

**From “Tin Pan Alley” to Rock and
Roll: The Story of American Popular
Music Through Sound and Film**

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LECTURE 1

The Advent of American Popular Music : Stephen Foster, Minstrelsy, Tin Pan Alley, and the American Songbook



AMERICAN POPULAR MUSIC

- tied to European model in terms of musical style and attitude
- increasing African, African American, and “Latin” influence to present
- class-based distinction
- often categorized somewhere between folk & “high cultured” (art) music

PARLOR PIANO

- manufacture of the affordable upright piano
- center of home entertainment for middle class
- songs learned from sheet music



Stephen Foster (1826-1864)

- **1st financially successful American popular music composer**
- **most important 19th century American composer**
- **familiar with both art and folk song styles**



1. PARLOR SONGS

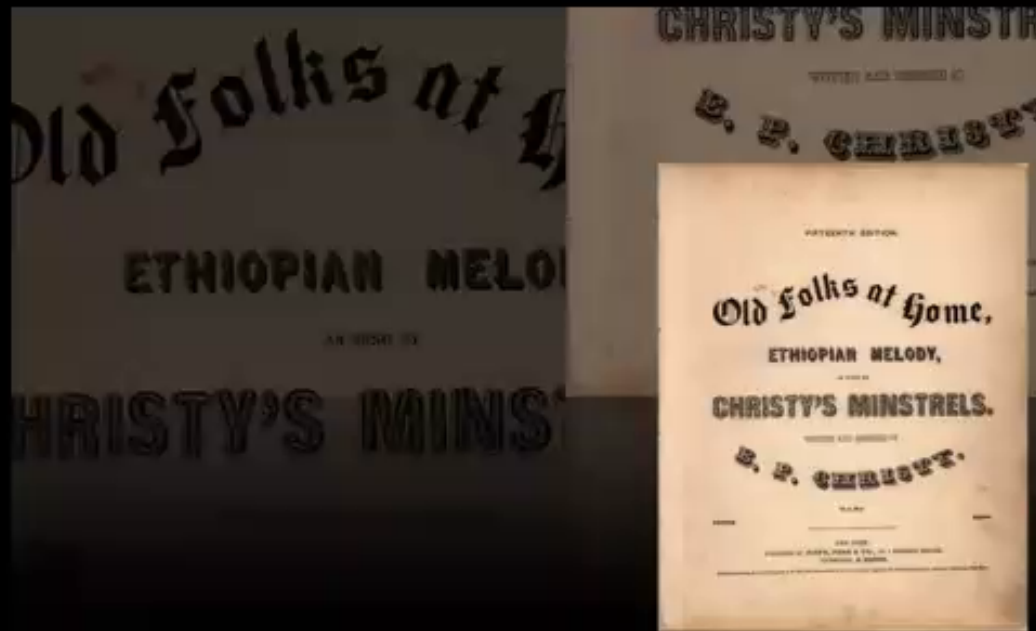
- **simple adaptation of European art and folk songs**

2. MINSTREL SONGS

- **first unique form of American Popular Music**

3. PLANTATION SONGS

- sentimental and nostalgic views of the “Old South”
- combination of parlor and minstrel genres



- new genre invented by Stephen Foster

BLACKFACE MINSTRELSY



- first distinctly American form of popular culture
- appearance in early 19th century
- White performers in Northeast
- low-class entertainment, but very popular
- racial stereotyping of African-Americans
 - appearance
 - dress
 - dialect
 - dance
 - mannerisms

GEORGE WASHINGTON DIXON: 1828

- **first white entertainer to establish reputation as minstrel performer**
- **developed urban dandy “Zip Coon” character**
- **published song in 1834**
- **based on Scottish or Irish folk tune**
- **same melody as “Turkey in the Straw”**
- **popular minstrel show dance number**

GEORGE WASHINGTON DIXON: 1828



THOMAS DARTMOUTH RICE: 1832

- **created naïve, uneducated southern slave stock character “(Jumping) Jim Crow”**

VIRGINIA MINSTRELS: Boston, 1843

- **first minstrel troupe**
- **led by banjo player Dan**
- **European musical style**
- **instrumentation – folk instruments fiddle, banjo, tambourine, bones**
- **Included dance routines**

“Dixie Land”

- **minstrel song written by Dan Emmett**

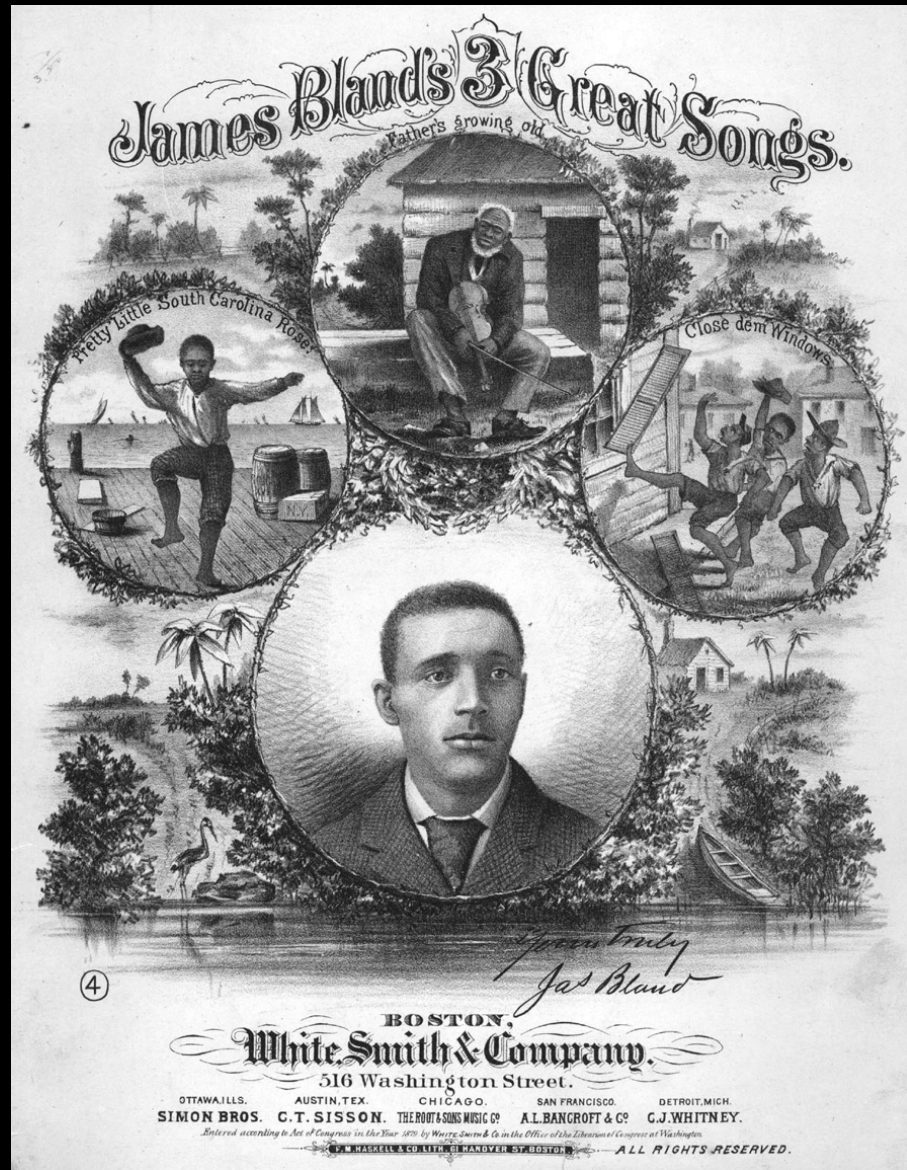
AFRICAN AMERICAN MINSTRELS

- post Civil War (1865)
- first large-scale African American entrance into show business
- “true delineators” of minstrelsy
- movement away from stereotypes by white performers



JAMES A. BLAND (1854-1911)

- first successful African-American songwriter
- wrote in the plantation song genre



JAMES A. BLAND (1854-1911)

- “Carry Me Back to Ole Virginny”
- (1878)
- Virginia State Song



BERT WILLIAMS



MINSTREL SHOW CONTRIBUTIONS

- 1. entertainment for the masses**
- 2. made use of vernacular speech and music**
- 3. low-brow, parody of upper class whites and northern blacks**
- 4. first synthesis of European classical and folk traditions**
- 5. begins pattern of rhythmic invigoration of popular music by African American influences**

BIRTH OF AMERICAN POPULAR MUSIC INDUSTRY

- sheet music publishing
- centered in NY at end of 19th century
- numerous small companies founded by Jewish immigrants
- 28th street in lower Manhattan
- known as TIN PAN ALLEY because of constant clatter of pianos
 - crankers – song writers/lyricists who cranked out song after song
 - pluggers – produced and promoted songs to prospective performers and retail outlets
- dominated mainstream American popular music industry for over 70 years



“AFTER THE BALL”

- **written by Charles K. Harris, 1892**
- **first Tin Pan Alley hit song**
- **interpolated into “A Trip to Chinatown”**
- **sold 5 million copies of sheet music**

TIN PAN ALLEY SONGS

- **escapist entertainment**
- **sentimental and non-specific themes**
 1. **security and solace (of home)**
 2. **romance (personal and emotional)**
- **use of vernacular speech**
- **appeal to growing middle class**
- **continuing interpretation and popularity**
- **broad appeal across racial, class, and religious lines**

IRVING BERLIN



“God Bless America” (1938)

- **Kate Smith’s signature song**



BELTING

- **pre-microphone vocal style**
- **loud vocal projection**
- **clear enunciation**
- **grandiose gestures**
 - **Al Jolson**
 - **Sophie Tucker**
 - **Kate Smith**
 - **Ethel Merman**

GEORGE AND IRA GERSHWIN

- George began as a Tin Pan Alley “plugger”
- recorded and arranged player-piano rolls
- biggest hit “Swanee” by Al Jolson in 1919
- collaborated with his brother Ira (aka “The Jeweler”) in series of musical comedies throughout the 1920s
- highly influenced by African-American music (syncopation and blue notes)
- “Fascinating Rhythm” (Fred and Adelle Astair)

GEORGE AND IRA GERSHWIN



Ethel Merman

A black and white photograph of Ethel Merman singing into a vintage microphone. She is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark jacket over a light-colored top. Her hair is styled in large, dark, curly waves. She has a joyful expression, with her mouth open as if in the middle of a song. The background is dark and out of focus, suggesting a stage setting.

- “I Got Rhythm” (1930)
- song about the pleasures of music itself
- pre-microphone era belting singing style
- introduced in the musical comedy *Girl Crazy*
- “rhythm song”
- syncopation
- chord progression has become a standard jazz form “rhythm changes”

CROONING

- intimate vocal style
- provides a “private” listening experience
- made possible through the invention of the electronic microphone, 1927
- changed the character of popular music
- coincided with the invention of radio

GENE AUSTIN

- popular radio crooner
- well-written song
- catchy melody
- sentimental
- “bird’s nest” metaphors
- cello adds sophistication



COLE PORTER



TIN PAN ALLEY STANDARDS

- aka “The American Songbook”
- continually rediscovered and reinterpreted in variety of styles by successive generations of performers
- jazz singers (Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald)
- jazz instrumentalists
- still highly influential

“Cheek to Cheek” by Irving Berlin

Tony Bennett and Lady Gaga – 2015 Grammy Awards

