

Istituto Tecnico Commerciale

“BERNARDINO GRIMALDI”

CATANZARO

# MUSIC IN AMERICA





## **MUSIC IN AMERICA**

America is the homeland of jazz, rock, heavy metal and rap. Modern pop music grew up in America and from there it has spread around the world.

More than any of the other arts, music has become the domain of the young.

Daily, music is listened to in stores, elevators, cars, at work as well as at home.

MTV, music television, is a special channel just for music videos and can be watched 24 hours a day. In major cities, whatever kind of music you prefer, you can find it on the radio. Thanks to its black population, America was able to make its own contribution to music in the 1900s. It began with jazz and blues. These styles of music used a strong beat, a lot of sensuality, and loud sounds. From there young people went on to create beat, hip and rock music in the late 1950s and 1960s.

I will start introducing Jazz, Spirituals and Blues to pass to Rock music and its varieties. In the end I will speak about Pop music including heavy metal my favourite one.

## JAZZ

It has often been called the only art form to originate in the United States. Jazz began in New Orleans during the 1920s and captured the spirit of the era, often referred to as "**The Jazz Age**". The word Jazz comes from the French word Jasier that means 'to chat, to have an easy conversation'. In fact in New Orleans, Louisiana, French was still spoken at the end of the 19th century, when black people started using instruments as if they were voices. According to the saxophonist **Sidney Bechet**, the word Jazz in its original form of Jass was local slang for sexual intercourse. Anyway the word is probably of Afro-American origin because Blacks were the first people to perform Jazz on the streets in the southern states. What is certain is that the negro slaves from West Africa brought with them their own rhythms and their own melodies, and in the hard conditions of the plantations, these developed in a special way.



San Francisco, California, 1921:  
Joseph King Oliver (the third  
one on the left) playing in what  
may be considered one of the  
first official jazz orchestras.

Jazz was born in the cotton fields, where the Negroes improvised work songs, half sung and half shouted, that helped them to pass the long hours of labour. It developed in tent churches or improvised chapels in the rural districts, where Presbyterian and Methodist ministers did a great deal of missionary work. The Bible stories appealed to the imagination of the Negro, for there was an obvious parallel between the oppression of the Hebrews in Egypt and the oppression of the Negroes in America. In their religious songs,

or spirituals, the slaves expressed their simple faith and deeply-felt longing to be free. It was in New Orleans that great trumpet-players like **Louis Armstrong** and **King Oliver** were first heard.

Louis Armstrong established the primacy of the improvising soloist. His sense of comedy, his career in Hollywood, his spectacular physical appearance and mannerism, and, above all his extraordinary vocal style, all contributed to his extraordinary success.



*You can still hear some of the best jazz music in the world in New Orleans.*

Jazz was not used just for entertainment: bands played in the streets to advertise important events, and they were always invited to the spectacular New Orleans funeral processions. At about the time of World War One Jazz moved up the Mississippi River and reached Chicago, which became the capital of Jazz until about 1928-1929. In 1924 George Gershwin gave birth to an original sort of symphonic Jazz with Rhapsody in Blue. From Chicago Jazz moved on to Harlem, the negro quarter of New York and it finally reached the Atlantic coast.

Jazz is a music where the performer plays melodies variations on a given harmonic base against a regular rhythmic pulse, it is a matter of lip-technique in Jazz the performer is usually his own composer.

*What are the characteristics of "Traditional Jazz"?*

First of all, its collective character: it is music for playing together. Improvisation is important and makes it unusual. Some Jazz music is written out or memorized by the musicians, while other parts of it are improvised (created spontaneously).

Second, the melodic style comes from the Blues: an extraordinary style of singing about suffering (not just racial, but personal, like losing your girlfriend).

Third: the use of vocal techniques in instrumental music.

In Jazz the trumpet, the clarinet, the sax all sound like real human voices: black voices.

Fourth, swing. This is a pulsating rhythm typical of "coloured" music. Above all, it wants to be danced to.

## **SPIRITUALS**

The Spiritual is one of the best known forms of American folk music. They are secular forms of hymns with a strong rhythm and highly emotional. Spirituals are especially moving when sung by a group. A leader sometimes sings one or two lines alone, and a chorus comes in with the refrain. Spiritual singers often emphasize the rhythm by clapping their hands. The melodies used in Spirituals are sometimes said to have come from Africa. Among the well-known Spirituals are : "Go down Moses", "Deep River", "Nobody know the trouble I see", "He's got the whole word in his hands".

**He's Got The Whole World In His Hands**  
 In whose hand is the soul of every living thing. Job 12:10

The musical score is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of one flat (Bb). It consists of three systems of music. Each system includes a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat, a line of lyrics, and a line of fingerings for 'Blow' and 'Draw'.

**System 1:**  
 Lyrics: He's got the whole\_\_ world\_\_ in his hands He's got the  
 Blow: 6 6 5 6 5 4 5 6 6 6 6 6  
 Draw: (blank)

**System 2:**  
 Lyrics: whole\_\_ world\_\_ in his hands, He's got the whole world  
 Blow: 6 6 5 6 5 4  
 Draw: 5 5 4 5 6 6

**System 3:**  
 Lyrics: in his hands, He's got the whole world in his hands,  
 Blow: 5 6 6 6 6 5 6 6 5 4  
 Draw: 5 4

He's got the wind and the rain in His hands,  
 He's got the tiny little baby in His hands,  
 He's got you and me brother in His hands,  
 He's got you and me sister in His hands,

## BLUES

As regards Blues it was an Afro-American vocal and instrumental style characterized by expressive pitch inflections (blue notes) and unique tone qualities. It was a type of sad folk song with a low jazz beat "To have the Blues" means "To feel sad or depressed" and blues songs told of the difficulties experienced by the Negroes whose ancestors had been brought to America from Africa as slaves (the singer often sings about his or her difficult life and bad luck in love). The Blues was one of the most important influences on all styles jazz, and the mainstream of jazz has continually renewed itself and received fresh creative impetus from the blues. It was Louis Armstrong, demonstrating freshness of ideas and cohesiveness of design who in the 1920s elevated the blues and jazz to an art form. Among Blues singers by far the greatest was **Bessie Smith**, whose vast recorded output has preserved a style outstanding for its integrity, honesty to life, and immense technical skill. After her we have to remember **Ella Fitzgerald**.



*Little Richard*



*Elvis Presley*

## THE EXPLOSION OF ROCK MUSIC

During the 1950s the young people in the Usa began to develop their own culture and rock-and-roll became their favourite music since it helped identify them as a distinct force in society. It developed from jazz, blues and country music. Singers, such as **Chuck Berry**, **Fats Domino**, and **Little Richard**, were the first people to record this music. **Elvis Presley**, the "King of rock-and-roll", was the first musician to make this music popular around the world. For many years, Elvis Presley was the top-selling solo recording artist. Today rock-and-roll (simply called rock), folk rock and acid rock are still very popular. Folk rock is rock music characterized by poetic ballads of social protest and emotional despair. It became very popular in the early 60s, thanks to **Bob Dylan** and **Joan Baez**.

Dylan's style was intense, and his songs were bitter protests. Acid rock, rock music characterized by the emotional intensity of electronic instruments, emerged in the late 60s. it came from the short-lived hippie movement centered in San Francisco.





*Bob Dylan*



Joan Baez in Central Park, New York, singing to a crowd of about 2 000 people

## ROCK AND REBELLION

The music of the 1960s was a lot louder than before. It was also more open about sex. Singers moved their bodies in sexy ways, to make the point while they talked about sex. Parents were shocked by the new music. Kids called their parents "squares". They made jokes about the boring popular music that their parents used to listen to. The new music was a part of a new youth culture. In the 1960s, many young Americans rejected the traditional values of American society. They were against the War in Vietnam. They also opposed the way most Americans lived and worked. They wanted a natural life, without rules or restrictions. They created an entirely new culture. It was called the "counter-culture".

**The Beatles**, a group of British youngsters, were the leaders of the musical rebellion. Today their songs, like I want to hold your hand, sound very cautious and old fashioned. But at the time, kids in England and America went wild about them. Huge crowds came to cheer them on. The term "Beatlemania" was coined to describe the hysteria and enthusiasm of their fans.



*The Beatles*

## POP MUSIC

The 1960s was probably the most creative decade for pop music. "Popular" or pop music is the type of music that can be easily appreciated (and bought!) by people all over the world. Ever since that time a number of varieties of pop music have developed. For example:

- **Reggae** is a type of rock music from Jamaica with a distinctive rhythm imported by West Indian immigrants. The most famous reggae artist was **Bob Marley** whose songs of protest and anti-colonialism made him a cult hero in many Third World countries. Born in Jamaica, Marley gave a distinct Caribbean identity to his songs in which he expressed the hopes and frustrations of his people.

- **Punk Rock** (sometimes known as New Wave) became popular in the late 1970s. The music was fast and loud; the lyrics were usually offensive and sometimes obscene. "Punks" often dressed outrageously as part of their anti-authoritarian image. The best-known punk rock group in Great Britain was the **Sex Pistols**, in America there were the **Ramones** who with their aggressive look, leather jackets and torn jeans, played hard and fast.

Characteristic of the Ramones was their breathless speed of execution.



*Ramones*

**Patty Smith** was the indisputable queen of New York punk, she sang and played with quite different finesse, adding to her music visionary lyrics.

**-House music** a form of popular music with a fast, regular beat, usually produced on electronic equipment, which first appeared in the late 1980s. It is often played in discotheques as it is easy to dance to.

**-Heavy Metal** is a particularly loud form of music played on the instruments most closely associated with "Hard rock": guitar, bass and drums.

This is my favourite music which I usually play on my electronic guitar and my favourite group is "**Sepultura**".



*Sepultura*

I will end this outline of music in America speaking of **Rap**, the latest stage of popular music.

Rap is a kind of chanting. 'To rap' literally means 'To hit or to punch', as well as 'To criticize or to punish'. The phrases rhyme and are spoken in a clipped rhythm. Aggressive body movements are used to accent a point.

The first rap singer or "rappers" were black Americans. They created rap by using things from their own culture, like when they would talk to each other with a strong rhythm and body language, or when they would insult each other in a good verbal style.

The violent, insulting side of rap has been carried to an extreme by "gangsta rappers". Their songs, like Cop Killer, have been criticized a lot. Older blacks say that they encourage young blacks to rape women and kill policemen. Their defenders say that all this violence and bad language is normal on the streets.

Rap, like every kind of pop music since the 1960s, is a part of the culture of youth rebellion. It is not the main thing in America but it is the part of America that the rest of the world hears most.

Nowadays two singers in America have won great popularity becoming the idols of millions of young people, they are: **Madonna** and **Michael Jackson**.



*Madonna*



*Michael Jackson*

