolescence, music also enters our private lives, providing comfort and continuity during emotional crises and offering us the opportunity to fantasize about romance and rebellion. Music provides images of gender identity, culturally specific ways of being masculine and feminine. Ethnicity and race—including notions of how to act authentically "white" or "black" or "Latino"— are also powerfully represented in music.

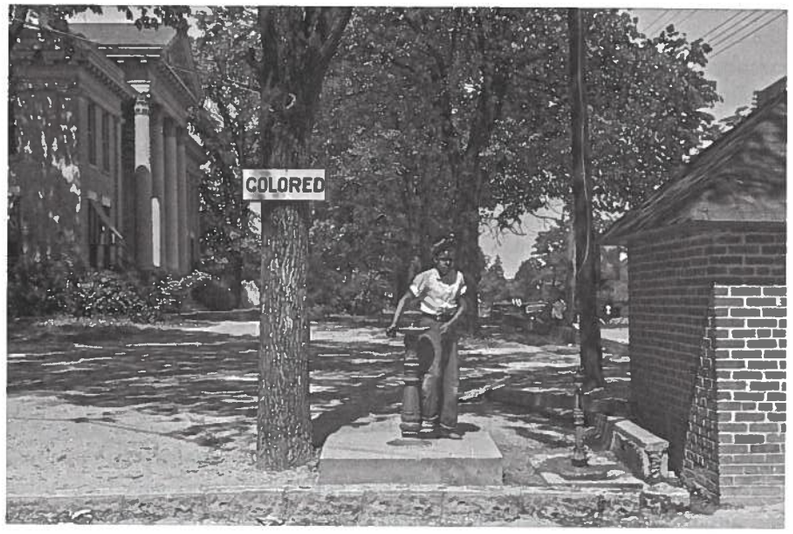
As you grow older, a song or a singer's voice may suddenly transport you back to a specific moment and place in your life, sometimes many decades earlier. Like all human beings, we make stories out of our lives, and music plays an important role in bringing these narratives to life. Some songs—for example, Van Morrison's "Brown Eyed Girl" (1967); Don McLean's paean to rock 'n' roll history, "American Pie" (1971); John Cougar Mellencamp's "Jack and Diane" (1982), with its rueful refrain, "Oh yeah, life goes on, long after the thrill of living is gone"; and "Back in the Day" (2003), Missy Elliott's foray into hip-hop nostalgia—are really *about* memory and the mixed feelings of warmth and loss that accompany a retrospective view of our own lives. Such personal narratives are important to developing a sense of who we are and where we belong in

the world. At the same time, music can also help us understand others. At its best, music can bring us to a deeper understanding of the many cultures that have come together to make up American society. At its worst, it can promote simplistic or reductive views of culture. Sometimes it does both at the same time.

One way that music in America has historically promoted a simplistic view of culture is by creating or reinforcing *stereotypes*, convenient ways of organizing people into categories. It is easy to find examples of stereotyping in this history: the common portrayal in song lyrics and music videos of women as sexual objects, and the association of men with violence; the image of African American men as playboys and gangsters; the stereotype of southern white musicians as illiterate, backwoods "rednecks"; the association of songs about money with supposedly Jewish musical characteristics; and the caricatures of Asian and Latin American people found in many "novelty songs" from the 1920s through the 1960s.

In order to understand the history of rock music in particular it is important to be critically aware of the long, complicated history of white fascination with black music—and of the complex and ever-evolving relationship between black and white musicians, and between African American and European American musical traditions. Many metaphors have been used to describe this relationship—homage, borrowing, syncretism, crossover, exchange, exploitation, rip-off—but none of them adequately captures the shifting, sometimes tensely ambivalent and sometimes joyously synergistic relationship between these two great musical streams, and the cultures that gave them birth.

Segregation, as both a cultural force and a practical reality, profoundly affected rock 'n' roll in its early years. Courtesy of Library of Congress.



The role of *race and ethnicity* in American music must be situated within a broader context. The very fact that Americans speak of "black" and "white" music as though these were self-evident, well-defined entities stems from a particular history of racial segregation—and in particular from the so-called Jim Crow laws designed during the early twentieth century to prevent racial commingling in the American South. This way of classifying human beings into racial categories is not universal and in fact differs substantially from perceptions of human diversity in many other parts of the world.

The history of rock music presents many examples of performers whose music in fact challenged racial stereotypes, who didn't "sound like they were supposed to." Indeed, much of the music that we discuss in this book does not admit easily of straightforward racial or ethnic classification. Although Elvis Presley was a white man born in the Deep South under the regime of official racial segregation, it is hard to know how to definitively "segregate" the music on his two-sided hit "Don't Be Cruel"/"Hound Dog" (1956), the only record ever to top the pop, country and western, and rhythm & blues charts at the same time. Ray Charles's country and western twang on "I Can't Stop Loving You" (1962), as well as the wildly eclectic juxtaposition of funk, rock, and European synth-pop in early hip-hop samples; the recorded work of Jimi Hendrix, the seminal African American rock guitarist whose records never sold particularly well in the black community; and that of the equally talented Duane Allman, a white guitarist raised in the Deep South who was a key player on classic soul music recordings by Aretha Franklin and Wilson Pickett, all challenge the idea that the history of American music can be understood along strictly racial lines.

This is not to say that racism is no longer a factor in American culture or in the production and marketing of music. Even if race is more a social fiction than a biological fact, it is a fiction that has taken on a powerful life of its own, helping some people to achieve their goals and radically disadvantaging others. If we accept the statement that "music has no color"—an assertion made in full sincerity by many musicians of all colors—we nonetheless cannot escape the fact that racial stereotypes arguably carry just as much force in contemporary popular culture (say, in many gangsta rap videos and in songs promulgated by white-supremacist rock groups on the Internet) as they did when white performers first artificially darkened their skins, or "blacked up," for a nineteenth-century minstrel show.[1]

One of the most significant ways that race and ethnicity have influenced the history of rock involves not its production at all, but the demographics of its audience. As we will discuss, arguments about who is—and who *should*

1. For more detailed information on the minstrel tradition, and other genres of popular music that lie outside the scope of this book, see *American Popular Music: From Minstrelsy to MP3*, by Starr and Waterman (third edition, 2010).

be—listening to rock are fundamental to its very existence. Rock music has traditionally been viewed as a genre with a primarily white, middle-class audience. In many cases this has been true. In some cases, it has been false. Often, it has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. In every case, however, this perception has influenced the music in complex and far-reaching ways.

Sexuality and gender are other aspects of identity that are central to the history of American music in general, and rock music in particular. A large proportion of American popular music has been concerned, in one way or another, with relationships between men and women. This polyphonic public conversation has represented many voices, attitudes, and viewpoints: for example, the male bravado of Muddy Waters's urban blues song "Hoochie Coochie Man" (1954); the mature resignation of singer-songwriter Carole King's "It's Too Late" (1971); the Freudian angst of Prince's "When Doves Cry" (1984); and the hip moralizing of Lauryn Hill's "Doo-Wop (That Thing)" (1998), a didactic song that urges both men and women to clean up their acts. We are sure that you could come up with many examples of this theme from the music you follow most closely. Suffice it for now to say that the history of rock music is also a history of popular attitudes toward romance, love, and sex.

Since so much popular music deals with love and sex, it is not surprising that public authorities of various sorts have been concerned to monitor representations of sexuality. We will encounter many examples of censorship in the history of rock music—for example, the 1954 cover version of Big Joe Turner's "Shake, Rattle and Roll" by Bill Haley and the Comets, which cleaned up risqué aspects of the original lyrics, or the production of "childproofed" versions of hip-hop and alternative rock hits, with the offensive references "bleeped" out. One area of particular concern has been the expression of perspectives on love that deviate from the normative views expressed by political and religious authorities. For example, the depiction of non-heterosexual relationships has been treated gingerly by the entertainment industry. However, the fact that homosexual and bisexual relationships have rarely been represented explicitly in popular music did not hinder the success of the Village People's disco hits "YMCA" and "In the Navy" (Numbers 2 and 3 on the charts, respectively, in 1979). These songs, which can be interpreted on one level as a defiantly out-of-the-closet celebration of gay popular culture, function on another level to reaffirm gay stereotypes, conveyed onstage and in music videos by the band's adornment in campy costumes—the cowboy, the construction worker, the sailor, the leather-clad biker, the Indian chief, and so on. (The question of what the Navy thought it was doing when it sought to use the song "In the Navy" for a recruitment campaign, or what millions of straight Americans think they're up to when they mime the song "YMCA" at sporting events, raises a number of interesting issues that we cannot probe here.) It must be noted that a number of prominent rock stars—including Little Richard, David Bowie, Prince, and Madonna—have fashioned personas that seem purposefully to *blur* public perceptions of their

sexual orientation. In regard to sexuality, as with other dimensions of social identity, music seems particularly well suited to carrying multiple meanings, depending in substantial measure upon who is doing the listening.

Beyond sexuality, much rock music is concerned—directly or indirectly—with the concept of gender itself, and particularly with the performance of masculinity. What does it mean to "be a man"? To what extent—and in what ways—is being masculine synonymous with being a rocker? How have women and men in different times and places negotiated these expectations? A large part of many rock artists' appeal has been their ability and willingness to perform alternative visions of masculinity and femininity. Artists such as the Beatles, Janis Joplin, Patti Smith, and Kurt Cobain all challenged the conventional wisdom of their eras about how men and women should present themselves.

Although Americans, unlike the English, are often characterized as being oblivious to *class distinctions,* the expression of working-class, middle-class and upper-class identities and experiences runs right through the history of

Contrasting rock identities: **Lady Gaga** (accepting an award at the 2010 MTV Video Music Awards) and **Justin Bieber** (accepting an award at the 2011 MTV Movie Awards); (l) photo by Kevin Mazur/WireImage/Getty Images; (r) photo by Scott Gries/MTV/PictureGroup) via AP IMAGES.



American popular music. However, class identity has often bubbled just below the sleek surfaces of rock music. In Chuck Berry's "Maybellene" (1955), the protagonist's automotive pursuit of a young woman is given a distinctive flavor by the distinction between his working-class V-8 Ford and the girl's more expensive Cadillac Coupe de Ville. (The use of a French name—always a marker of elite culture—drives the point home, we might say.) The Crystals' 1962 hit "Uptown" sketches the social geography of New York City, tracing the daily path of a young man who works "downtown," where he "don't get no breaks," and comes home every evening to his lover's "uptown" tenement, where he feels like a "king." Although Americans do not tend to wear their class affiliations on their sleeves, rock music is full of references to wealth, poverty, and the effect of economic matters on the human heart.

Generational identity has, perhaps naturally, been a constant theme in an industry that relies to a great degree on the exploitation and creation of new styles, or at least the appearance of novelty. Popular music has played a major role in creating youth cultures and in shaping Americans' conceptions of adolescence. Beginning in the early twentieth century and continuing through the rock 'n' roll era and the myriad youth movements and fads that have followed in its wake, generational identity has been crucial to the workings of the American music industry and to the identity formations of musicians and audiences. The music industry now draws a broad distinction between kids in the twelve-to-sixteen age bracket—the patrons of teenybopper acts like Miley Cyrus and Justin Bieber—and young adults in the seventeen- to twenty-five-year-old range, whom the industry relies on to download millions upon millions of rock, rap, and alternative music tracks. The history of rock music provides us with a unique window onto changing conceptions of adolescence, ranging from the mild rebellion of the Beach Boys' "Fun, Fun, Fun" (1964) to the Beastie Boys' rowdy party anthem "(You Gotta) Fight for Your Right (to Party)" (1987) and Nirvana's sardonic, depression-tinged "Smells Like Teen Spirit" (1991). It is no exaggeration to say that rock music has been one of the main cultural forms through which Americans have learned how to "act their age."

WHAT IS ROCK?

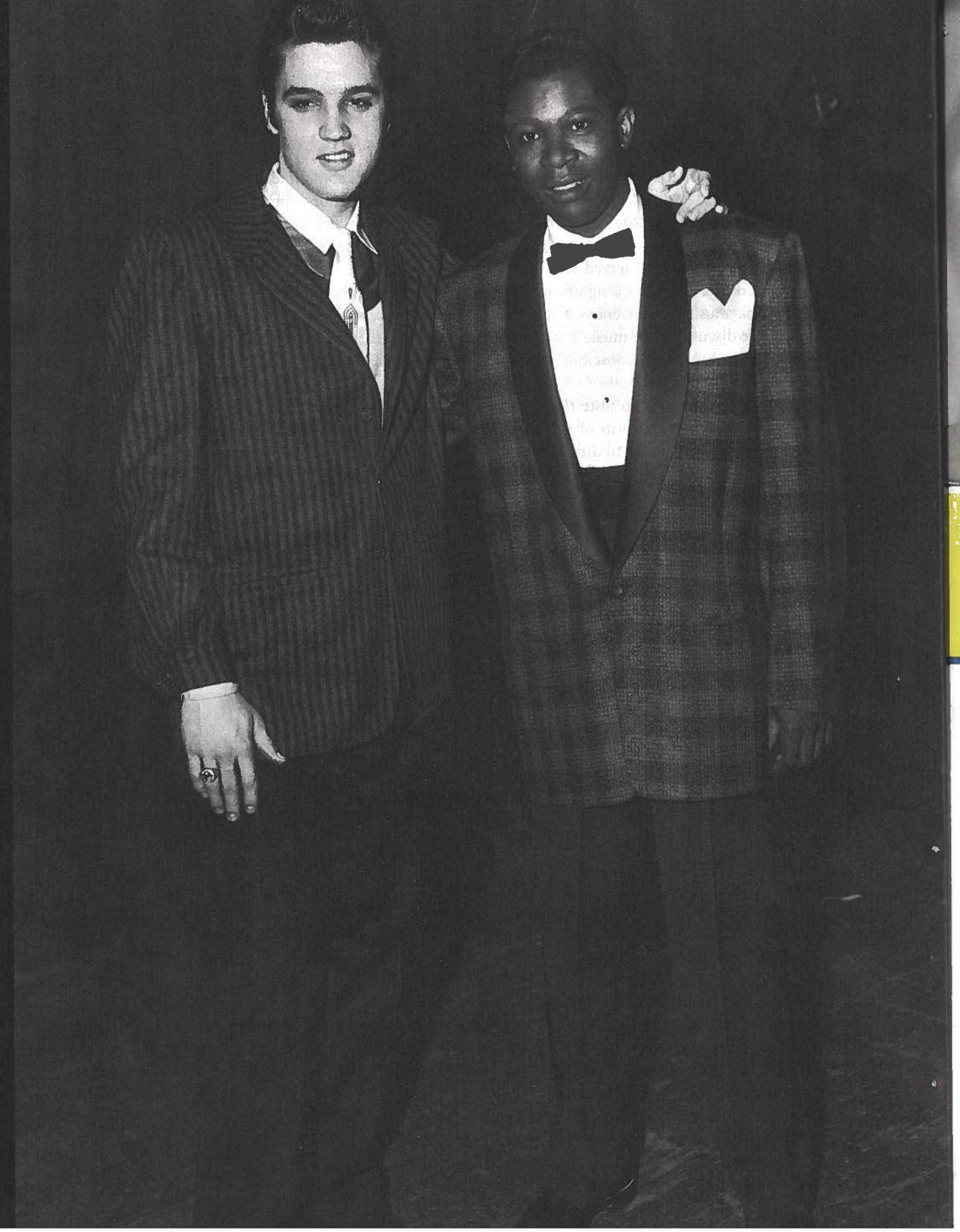
The preceding issues of identity are fundamental to the very definition of rock, and thus to the organization of this book. The question of what is or isn't rock music is one that has had many different answers at many different times. Often, it has even had different answers at the *same* time. Rather than create a strict boundary between rock and other musical genres, we view rock as a continuously evolving set of relationships among musical expectations, cultural values, and business practices that developed in a particular time and place. The extent to which these relationships can be altered before they should no longer be considered "rock" is a subjective question, and one that we take on a case-by-case basis.

We have even chosen to include musical styles that are sometimes not considered rock at all if we feel they have a significant association—positive or negative—with the core set of rock relationships. For example, we discuss disco music in spite of the fact that it is almost never considered a form of rock precisely *because* it served as a foil to the rock culture of its era. In its time, disco was viewed as a significant threat to the future of rock music, and much rock music of that era was specifically conceived as a response to that threat. We discuss reggae music because many Jamaican artists of the seventies (especially Bob Marley) consciously modeled their approach on that of their rock contemporaries.

It is also important to note that at some points in its history, rock music has been the dominant form of popular music in the United States, while at other times rock has stood in direct opposition to the popular musical trends of the day. The blurry and ever-shifting line between "rock" and "pop" is itself an important aspect of the history of the genre, and one that we deal with as such.

A NOTE ON THE TERMS "ROCK 'N' ROLL" AND "ROCK"

The musical form we discuss in this book was initially known as "rock 'n' roll." This term applied from the mid-1950s to the late 1960s. As the music matured in the late sixties, the term "rock" began to be used to refer not only to the genre but to the entire culture associated with it, including a growing sense of its own history. For this reason, we use the term "rock" as a general term for the entire genre and its cultural associations, and the term "rock 'n' roll" to refer more specifically to the music that was made during the first fifteen or so years of the "rock" era.





1

THE PREHISTORY OF ROCK 'N' ROLL

Rock 'n' roll was both distinctive from, and dependent on, the musical styles and popular cultural movements that preceded it, and it is important that we gain some sense of the historical factors that contributed to its emergence in the mid-1950s. While the rise of rock 'n' roll is widely recognized as a rebellion against the restrictive American culture of the 1950s, it was equally a rebellion against the business practices of the popular music industry at that time. Before rock 'n' roll, popular music was dominated by a centralized industry that excluded many artists, musical styles, and economic approaches that did not conform to its strict expectations. Rock 'n' roll, by contrast, embraced the outsider status of these excluded genres (such as rhythm and blues, country and western, and some forms of Latin music) and ultimately helped to bring them into the mainstream.

In this chapter, we discuss the roots of the mainstream music industry in the United States, the musical systems that competed with it, how their general approaches differed, and how these conflicts set the stage for the birth of rock 'n' roll. It is natural in retrospect to see the self-appointed guardians of the pre-rock era as hysterically overreacting to the perceived threat posed by the rise of rock 'n' roll. But—for better or worse—rock 'n' roll really *was* a threat to the existing

order. To understand why, we must first take a look at the system that rock 'n' roll so fundamentally challenged.

POPULAR MUSIC BEFORE THE RISE OF ROCK 'N' ROLL

The fact that the modern music industry began more than a century ago as an outgrowth of the printing and publishing industries is an accident of history that continues to influence popular music to the present day. In the nineteenth century, before mass media and mass-produced recordings became commonplace, there were two primary ways that people enjoyed popular music: attending live performances by professional musicians, and performing the music themselves at home. Home music performance was encouraged by the growing perception in the nineteenth century that owning a piano—and displaying it proudly in one's home—demonstrated cultural sophistication and upward mobility. The popularity of amateur home performance (echoed in the modern era by karaoke and video games such as *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*) presented a new business opportunity: sheet music.

Sheet music was simply printed notation of popular songs, designed to be played by an amateur musician on a piano at home. Since sheet music was a form of mass-produced printed material, it is not surprising that its production would be handled by the same industry that produced books, magazines, and newspapers. The social, cultural, and—ultimately—legal expectations for sheet music sales were naturally based on those of books as well. Like authors, songwriters had a relatively straightforward relationship with publishing companies: The publisher would essentially purchase the song from the songwriter, and then print, distribute, and advertise it. Payments were usually made in the form of *royalties*—a percentage of total profits from the sheet music's sales. Since most of the songs that were published at that time were composed by two-person professional songwriting teams, in which one partner composed the music and the other wrote the lyrics, it was common practice to split the royalties evenly between the two contributors. Although the way music is composed has changed drastically in the one-hundred-plus years since this practice was established, this division (50/50, lyrics and music) is still commonplace.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as recordings, radio, television, and the Internet overtook sheet music as the preferred methods for the distribution of popular music, one might have expected the music industry to create new business models to fit them. This, for the most part, did not happen; the rules for sheet music were simply adjusted to fit each new situation. The result has been an industry that is substantially skewed to favor the interests of songwriters over those of performers. The ways that different rock artists and movements have dealt with that situation—in some cases accommodating themselves to it, in others rebelling against it—continues to be one of the largest influences on the development of the music to the present day. In fact, it could

be argued that rock 'n' roll itself actually began as an attempt to destroy this system, known at the time as Tin Pan Alley.

At the dawn of the modern music industry in the late nineteenth century, publishers bought popular songs from their authors and sold the sheet music to the public. Publishing companies would then encourage as many artists as possible to perform their songs and thereby popularize them. Under this system, live performances were essentially viewed as advertisements for sheet music.

By the early twentieth century, publishers had streamlined the process: Rather than wait for songwriters to approach them and negotiate a price for each song individually, they began to sign the songwriters to exclusive contracts that covered all of their output. Songwriting essentially became an office job. In fact, so many songwriters were housed in offices on New York's West 28th Street that the sound of their many pianos playing at the same time was said to resemble the clatter of tin pans in a busy kitchen, an observation that led to the street being nicknamed "Tin Pan Alley." That term soon came to represent the entire popular music industry. This term can also be seen as comparing songwriters to chefs in a busy restaurant, trying to quickly "cook up" songs that would appeal to impatient customers—a description of the Tin Pan Alley approach that is relatively accurate.

Unlike the rock system that would replace it, the Tin Pan Alley system was based on a strict separation between the jobs of *songwriter* and *performer*. It was extremely rare for one person to fulfill both of these roles, not only because they were viewed as different kinds of talent, but also because they operated in different worlds. Songwriters were associated with publishing companies and wrote songs intended to appeal to the widest possible range of singers, in order to maximize publishing profits. Singers chose from the songs that were available (often influenced by bribes, threats, and other forms of influence on the part of publishers) and made their income from live performance. They were expected to present the broadest available variety of songs to appeal to the widest possible audience. Audiences, for their part, generally expected a working artist to perform a selection of popular hits of the day, which meant that most artists were drawing from the same repertoire of songs. In such an environment, artists who wrote their own songs would be viewed as cripplingly limited. They would be, in essence, restricting their repertoire to the work of a single songwriter (themselves), and would likely be seen much like a restaurant that only served one dish! In contrast to this perspective, rock presented the practice of writing one's own songs not as a limitation, but as an indicator of sincerity and a deep personal connection to the music. By changing this perception, rock would essentially change the entire economic structure of popular music.

One of the stylistic foundations of Tin Pan Alley was a distinctive four-part song form, the so-called AABA form. The structure of such songs includes four sections of equal length, in the musical pattern:

A ***A*** ***B*** ***A***

Later in this chapter we examine a specific example of this form, the song "Love and Marriage." Other AABA songs with which you may be familiar include "I Got Rhythm," composed by George and Ira Gershwin in 1930; and "Over the Rainbow," composed by Harold Arlen and E. Y. Harburg, familiar from the 1939 MGM film *The Wizard of Oz*. Over the course of many years, such song forms became the basis of listening habits; in those days, just as today, audiences were conditioned to hearing particular musical forms. **Composers**, singers, and **arrangers**—the individuals who bore responsibility for creating a musical environment (including choice of instrumental accompaniment, the pacing of the performance, and so on) that would match a given singer's vocal strengths to a particular song—became adept at fulfilling these expectations while introducing just enough unexpected variation to keep the listener's attention. The attractiveness of a popular song, and of its rendering on a particular recording, had much to do with achieving a balance between predictability and novelty. Although a lot of mediocre music was produced by Tin Pan Alley composers, the best songwriters were able to work creatively within the structural limitations of standard popular song forms.

It is important to recognize that this balance between predictability and novelty was not only intended to appeal to listeners as music lovers, it was also intended to appeal to them as consumers. Songs were commercial products, and from a business standpoint a good song was a profitable one. A considerable asset of AABA songs is that they were also extremely efficient to create. After all, a songwriter only had to create two short, contrasting, sections (A and B)—lasting a few seconds each—and the *form itself* converted them into a full-length song. Similarly, once everyone understood how it worked, AABA form also made it very easy to teach the songs to professional musicians in a matter of minutes. This is a perfect example of the way a song's form can reflect the social and economic environment in which its creators are working. AABA form was designed to be emotionally attractive to the widest possible audience, easy to produce (like a car, each piece fits together in a predetermined matrix), easy to *re*-produce (among musicians), and easy to perform and thus advertise. The fact that rock 'n' roll often (though not entirely) rejected the AABA form thus also indicates a rejection of the business strategies that made this form so important in the first place.

Most hit records of the decade leading up to the emergence of rock 'n' roll (1945–1955) were romantic Tin Pan Alley–style songs, backed by string orchestras and performed by *crooners*—sweet-voiced singers like Frank Sinatra, Perry Como, and Nat "King" Cole, who used the microphone to create a sense of intimacy. The sentimentality of these songs can be gleaned from their titles: "Prisoner of Love" and "(I Love You) For Sentimental Reasons" (1946), "My Darling, My Darling" and "You're Breaking My Heart" (1949), "Cry" (1951), "No Other Love" and "You You You" (1953), all Number 1 pop hits. These romantic recordings were interspersed on the popularity charts with

catchy, lighthearted novelty songs, including Number 1 hits such as "Woody Woodpecker" (Kay Kyser, 1948), "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus" (Jimmy Boyd, 1952), and "The Doggie in the Window" (Patti Page, 1953).

The roots of this musical conservatism are not difficult to pinpoint. Although there was a brief depression just after the Second World War, the national economy expanded rapidly during the postwar decade, fueled by the lifting of wartime restrictions on the production of consumer goods, the increased availability of jobs in the industrial and service sectors of the economy, and the G.I. Bill, which provided educational and job opportunities for returning servicemen. After the uncertainty and personal sacrifice of the war years, many people simply wanted to settle down, raise a family, and focus on building their own futures. For millions of Americans who had served in the armed forces, or had come to the city in search of work during the war, or whose immigrant parents and grandparents had fled poverty earlier in the century, this represented

Nat "King" Cole (at the piano in an early 1940s recording session). Used by permission of the University of Missouri–Kansas City Libraries, Special Collections Department.



the first opportunity to buy a home. If we also take into account the underlying uncertainties and tensions of the postwar era—including the threat of nuclear war and the Cold War conflicts in Europe and Asia—it makes perfect sense that many new members of the American middle class preferred popular music that focused on romantic sentiments and helped to create a comforting sound environment in the home. In a sense, the "hi-fi" record player and the television set had come to replace the piano as symbols of middle-class domesticity.

The economics of the music industry also played a role in the conservativism of much mainstream pop music produced in the years preceding rock 'n' roll. During the postwar decade we see clearly for the first time a phenomenon that has helped to shape the development of popular music in the United States ever since: a constant tug-of-war between the music business's efforts to predict (and control) the public's consumption of music and the periodic eruption of new musical fads, usually based in youth culture. In general, the center of the music business—like many other sectors of corporate America—became increasingly routinized after the Second World War. Recorded music had become a product, sold in units, and listeners were consumers.



Teenagers study the offerings on a jukebox, 1957. Courtesy of Library of Congress.

The medium of radio played a critical role in the promotion of popular records of the era. The idea of *Top 40 radio programming*—another attempt to control the uncertainty of the marketplace—was developed in the early 1950s by Todd Storz, a **disc jockey** in Omaha, Nebraska. Storz observed teenagers dropping coins in jukeboxes and noticed that they tended to play certain songs repeatedly. He applied this idea to radio programming, selecting a list of forty top hits, which he played over and over. The idea spread quickly, and within a few years many radio stations were playing the same set of songs.

As popular music increasingly appeared on radio broadcasts and recordings, publishers rushed to find ways to apply the rules that had been created for sheet music to these new endeavors. *Licensing and copyright agencies* such as *ASCAP* (*The American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers*) and *BMI* (*Broadcast Music, Incorporated*) were established to control the flow of profits from the sale, broadcasting, and live performance of popular music. ASCAP was founded in 1914 in an attempt to force all business establishments that featured live music to pay royalties for the public use of music. By the 1920s almost all leading publishing houses and composers belonged to ASCAP, and by 1939 ASCAP had licensed around 90 percent of mainstream pop songs.

As profits from radio broadcasts rose, ASCAP turned up the legal pressure on the radio networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, and Dumont) to turn over a larger portion of their revenues. In 1940 the radio networks counterattacked by forming BMI, a rival licensing agency specifically designed to challenge

ASCAP's monopoly. While BMI was not initially expected to survive for long, its "open door" policy allowed songwriters working outside of mainstream pop to claim royalties from the use of their songs on the broadcast media, including radio and, increasingly, television. This gave a boost to musicians working in the idioms of country and western and rhythm & blues, genres which had largely been ignored by ASCAP and which rose in economic importance during and after World War II. It also led to these genres being played increasingly on the radio by broadcasters who wished to resist the control that ASCAP held over popular music, thus introducing rhythm & blues and country and western music to new audiences who would soon become the first rock 'n' roll fans.

Of all the new electronic technologies of the postwar era, television exerted the most profound influence on American culture. The development of television broadcasting, foreseen by science fiction writers of the nineteenth century, started in earnest in the 1920s. In 1946 it was estimated that Americans owned six thousand television sets; this figure shot up to three million in 1948, then twelve million in 1951. For better or worse, by the early 1950s television had become the central focus of leisure time in millions of American households.

Television's massive success rested on its ability to fuse the forms and functions of previous media, including radio, the record player, and cinema. Like Hollywood film, television was a multiple medium, combining sound and moving images. Like radios and record players, the TV set could be brought into the family parlor (now called a "living room") and incorporated into the daily round of domestic life. TV quickly became the main outlet for corporate advertising, and by 1952 the four big networks—ABC, CBS, NBC, and Dumont—began to turn significant profits. TV broadcasters used a great deal of recorded and live music, and there can be no doubt that the new medium was perceived initially by the record industry as a threat: In 1949 retail sales of records fell drastically, while sales of television sets increased by some 400 percent. By the mid-1950s, however, television had become the most important medium for launching new performers and recordings, and established stars such as Perry Como, Nat "King" Cole, Tommy Dorsey, and Jackie Gleason hosted their own weekly variety shows.

Meanwhile, the entertainment industry in general was growing rapidly after the war, and in 1947 record companies achieved retail sales of over $214 million, finally surpassing the previous peak, established back in 1921, more than a quarter of a century earlier. This growth was supported by the booming postwar economy and by a corresponding increase in the disposable income of many American families. In particular, record companies began for the first time to target young people, many of whom had more pocket money to spend on records than ever before. During World War II the demand for workers in military-related industries meant that many teenagers took on adult responsibilities, working for wages while continuing to attend high school. The idea that teenagers had the right to earn a salary of their own led after the war to

the widespread practice of a weekly allowance in return for doing the household chores. Many young adults spent a considerable portion of their income on films, jukeboxes, and records. A survey of record retailers conducted in 1949 estimated that people under twenty-one constituted fully one-third of the total record-buying population of the United States, a great increase from previous eras. Nonetheless, the music produced by the largest record companies was still mainly aimed at an older audience.

THE SOUTHERN ROOTS OF ROCK 'N' ROLL

In discussing the role of record companies, also known as "labels," it is common to divide them into two categories: *major labels* and *independent labels*. Although these terms are not always consistently applied, the term "major label" generally refers to a large record company with substantial resources that works with artists in diverse genres, while the term "independent label" or "indie" refers to a smaller, lower-budget record company that tends to specialize in a single genre. As we have indicated, the major record companies of the postwar period—RCA Victor, Columbia, Decca, and Capitol Records—experienced considerable growth. At the same time, however, musical genres regarded as marginal by the industry came to influence even more strongly the musical taste of middle-class white Americans. Back in the 1920s, both the major record companies of the day and smaller upstart firms had begun to market recordings of musicians from the American South, performing music that drew upon a variety of rural folk sources ultimately derived from ancestral traditions in Europe and Africa. The market for this music was broadly segregated by race, the recordings of white artists often being classified as "hillbilly music," and recordings of black artists as "race music." By the 1940s the pattern of racial segregation persisted, but the categories had been renamed, respectively, "country and western music" (often simply called "country") and "rhythm & blues" ("R&B").

During the Second World War millions of people migrated from the rural South in search of employment in defense-related industries. Cities such as Chicago; Detroit; Pittsburgh; New York; Washington, D.C.; Nashville; Atlanta; and Los Angeles were all home to large populations of transplanted southerners, whose musical tastes were doubly shaped by their experience of rural traditions and by the desire to forge new, urbanized identities (and thereby distance themselves from the stereotyped image of the "hick" or "rube"). This migrant population greatly expanded the target audience for southern-derived music, providing a steady source of support for the urban honky-tonks, juke joints, and lounges where country and western and rhythm & blues groups played.

The rise of small independent record labels during and just after the war provided an outlet for performers who were ignored by the major record companies. The development of portable tape recorders made record **producers** and studio owners out of entrepreneurs who could not previously have afforded the equipment necessary to produce master recordings. Each company was

centered on one or two individuals, who located talent, oversaw the recording process, and handled publicity, distribution, and a variety of other tasks. These label owners worked the system in as many ways as time, energy, and ingenuity allowed. They paid radio DJs **payola** (bribes) to promote their records, visited nightclubs to find new talent, hustled copies of their records to local record store owners, and occasionally attempted to interest a major label in a particular recording or an artist that they felt could become a mainstream star.

Most "indie" label owners worked a particular piece of musical and geographical territory. However, they also had dreams of the huge financial success that would accrue to the label that found a way to cross country and R&B records over to the pop music charts. The middle-class white audience for this music, and the big record companies' and radio networks' interest in it, were growing—but the competition was fiercer than ever. By 1951 there were more than one hundred independent labels slugging it out for a piece of the R&B market, and few of them lasted more than a few months.

Indie owners often put their names down for composer credits on songs they recorded and thereby often earned more royalties from a given song than the actual composer or performer! One of the reasons this was possible was that young artists generally did not understand the value of publishing rights, so they were often willing to sign them away for the promise of success. As we noted earlier, songwriting credits are the backbone of the music industry. The *performer* may make a profit from live concerts, the sales of their recording, or the use of their recording in a film or commercial. But the *songwriter* makes a profit from all of those things, *plus* any time the song is played on the radio, television, in a store or entertainment venue, as part of a corporate presentation, if the lyrics are quoted in a book (including this one!) or on a poster, or if another artist records the song or even samples it—essentially any time the song is used for any commercial purpose. Although they are rarely glamorous, arguments over publishing rights have driven some of the most important developments in rock history, as we shall see.

Radio also played a crucial role in the popularization of rhythm & blues and country music. There was a substantial increase in the number of radio stations catering specially to transplanted southerners, some capable of saturating the entire country's airwaves, others low-wattage affairs with a broadcasting radius of only a few miles. The country music radio business was booming in the late 1940s and early 1950s, with new shows coming on the air in all of America's major cities and on hundreds of small stations that sprouted in rural areas. During the war a number of white disc jockeys began to mix black popular music in with their usual diet of pop records, and 1949 saw the inauguration of the first radio station dedicated exclusively to playing music for a black audience—WDIA in Memphis, Tennessee, featuring the popular blues musician and disc jockey B.B. King. (Although this station catered to a predominantly black audience in the Mississippi Delta area, it was in fact

Hank Williams represented for postwar country audiences the enduring myth of the hard-living, hard-loving rambler. Although the details of Williams's life seem in retrospect to have custom-designed him for legendary status, it is important to realize that these were the actual facts of his life: born into crushing poverty in Alabama, this son of a sharecropper learned to make his way at an early age by performing on the street, learning a great deal from a black street singer named Rufe "Tee-Tot" Payne. By the time he was sixteen, Williams, now called "the Singing Kid," had his own local radio show; shortly thereafter he formed a band, the Drifting Cowboys, and began touring throughout Alabama. Enormous success came to Williams by the time he was in his mid-twenties, but it did not come without its problems. By 1952 he was divorced, had been fired from the *Grand Ole Opry* (for numerous failures to appear), and was seriously dependent on alcohol and painkilling drugs. He died on New Year's Day 1953 at age twenty-nine, having suffered a heart attack in the back of his car while en route to a performance.

Along with a few of Williams's other records, the jaunty "Hey, Good Lookin'" was actually something of a minor crossover hit for him (Number 29 Pop, but Number 1 on the Country chart—for eight weeks—in 1951). This should not seem surprising, given its danceable character and its pop-friendly AABA form borrowed from Tin Pan Alley models. With its prominent steel guitar and fiddle parts, not to mention the character of Williams's vocal, there's still no mistaking the record's basis in country music. What is most arresting here, however, is the specific targeting of a youthful audience. The lyrics address cars, dancing, and young romance, and the use of terms like "hot-rod Ford," "soda pop," "go steady," and "date book" create what would—about five years later—have been called a "teen-friendly" piece of material.



Hank Williams performs, while Chet Atkins—soon to be a hugely influential figure in country music himself, as a guitarist and producer—looks on admiringly. Ernie Newton is playing bass. Courtesy of Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum.

In a sense, "Hey, Good Lookin'" came a little too early, and Hank Williams of course died much too young. Had Williams been able to bring this same song, or something like it, to a savvy record producer in late 1955 or early 1956—to a producer aware of the noise being made by the young Elvis Presley or by Carl Perkins (of "Blue Suede Shoes" fame) at the time—that cynical producer might have said something like this: "Hank, you've got something there. Please throw out those fiddles, though—too hillbilly. And replace the steel guitar with a regular electric guitar played R&B-style.

Add some R&B-based drumming, too. I think you'll have a hit rock 'n' roll record." And had Williams been interested, which is questionable, his name might well have been added to the **rockabilly** roster, perhaps even close to the top of it. As it is, Williams's early death leaves us pondering what might have been; but in any case, a song like "Hey, Good Lookin'" attests to the forward-looking character of his creativity.

THREE BIG HITS OF THE PRE–ROCK 'N' ROLL PERIOD

We pause now to consider in detail three representative hit records from the period under discussion. In doing so, we will not only become familiar with characteristic sounds of this decade but will also begin to develop skills in listening critically to popular music, and to become familiar with terminology and concepts that will prove essential in our survey of the history of rock music. The conceptions of *melody*, *rhythm*, *harmony*, and *form* reflected in these examples have their roots in music that substantially predates these particular hits. Yet the influence of these conceptions also extended far into the future, as will soon become evident.

The Weavers (Pete Seeger on banjo, Lee Hays, Fred Hellerman, Ronnie Gilbert). Courtesy Library of Congress.



The three records, representing diverse styles, are "Goodnight, Irene" by the Weavers (1950), "Choo Choo Ch'Boogie" by Louis Jordan's Tympany Five (1946), and "Love and Marriage" by Frank Sinatra (1955). They are considered in this order because, from the standpoint of musical form, "Goodnight, Irene" presents the simplest conception, while the other two present a somewhat more elaborate approach. (This in no way implies that the other two are either "better" records or that they are necessarily more "difficult" to understand or to enjoy!) In this section, the musical aspects of these hits are deliberately isolated, in order to concentrate on the listening experience they provide. Even if you have no formal musical training, you should be able to follow the basic structure of the recordings with a little practice.

"Goodnight, Irene" (Strophic Song Form)

The Weavers' recording of "Goodnight, Irene" was an unexpected but gigantic hit in 1950, one of the biggest records of the entire post–World War II decade (1945–1954). It held the Number 1 spot on the pop charts for thirteen weeks, eventually selling more than two million copies (a remarkable figure for the time). The broad appeal of "Goodnight, Irene" may be attributed to several factors. The Weavers learned the song from the African American musician Huddie Ledbetter (1889–1949), better known as Leadbelly; thus the recording had its source in black folk music. However, "Goodnight, Irene" tells a story—of marital strife, regret, and the need to return to "traditional" values of home and family—that could well have come right out of a contemporary honky-tonk tune. Furthermore, the Weavers' performance of the song avoids any of the rough edges that would have been characteristic of either African American or white country styles; with the considerable assistance of a smooth arrangement provided by Gordon Jenkins (the managing director of Decca Records), they turn "Goodnight, Irene" into an effective pop record designed for a wide, mainstream audience. The success of "Goodnight, Irene," and of several other records by the Weavers over the next few years, helped to define a market niche for folk-based popular music, setting the stage for the later "urban folk" appeal of the Kingston Trio; Peter, Paul, and Mary; and even Bob Dylan. In addition, the Weavers' use of international folk materials, such as the Israeli song "Tzena, Tzena, Tzena" (found on the other side of "Goodnight, Irene," and a substantial hit as well), made them in effect the first "worldbeat" artists—a category of popular music that would not emerge in defined form for another thirty years.

"Goodnight, Irene" is a good illustration of one of the oldest and most enduring of all musical forms: the **strophic** song. (See the "Listening to" discussion, pp. 22–23.) In a strophic song, the same music is heard several times, with changing words. Strophic songs are found in virtually all types and styles of music: in the folk cultures of many countries, in African American blues, in the early "hillbilly" music of the American rural South, and in all the periods of American popular song. It is easy to understand why this is true. Strophic songs, because of the repetitive nature of their music, are easy to learn and to

remember. They can also readily be used by performers to encourage listeners to participate by singing along; the Weavers, in fact, made a habit of concluding their public appearances with "Goodnight, Irene," urging their audiences to sing with them.

When an audience member sang along with the lead singer in "Goodnight, Irene," he or she was singing the *melody* of the song. From a technical standpoint, a melody consists of a succession of musical notes, or *pitches*; musicians typically name these pitches with letters (C, D, E-flat, and so forth) that can identify them in terms of written music and in terms of their positions on a keyboard or a guitar. There is more to a melody than just a succession of pitches, however. To make a melody, the notes have to occur in a specific pattern in time. Some notes are longer, some are shorter, and the durations are almost always defined in relation to an ongoing, regular *pulse* or *beat*. This time dimension of music is *rhythm*. When you tap your foot or your finger to a tune, you are feeling its rhythm, its pulse, its beat.

"Choo Choo Ch'Boogie" (Twelve-Bar Blues Form)

"Choo Choo Ch'Boogie" merits our attention as a representative recording by the most popular rhythm & blues act of the post–World War II decade, Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five.

Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five, 1946. Frank Driggs Collection.



LISTENING TO "GOODNIGHT, IRENE"

A closer look at the opening of "Goodnight, Irene" will help introduce some basic examples of melody and rhythm. This opening section (following a brief instrumental introduction) consists of words and music that are repeated regularly together as a unit throughout the song; such a section is called a **chorus**. The chorus may readily be subdivided into four *phrases*, brief building blocks of the melody that are separated from one another by breathing spaces (pauses or *rests*):

Irene, goodnight; [vocal pause]
Irene, goodnight; [vocal pause]
Goodnight, Irene, goodnight, Irene,
[brief vocal pause]
I'll see . . . dreams. [vocal pause]

Each phrase has an individual pitch structure, sometimes going higher and sometimes lower, in patterns that mimic the natural inflections of spoken words; phrases that "sing" naturally are generally a hallmark of effective songwriting. As is typical of most speech, the vocal melody tends to fall in pitch at the ends of phrases. Some phrase endings seem musically more conclusive than others; in the chorus of "Goodnight, Irene" this is true of the second and fourth phrases, both of which end on the same pitch. When the melody reaches such a temporary stopping point—what we might call the end of a musical "sentence"—musicians call this a **cadence**.

Now what about the rhythm? In the Weavers' recording of "Goodnight, Irene" the musical instruments start to articulate the beat shortly after the record begins, and this regular beat then persists throughout the rest of the record, right through the fade-out. All beats are not equally intense, however, and a larger, regular rhythmic pattern is created by the significant *accent* given to every third beat:

One, two three; **One**, two three; **One**, two three; and so on

These groups of three beats, defined by the regular accents, are called *measures*, or *bars*. (The three-beat bars—or triple *meter*—of "Goodnight, Irene" evoke the rhythm of the **waltz**, a dance whose popularity dates back to the nineteenth century.) It may also be noticed that the phrases of the melody in this song all extend over a duration four bars in length. Thus a great consistency characterizes the rhythmic patterns of this song at every level: a regular beat; constant three-beat measures; phrases that are all four measures in length (with cadences occurring regularly at the end of every other phrase); a four-phrase melodic chorus. Such regularity is typical of popular music, since it results in easily remembered, reassuringly predictable patterns that lend themselves readily to singing and dancing. Of course, too much regularity would result in boredom, so most popular songs tread a fine line between what is predictable and what creates novelty and interest.

If we look now at the overall structure of the Weavers' recording, we will be able to appreciate additional aspects of "Goodnight, Irene"; see the Listening Chart that follows. (This is the first example of the charts that are presented regularly throughout this book to facilitate in-depth discussion of some particularly significant recordings. You may want to refer to the chart to reinforce and supplement the discussion that follows, and also to use the chart as a visual aid while listening to the recording.) The recurring chorus sections alternate with **verses**. The melody for all of the verses is the same each time, but this verse melody is recognizably different from that of the chorus. What distinguishes the verses from one another is that new words are sung with each successive verse—while the words to the chorus sections, of course, remain the same each time. Attentive listening will reveal that each of the verses in "Goodnight, Irene" is constructed analogously to the chorus, insofar as each verse also may be divided into four phrases, with each phrase extending over four bars of the ongoing triple meter, and with clear cadences occurring at the ends of the second and fourth phrases.

In "Goodnight, Irene," one verse and one chorus together form a larger structural unit: the **strophe** of this strophic song. (The term *strophe* comes from literature, identifying a section of poetry that contains a certain number of lines, usually with a set pattern of meter and rhyme.) The alternation of verses and choruses creates a continuing source of variety and interest within the strophic form, as each strophe presents one section that

LISTENING CHART "GOODNIGHT, IRENE"
Written by Huddie Ledbetter (Leadbelly) and performed by The Weavers; recorded 1950

FORM		LYRICS
Brief instrumental introduction		
Chorus	0.14	*Irene, goodnight . . .*
Instruments, background voices repeat the chorus tune	0.34	
Strophe 1: Verse	0.54	*Last Saturday night . . .*
Chorus	1.15	*Irene, goodnight . . .*
Strophe 2: Verse	1.35	*Sometimes I live . . .*
Chorus	1.55	*Irene, goodnight . . .*
Strophe 3: Verse	2.15	*Stop ramblin' . . .*
Chorus	2.36	*Irene, goodnight . . .*
Chorus is repeated, fading out	2.56	

remains consistent and completely predictable in terms of both words and music, and another section in which the words change, revealing a new event or twist in the developing story. It seems obvious why this verse-chorus format became a favored approach to strophic form.

In practice, a performance of a strophic song may begin either with a verse or with the chorus. The Weavers' recording begins with the chorus, since this part would be immediately recognizable to anyone even vaguely familiar with the song—a clever selling point!—and the vocal chorus is itself preceded by an instrumental foreshadowing of the chorus melody, which clearly was designed to spur a feeling of anticipation, along with familiarity, in the listener. After the voices first sing the chorus with words, the music for the chorus is repeated without words, by instruments and background voices, reinforcing this essential part of the song before the performance proceeds with the first verse. Performances of strophic songs almost invariably end with the chorus, which brings a sense of comfortable, predictable conclusion, and indeed the Weavers' recording follows this anticipated procedure, even fading out as the chorus repeats, literally bidding the listener "goodnight."

The Weavers' recording of "Goodnight, Irene" was designed to avoid the kind of absolutely predictable structure that would have made for an uninteresting record. An additional factor, which brings interest to the successive vocal choruses, has to do with the aspect of music musicians call *harmony*. In a very basic sense, harmony deals with the interrelationships among different pitches in a musical piece. It may be heard, by the time we reach the chorus following the first verse, that the melody is being enriched here by having different voices sing different pitches at the same time: While the melody remains clearly in the foreground, the other pitches heard simultaneously are creating **chords**, which provide the foundation for harmony in popular music. The employment of three different solo voices to sing the three verses provides yet another source of variety. Notice here how apparent it is that the man who sings verse 3 is not the same man who sings verse 1; it is the specific individual "color," or **timbre**, of the two voices that allows us to differentiate them.

The Weavers' "Goodnight, Irene" exemplifies both the strophic song and the adaptability of this form to various arrangements in performance and recording. In fact, strophic songs can be almost infinitely adaptable, lending themselves to the spontaneous alteration of lyrics and to the creation of additional strophes to fit new occasions, new contexts, new performers, and new audiences—since everybody, presumably, either knows the tune to begin with, or else can learn it in short order.

Released in 1946 by Decca Records, "Choo Choo Ch'Boogie" proved to be the biggest hit of Jordan's entire career, holding the Number 1 spot on the rhythm & blues charts for an astounding eighteen weeks, and crossing over into the Top Ten on the pop charts as well. Although crossing over to mainstream pop success was a relatively unusual achievement for rhythm & blues artists during this period, Jordan managed to do so with some regularity, which indicates the broad appeal of his music and also foreshadows one of the major commercial phenomena—rhythm & blues recordings becoming huge pop hits—that would come to define rock 'n' roll. "Choo Choo Ch'Boogie" will also serve to introduce one of the most important formal patterns in American popular music, the *twelve-bar blues*.

"Choo Choo Ch'Boogie," while obviously very different in musical style from "Goodnight, Irene," is actually quite similar in overall musical structure. It too is a strophic song in which each of the three strophes contains both a verse and a chorus; see the accompanying Listening Chart. (The fact that both of these songs share this basic organization illustrates how useful and flexible the strophic song with verses and choruses can be.)

LISTENING TO "CHOO CHOO CH'BOOGIE"

One of the most immediately apparent and important differences between "Choo Choo Ch'Boogie" and "Goodnight, Irene" lies in the ucial area of rhythm. The rhythm of the Jordan recording based on regular *four-beat* bars, as opposed to the gular triple meter of "Irene." That is to say, the rhythmic :cents in "Choo Choo Ch'Boogie" create the following eady pattern:

One, two three, four; **One**, two, three, four;
One, two, three four; and so on.

(By far the most common meters found in all styles nd periods of American popular music are quadruple ieter, triple meter, and duple—a simple **one**, two—meter.) he four-beat bars of "Choo Choo Ch'Boogie" are arranged nto two-bar phrases; each phrase corresponds to one line f the lyrics, as may be seen in the chart. The verses are ll twelve bars (six phrases) in length, while the choruses re all eight bars (four phrases) in length, and this in turn reates consistent strophes of twenty bars each.

All this is hopefully straightforward enough to hear and to understand, but it is now important to pause briefly over the *internal* form of those twelve-bar verses. This runs the risk of becoming slightly technical, but these verses all exemplify the musical pattern of *twelve-bar blues*—an arrangement of rhythm and chords that is one of the backbone structures of American popular music. (See "Technical Note," p. 25.) Twelve-bar blues has been so useful and adaptable for musicians, especially in the rock era, that it is worthwhile for any attentive listener to learn to recognize it.

"Choo Choo Ch'Boogie" integrates the twelve-bar blues progression into its overall verse-chorus strophic structure. Verses in twelve-bar blues form alternate with the eight-bar choruses, creating together the twenty-bar strophes. Additional variety is created in the recording by the employment of purely instrumental episodes: an introduction, a concluding "tag," and interludes following the first and second occurrences of the chorus (see the chart).

The instrumental introduction follows the chord pattern of the twelve-bar blues; the horns (a trumpet and two saxophones) imitate the sound of a train whistle, while the rhythm section (piano, bass, and drums) establishes a characteristic rhythm moving at a medium pace, or medium **tempo**. (This infectious four-beat dance rhythm, common in Louis Jordan's recordings, is also sometimes called a *shuffle*.) After the introduction a verse is sung by Louis Jordan, backed by **riffs** (repeated patterns) in the horn section. Then a chorus, also sung by Jordan, is followed by a twelve-bar blues piano solo. The whole sequence of verse–chorus–instrumental solo is then repeated (with a twenty-bar saxophone solo, representing both verse and chorus, replacing the piano solo). A third strophe is sung, and a slight variation at the end of this chorus leads into the concluding ten-bar tag.

A TECHNICAL NOTE: TWELVE-BAR BLUES

Twelve-bar blues refers to a particular arrangement of four-beat bars. The bars are themselves grouped in phrases of two or four, with characteristic chord changes occurring at certain points. The issue of harmony in the twelve-bar blues is a complex one, especially since the chord progressions in a form as widespread and diverse as the blues will by no means be absolutely systematic or consistent from case to case. Still, the twelve-bar blues does tend to be marked by specific chord changes at particular points, and our present example—"Choo Choo Ch'Boogie"—offers a conveniently straightforward illustration of these changes in each of its verses. (The important thing to remember is that the chord changes in twelve-bar blues need not be limited only to these typical ones.)

If we call our starting chord the "home" chord (musicians would call it the **tonic**), this chart shows the most important, typical points of change in the twelve-bar blues pattern:

BARS: 1 2 3 4
CHORDS: **"Home"** . . . . . .
BARS: 5 6 7 8
CHORDS: **Change 1** **"Home"**
BARS: 9 10 11 12
CHORDS: **Change 2** **"Home"**

Note that the chords at "changes" 1 and 2 are different from one another; thus, there are three essential chords that define the skeleton of this musical structure. (Musicians call the chord at bar 5 the *subdominant*, and the chord at bar 9 the *dominant*.) These are the three chords that define the harmony in the verses of "Choo Choo Ch'Boogie," and they occur at precisely the rhythmic points just shown. To illustrate specifically, here is what happens in the first verse. The numbers of the bars show where the accent (the **one**) of the bar in question falls, and the chord changes always occur on the accented beats; remember to count the four beats in each bar:

BARS: 1 2
LYRICS: *Headin' for the station with a pack on my back*
CHORDS: **Home (tonic)** . . . . . .
3 4
I'm tired of transportation in the back of a hack
[home (tonic)] . . . . . .
5 6
I love to hear the rhythm of a clickety-clack
Change 1 (subdominant) . . . . . .
7
And hear the lonesome whistle, see the
8
smoke from the stack
Home (tonic) . . . . . .
9 10
And pal around with democratic fellows named Mac
Change 2 (dominant) . . . . . .
11 12
So take me right back to the track, Jack.
Home (tonic) . . . . . .

LISTENING CHART "CHOO CHOO CH'BOOGIE"

Music and lyrics by Milt Gabler, Denver Darling, and Vaughan Horton; as performed by Louis Jordan's Tympany Five; recorded 1946

FORM		LYRICS	DESCRIPTIVE COMMENTS
Instrumental intro			**12-bar blues** During the first four bars, the horns imitate the sound of a train whistle.
Verse 1	0.17	*Headin' for the station with a pack on my back* *I'm tired of transportation in the back of a hack* *I love to hear the rhythm of a clickety-clack* *And hear the lonesome whistle, see the smoke from the stack* *And pal around with democratic fellows named Mac* *So take me right back to the track, Jack.*	**12-bar blues**
Chorus	0.34	*Choo choo, choo choo, ch'boogie* *Woo woo, woo woo, ch'boogie* *Choo choo, choo choo, ch'boogie* *Take me right back to the track, Jack.*	**8 bars**
Piano solo	0.45		**12-bar blues**
Verse 2	1.02	*You reach your destination, but alas and alack* *You need some compensation to get back in the black* *You take a morning paper from the top of the stack* *And read the situation from the front to the back* *The only job that's open needs a man with a knack* *So put it right back in the rack, Jack.*	**12-bar blues**
Chorus [as before]	1.19		**8 bars**
Saxophone solo	1.30		**20 bars (12-bar blues + 8-bar chorus)**
Verse 3	1.58	*Gonna settle down by the railroad track* *And live the life of Riley in a beaten-down shack* *So when I hear a whistle I can peep through the crack* *And watch the train a-rollin', when it's ballin' the jack* *Why, I just love the rhythm of the clickety-clack* *So take me right back to the track, Jack.*	**12-bar blues**
Chorus [as before]	2.14		**8 bars**
Instrumental tag (with brief vocal interjection)	2.26		**10 bars**

"Love and Marriage" (AABA Song Form)

The 1955 hit record of "Love and Marriage," a song composed by Sammy Cahn and Jimmy Van Heusen, and sung by Frank Sinatra, serves here to represent several things: the typical Tin Pan Alley song form; the characteristically elaborate and clever arrangements that enhanced recordings of such songs; and the suave and knowing vocal style of one of the greatest singers of this—or any—period. The lasting appeal of this record is reflected in its use as the ironic theme song for the 1990s sitcom "Married, with Children."

"Love and Marriage" introduces us to the four-section **AABA** song, another venerable form in American popular music. Songs constructed along these lines typically have sections of equal length, with the three **A** sections presenting identical (or nearly identical) music accompanied (usually) by different words each time, and the single B section presenting new words *and* new music. The repetitions of the A music assure that the song will quickly become familiar to the listener, while the B section offers some musical variety within the form. The B section in an AABA form is frequently called a **release**—or, even more commonly, a **bridge** (presumably because it links two A sections). The principles behind the AABA formal strategy seem obvious enough: State an effective musical idea to "hook" the listener; restate it (usually with new words) in order to fix it in the listener's mind; then sustain attention with a deviation from the established pattern; and conclude with the gratifying return of the now-familiar basic idea. It is not surprising that many songwriters have turned to AABA organization for the construction of memorable songs. The form itself has endured well past the heyday of Tin Pan Alley, and it continues to influence the structure of some popular music to this day.



Frank Sinatra: The "Sultan of Swoon" in the 1940s, the ultimate cool "saloon singer" in the 1950s. © Corbis; Frank Driggs Collection.

CONCLUSION

The mainstream music industry had been designed to capitalize on the value of *songs* rather than *performances*. In order to maximize their profit, songwriters and publishers had taken a number of understandable steps: They created standardized song forms that allowed them to compose music quickly and efficiently. They created ASCAP to protect their intellectual property rights, and used it to forge a relationship with the radio industry that was so strong that it bordered on monopoly. They built strong ties with the record companies

LISTENING TO "LOVE AND MARRIAGE"

s a simple matter to hear the AABA organization in ve and Marriage," especially since each of the A ctions begins with identical words: the words of the hich thus serve as a recurring verbal and musical ace point for the listener. After a brief instrumental uction, the song proceeds as follows:

A *Love and marriage, love and marriage, go together . . .*
A *Love and marriage, love and marriage, it's an institute . . .*
B *Try, try . . .*
A *Love and marriage, love and marriage, go together . . .*

llowing the completion of the form, an instrumental de presents the A music again, after which Frank reenters and sings the last two sections, B and e more. A brief instrumental passage ends the ng.

ve and Marriage" is typical of AABA songs of this insofar as it is organized rhythmically in regular at bars that are grouped into sections of eight- ngth. We may also call attention to a few formal ies that lend interest and distinction to this particular example of AABA song form. It will be noticed that the music of the second A section is indeed identical to that of the first A—with one small but important exception: it ends on a different pitch from the first. This is significant because, as a result of this alteration in the vocal melody (and in the accompanying chord), there is a cadence at the end of the second A whereas there was no cadence concluding the first A. In a sense, then, the first A section sets up the second A, which in turn musically rounds off the first. The beginning of the B section is marked by a particularly striking new chord, which helps to set the music of this section strongly apart. The final A of "Love and Marriage" restates not only the music but also many of the words of the opening section. Monotony is decisively avoided in this case, however, for two reasons. First of all, this concluding section is extended beyond the expected eight bars to reach a length of eleven bars. Secondly, unlike the first A, this section does reach a cadence (although we are, effectively, forced to wait for it), so it provides a definitive feeling both of rounding and of conclusion to the overall form. Because of the differences among the three A sections in "Love and Marriage," the form is perhaps best represented as $A\text{-}A^1\text{-}B\text{-}A^2$.

that sold their music to the public. In short, they streamlined every aspect of the business, from songwriting to recording to promotion, in order to make it work as efficiently as possible. As the business model became more efficient, it naturally became more narrowly focused. Musicians and songwriters whose musical style or business model did not fit the norm were often excluded from participation. From its own point of view, this approach makes perfect sense: Tin Pan Alley publishers had created an extremely profitable industry, and they had little to gain by sharing it with other composers and musicians, especially those whose music and culture seemed strange and even threatening.

From the outsiders' perspective, however, the picture looked very different: The mainstream music industry was preventing entire communities from having their music heard, and—not incidentally—reaping the profits that that could bring. At the same time, the fact that these artists were excluded from radio and mainstream performance venues meant they did not have to be concerned with the strict—and often overtly repressive—standards of propriety

that these venues demanded. The result was that non-mainstream musical forms—especially country and western and rhythm & blues—were able to be more daring, more openly sexual, and more rebellious than mainstream musical forms. It is not difficult to see how this would be appealing to teenagers. And, as teenagers became an increasingly dominant consumer demographic, they would bring this music with them into the mainstream, as rock 'n' roll.