The SAGE International Encyclopedia of Music and Culture

Popular Music, as a Movement

Popular music may be understood as a part of popular culture. In academic discourse, popular music is distinguished from art music, a classification deriving from European concepts of high and low culture. In everyday usage, these theoretical divisions of music and culture play a limited role. Nevertheless, this differentiation in terms of establishing identity does have significance in social contexts, as one is perceived differently if one identifies oneself as a fan of Madonna, Mozart, or Miriam Makeba.

The alignment of popular music with popular culture has influenced the development of social and artistic movements. Popular music movements often extend beyond the boundaries of any single state or nation. This entry examines the formation and distribution of popular music as well as its growth as an artistic, business, and consumer movement. This entry also examines the alignment of popular music with movements driving performance format and sound design, which is related to the rise of new technologies and modes of dissemination, communication, and valuation.

Etymology

As part of popular culture, popular music represents above all modern, technically mediated entertainment for a mass audience. From an etymological viewpoint, the Latin word *populus* designates the common people, the crowd, or the plebs. Accordingly, popular music is the preferred music of ordinary people, that is, of the majority of people. Although Western forms of popular music—and North American music in particular—dominate or retain their supremacy in comparison with others, independent forms of popular music have developed in other cultural spheres, which pick up traditional and highly developed musical elements from the particular culture. As a result, there are strong links between popular, artificial, and ethnically driven music plus mutual self-referencing.

Pop Culture

The study of popular culture has produced a large number of synonyms and paraphrases. Popular culture is understood in connection with many aspects of culture, including everyday (routine activity), novelty (adventures or excitement produced through consuming products or events), leisure, youth, industrial, mass (the opposite of high or elite culture, with the purpose of distracting the masses), resistance (in which a minority offers resistance to the power of the majority), ethnic subcultural, and folk (a national, apparently homogeneous social construct).

All theories of the popular culture revolve around terms such as pleasure, amusement, enjoyment, fun, entertainment, and delight or inclination, that is to say, positive or agreeable feelings. At the same time, they imply the opposite of complexity, intellect, substance, content, originality, and significance, that is to say, they emphasize the sensual over the mental. Popular culture can be described as something that is directed at the surface or the external, where the stimuli are recognized and processed superficially as sensations. Of course, these are accompanied by associative and categorical patterns of thought, but the latter are secondary. A genuine intellectual penetration, a cognitive submersion in deeper structures, or a philosophical discourse would not be typical of the context of popular culture. Even the so-called *pop art* is no exception, and equally so *haute couture* and pop literature. It is not rare for scholars of these to reference popular music directly and vice versa.

Between Art and Commerce

Popular music is part of the economy in the sense of commercial production. One significant characteristic of popular music is that the production process is one of division of labor (e.g., by musicians, composers,

texters, and producers). Likewise, the distribution process also involves division of labor (e.g., through record labels, agents, and owners of record shops). This division of labor began toward the end of the 19th century and proceeded during the course of the 20th century to the establishment of a globally operating music industry, with cartel-like structures in the form of huge multinational concerns with diverse subsidiaries. These businesses generate popular music and culture, in order to reach the maximum number of potential customers. In this process, artistic considerations usually play a subordinate role to those of profit-oriented calculation.

In contrast, independent artists produce and market their own music, a process made easier by the digital revolution of the 21st century. However, if these musicians want to reach a larger audience, then either they have to assert themselves against the financial and informal might of the few music businesses that dominate the market, which is seldom successful, or they have to let themselves be pocketed by these quasi-monopolists. If they do so, they must inevitably surrender their individuality to the professionalized rules of production. But even musicians who preserve their independence are often affected by the mechanisms of the heavily contested pop music market. This market prescribes certain formats and content. The more of these unwritten specifications they fulfill, the higher the probability that they will achieve commercial success. The inherent conflict between independent music performance and commercial success thus appears to be practically indissoluble. For pop musicians, there is only little room for maneuver, which allows for minimal deviations. The recipients must accept these discrepancies. These are the rules for pop musicians. Although it may be the case that innovations are desirable, de facto the customers react by rejecting or even by disregarding them, whenever their listening habits—conditioned by the music industry—are violated or offended.

The Song as Lowest Common Denominator

The song is the determining form in popular music, with a length of between 3 and 5 minutes. An interchange between verse and chorus has established itself as the internal structure of a song, in addition to whole number beats (e.g., 4, 12, or 32) for the basic harmonic sequences. As a rule, simple cadences (tonic, subdominant, and dominants) are used. The melody, which remains within a single octave and does without major jumps in its intervals, is normally sung, while a pulsating, clearly recognizable rhythm carries the song. We can roughly distinguish between three categories of time: ballads, mid-tempo songs, and up-tempo songs. As physical recordings, prior to the growing dominance of digital distribution, these were published either as singles, in the hope of landing a hit in the charts, or combined with other songs to make up a maxi-single, an EP, or an album.

The Influence of Sound and Aesthetics

The musical means of a pop song are relatively limited, if they are compared with the level of development of harmonics, melodies, rhythm, and dynamics in other forms of music. What makes the difference is the instrumentation, the electronic sound production, and the often playful handling of traditional aesthetics and its implicit notions of values. The story of popular music is closely linked to the history of sound and mass media, that is to say, both with regard to the reproduction of sounds and to the communications about them.

The following turning points in media history contributed to the emergence and prevalence of popular music in roughly chronological order: (a) published music and piano scores, (b) Tin Pan Alley in New York (a collection of specialist music publishers), (c) automated music machines (self-playing pianos, gramophones, and radios), (d) film, (e) cheap audio material (vinyl, tapes, and cassettes), (f) big recording companies, (g) television, (h) multitrack recording technology in studios, (i) specialist music magazines, (j) mobile stereo players (e.g., the Walkman), (k) multimediality and digitalization, and (l) the Internet.

All forms of music were certainly influenced by these milestones in media history, including, for instance, clas-

sical music. However, these milestones had an even greater effect on the development of popular music, and in particular, the establishment of electronic instruments (electric organs, E-guitars, and E-basses) toward the middle of the 20th century. Through the introduction of synthesizers and E-pianos in the 1960s, the sound spectrum of popular music expanded enormously. Electronic amplification (power output stages and loud-speakers), plus the budding opportunities for manipulating the sound (effects machines) of these instruments, manifested themselves in a new aesthetic of sounds.

Visualization, Performance, and Image

In the tradition of art music, the work of a composer is the focus of interest, and performers do their utmost to (re)produce the composition exactly as written or to serve the work. This method differs from prevalent beliefs in popular music, which often centers around the performer and the performer's ability to entertain. The question of whether it is the performer's own composition that is on display, a cover version, or a composition by an unknown composer who has been specially contracted is not as important. The main thing is that the performance is attractive and lets us to see a certain image of the pop musician. The term *image* indicates that the pop musician should offer the audience a projection area/surface. Individual characteristics should be made audible and visible since they have a high recognition value. The image must make an impact quickly and directly within the length of a typical song (such as 3 minutes) and often presents an unequivocal/clear audio message to attract attention at first sight.

Those are the two areas that, in addition to the music (should), draw particular attention to themselves, namely, the text of the song and the outer features of the pop musician or band. With regard to outer appearance, there are usually two main models: attractiveness in the sense of the current fashion or exaggerated deviation from such fashion. At any rate, the musician or band's appearance is ideally exceptional. For texts, a somewhat bigger semantic freedom is possible, but hedonist topics such as love, sexuality, and partying dominate. It is also possible to discover quasi-political topics, which aim as a rule to achieve a diffuse feeling of protest. Such topics, however, are not compatible with chart success in the narrower sense.

Youth Culture, Subculture, and the Politicization of Popular Music

Broad sections of academic popular music studies, which have existed since approximately the middle of the 1960s, prefer to engage in studies of the marginal areas of popular music, which are seen as politically progressive or artistically demanding (e.g., singer-songwriters of the 1960s or progressive rock of the 1970s). In the early years of academic engagement with popular music, many young researchers came from the left of the political spectrum and in addition did not come from music research but from neighboring disciplines (sociology, political science, cultural studies, literary studies, etc.) and commonly researched their own preferences, that is to say, the music with which they themselves had been socialized. One-sided representations and theoretical approaches gained supremacy, along with theories regarding youth and subculture of resistance. As a result, for decades, it was *unpopular popular music*, which gained most attention within popular music studies and in highbrow music journalism.

The Historical Development of Popular Music

Using a broad interpretation of the term *popular music*, it is reasonable to claim that it has really always been with us. Sociable drinking songs and dancing tunes have, for example, been a firm part of all social strata, for

example, in the Middle Ages in Europe. But every social stratum cultivated its own music, which was played by specialist musicians on particular instruments on special occasions. Society was divided up according to social standing, so that interaction between the ranks of birth, ownership, and profession was restricted to rare occasions. To that extent a single, connective practice of music making did not exist.

It was only at the end of the 18th century that the bourgeoisie (middle class) began to emerge, first in France and then in Germany, as a result of profound social upheavals such as the French Revolution. Thus, a bourgeois national state was formed, which was supposed to be ruled by the people. The people now comprised all citizens, that is, farmers, craftsmen, merchants, employees, traders, the nobility, clerics, and the feudal gentry.

This newly established bourgeoisie began for the first time to conduct public debates and publish critical pamphlets, in which a distinction was made between bourgeois and popular. The popular infiltrated, in the eyes of many citizens, the manners and rules of the bourgeoisie. Thus, the notion of the popular became an ideological instrument for social demarcation. At the same time, however, the modern bourgeois state created a public sphere for political discourse and consequently a musical sphere with its own institutions, such as ballrooms and dance halls, beer gardens, pleasure grounds, and music pavilions, in which predominantly popular music was performed. Ultimately, it was the goods-for-cash mechanism that determined what was to be rated as sought-after or popular.

An important milestone for the distribution and commercialization of music was the invention of the low-cost lithographic process. In 1796, the first printing of musical notes to use lithography appeared. The process was successful and henceforth was used by all the major music publishers. Quickly, a new music repertoire came into being, which contained songs and dances from different parts of the world, and which was distributed en masse. In addition, piano scores from operas and symphonies were produced on a large scale since the piano had advanced to become the fashionable instrument of the 19th century. Gradually, a broad movement of lay music (all *higher daughters* had to learn to play the piano) and the profession of a free musician evolved, who would play at weddings, funerals, and feasts.

In the course of industrialization, towns started to grow and to turn into centers of trade and industry. These conurbations became the birthplace of the mass culture that was brewing. After a hard day's work, people now made use of their free time in a way that had previously not existed. Live music in restaurants and coffeehouses, or the use of popular music to offer goods for sale, grew in prevalence.

Parallel to that, music making in the home reached its zenith, and the music publishers concentrated their efforts on producing printed music editions for private home use, landing huge sales of easy scores, which were sold in their millions, one such being the piece "La Prière d'une Vierge" ("A Virgin's Prayer") by the Polish pianist and composer Tekla Bądarzewska-Baranowska. In the mid-19th century, starting in Vienna, the waltz advanced triumphantly. It became highly popular dance music for Europe and spread rapidly across the whole continent. In Vienna, the Strauss family developed the waltz from a sort of family business into a phenomenon for the masses. One new element was that people danced as couples and no longer as a group.

At the end of the 19th century, in the German-speaking areas of Europe, the genre of operetta or *little opera* was celebrating major success. Individual parts from these mostly light hearted works became popular melodies or hits, for instance, the duet "Schenk mir doch ein bißchen Liebe" ("Give Me Just a Little Love"), taken from the operetta *Frau Luna* by Paul Lincke (composition) and Heinz Bolten-Baeckers (libretto), first performed in Berlin in 1899.

In 1877, the American inventor Thomas Alva Edison created a machine for the mechanical recording of sound waves, which he called the phonograph. With this invention, the ground was prepared for the mass, commercial reproduction of performed music. Only a few years later, the gramophone was developed by the German-born American inventor Emil Berliner. This together with sound broadcasting and the introduction of the radio

in the early 1920s brought music into private households and thus structured from that time onward the lives of people in the United States and Europe.

Jazz

At the beginning of the 20th century, musical developments and developments in music technology intensified in various parts of the world. In the United States, many musicians from rural regions moved to large cities like Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York, not only in order to get their guitar-heavy, vocal roots music or American folk music (blues, country, folk, gospel, etc.) documented by the budding recording industry but also to perform live or on the radio. In New Orleans, a multicultural center of the Southern states, a new form of music was starting up, which came to be called jazz. With an intermediate stop in Chicago, this percussion- and wind-based music spread rapidly in the direction of New York and from there throughout the world. In the 1930s and 1940s, jazz became the first popular music to achieve worldwide attention. Swing, a subordinate form, even produced the first genuine youth culture, the so-called *Swing Kids*. That was due firstly to the fact that swing music was omnipresent in American films and in the radio programs of the time and then to the circumstance that American soldiers had imported it into Europe, where it was interpreted by the opponents of the National Socialists as the sound of freedom, not least because of the resonance in the music of the African American history of slavery, its abolition, and the subsequent struggle for equal rights under law. A further important reason for its comprehensive success was surely also the fact that swing music—at least at that time—was not only music to listen to but also to dance to (swing dance).

Popular music from Central and South America was also in great favor in the 20th century, in large part because of its electrifying rhythmic qualities, imparted via expressive dances like the maxixe, the samba, paso doble, rumba, tango, mambo, and cha-cha. In Europe, up until the 1930s, these styles of music and the associated dances still operated under the collective name of jazz, which came to mean especially rhythmic, exotic, and danceable.

From the mid-1940s onward, jazz developed increasingly into instrumental avant-garde music for specialists (bebop and symphonic jazz), whereupon the public turned away from it. In its place, a new type of music called rhythm 'n' blues was arousing great interest, with its presentation of the electric guitar, alongside the saxophone, as its main instrument. In addition, a small rhythm group formed the basis for singing in the tradition of the blues, with its suggestive texts. This form of music was performed principally by Afro-Americans (e.g., Louis Jordan) and is now recognized as a precursor of the supposedly *white* rock 'n' roll.

Rock 'n' Roll and Folk Music

At approximately the same time, that is, about the middle of the 20th century, the American folk and roots music movement underwent a comeback and smoothed the way for a new sort of musician (based on an old model), bearing the name singer-songwriter. As a rule, singers accompanied themselves on an acoustic guitar and sang about everyday life and the hard lives led by ordinary workers, day laborers, and itinerant journeymen. This musical renaissance of an earlier, idealized, rural age aroused the interest of student audiences and created the blueprint for the later hippie movement.

Before that, in the mid-1950s, rock 'n' roll, which many authors see as the true archetype of popular music, evolved from rhythm 'n' blues and American roots music. However, there is debate about what exactly distinguishes rock 'n' roll from its musical predecessors. Some authors claim that it is simply a cleverly applied sales ticket, with effectively nothing behind it. If at all, then we can only speak about a successful fusion of blues, country, boogie-woogie, jazz, and rhythm 'n' blues. The reasons given for the phenomenal success of the two main American representatives of rock 'n' roll—Elvis Presley und Bill Haley—are as follows: their con-

stant presence in the major American TV and radio shows of the time; in particular, the bribing of disc jockeys, who constantly played the latest singles over and over again; the growing strength of Sun Records and Chess Records, two rock 'n' roll record companies, and consequently the breaking of the monopoly of the American record market; the placement of music and the rock 'n' roll protagonists in elaborately produced cinema films; plus the establishment of a style of dance of the same name (which borrowed heavily from swing dance). Taking the long view, the international hype surrounding rock 'n' roll only lasted 5 years (1954–1959).

Beat Music

As had happened on previous occasions, with the massive support of all available means of marketing, a new musical direction was proclaimed, and a few major representatives were sent into the fray. This time, however, they came from Europe, and more precisely from the United Kingdom, and the music which they performed went by the name of beat music. Musicians were newly marketed as compact bands, which were composed of individuals but which in the end would function as a single unit. This led to the casting band format, in which every musician involved had to play a particular role (the go-getter or daredevil, the shy one, the musical leader, etc.). The music industry's coup de resistance was the construction of a rivalry between two successful bands, in this case between The Beatles and The Rolling Stones. While the one band had the image of well-behaved and musically sophisticated sunny boys (The Beatles), the others were built up to be the rough and musically harder bad boys (The Rolling Stones). The success of this strategy was so complete that it turned into such a fast-selling item that it actually led the two bands in different musical directions.

In the second half of the 1960s, beat music transformed itself into rock music through amplification and distortion of the electric guitar's sound. Once again, the impulses emanated from America and Britain. Popular bands and musicians of this genre with its heavy guitar and blues elements were—besides The Rolling Stones—for example, The Who, The Cream, or the band-accompanying guitarist Jimi Hendrix. In order to be able to characterize in words, the sound's degree of harsh abrasiveness together with the massive volume, the term *hard rock* was introduced at the end of the 1960s.

Hippie Movement

Simultaneously, society in North America and Europe went through a period of change, in which rock or popular music played an important role. The so-called *Hippie movement* and the *open-air festival culture* associated with it made social upheavals visible, culminating in the *Summer of Love* in 1967. That summer approximately 200,000 people gathered at the Monterrey Pop Festival in Monterey, California, not only to listen to the rock music, which had been announced, but also to hear the spiritually charged Indian *raga* music of the sitar virtuoso Ravi Shankar. One year later, the peaceful revolution of the Love and Peace Generation came to pass in Europe, too, going down in the annals of history as the legendary year 1968 with its attendant student movement (Prague, Paris, Berlin, and Warsaw). Finally, in 1969, 400,000 people gathered at the Woodstock festival in upstate New York. Although many of the stars of the time were not present (The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, The Doors, Johnny Cash, etc.), the festival was stylized after the event into a musical climax of hippie culture since 32 bands and solo musicians of the most varied hues (blues, folk, rock, and soul) shared the stage. The momentary proximity of popular music and sociopolitical concerns (antiwar movement, sexual freedom) had a lasting effect, at least concerning the exaggerated reception by journalists and academics. Considered from another perspective, a coolly calculating music business formed from the popular music of the 1960s, which acted in a synchronized fashion worldwide.

In the 1980s, all these stylistic branches merged and flowed into one major river of the so-called *pop*, which appeared to level out the musical differences with the aid of technical equipment (synthesizers, samplers, drum and bass machines, personal computers, etc.). Out of the styles that had previously preserved their

local roots, a steady stream of global artists and genres emerged—as a result of the planned internationalization of the pop business. These could still be identified by name, but their sound aesthetics otherwise converged. The promotion of retro waves in the current latest sound garb was bound to awaken the impression in schooled observers that what was going on here was the return of musically identical material, with the only difference being the technical equipment. The pop system effectively closed down and entered into an aging process, which led to historification (films, books, and magazines) and to its museum-like curated display (halls of fame and best of compilations). In the meantime, popular music operates largely autopoietically, rediscovering itself and being rediscovered at regular intervals.

See also Afropop; Audio Recording; Blues; British Invasion; Commercial Music; Copyright; DJ Culture; Europop; Folk Music; Gender Studies and Music; Generation; Globalization; Identity, Music and; Jazz as a Movement; Karaoke; Love Songs; Media; Music Industry; Popular Music, as a Movement; Protest Music; Rock; Roots Music; Songwriting; Sound Ideals; Sound Recording; Subculture; Underground Music; World Music

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