American Popular Music

Camptown Races
How do we define Popular Music?

- Positioned between Classical Music and Folk Music
- Classical - upper class
  - wealthy
- Popular - middle class
  - the masses
- Folk - lower class
  - Rural, working
Defining Popular Music

- Music that appeals to a mass audience
  - Large number of Americans listen

- *Intended* to have wide appeal
  - mass produced, disseminated via mass media

- Has a sound and style distinct from classical or folk music.
Ways to Talk About Music

- Elements of Popular Music
  - Instrumentation
  - Dynamics
  - Form/Structure
  - Rhythm
    - Beat, Syncopation, Tempo
  - Melody, Harmony
  - Scales, Chords
  - Lyrics
  - Historical/Cultural context
British Isle emigrants brought musical traditions to America

Lower class in isolated, rural areas

“Barbry Allen”
- Ballad - simple song with lyrics that tell story
- Pentatonic scale (5 note)
- Strophic - several stanzas sung to same melody
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Text</th>
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</table>
| 0:00 | All in the merry month of May  
When the green buds they were swellin’,  
Young William Green on his deathbed lay  
For the love of Barbary Allen. |
| 0:23 | He sent his servant to the town  
To the place where she was dwellin’  
Sayin’, “Master’s sick and he sends for you  
If your name be Barbary Allen.” |
| 0:49 | So slow-lie [slowly], slow-lie she got up  
And slow-lie she came a-nigh [near] him  
And all she said when she got there  
“Young man, I believe you’re dyin’.” |
| 1:12 | “Oh yes, I’m low, I’m very low,  
And death is on me dwellin’  
No better, no better I’ll never be  
If I can’t get Barbary Allen.” |
| 1:37 | “Oh yes, you’re low and very low,  
And death is on you dwellin’  
No better, no better you’ll never be  
For you can’t get Barbary Allen.” |
| 2:00 | For don’t you remember in yonder’s town  
In yonder’s town a-drinkin’  
You passed your glass all around and around  
And you slighted Barbary Allen.” |
| 2:27 | “Oh yes, I remember in yonder’s town  
In yonder’s town a-drinkin’  
I gave my health to the ladies all around  
But my heart to Barbary Allen.” |
| 2:52 | He turned his pale face to the wall  
For death was on him dwellin’  
“Adieu, adieu, you good neighbors all  
Adieu, sweet Barbary Allen.” |
| 3:17 | As she was goin’ across the fields  
She heard those death bells a-knellin’ [ringing]  
And every stroke the deathbell give  
Hard hearted Barbary Allen. |
| 3:44 | “Oh Mother, oh Mother, go make my bed,  
Go make it both long and narrow  
Young William’s died for me today  
And I’ll die for him tomorrow.” |
| 4:09 | Oh she was buried ‘neath the old church tower  
And he was buried a-nigh [near] her  
And out of his bosom grew a red, red rose,  
Out of Barbary’s grew a green briar. |
| 4:35 | They grew and they grew up the old church tower,  
Until they could grow no higher  
They locked and tied in a true lover’s knot,  
Red rose wrapped around the green briar. |
Slaves brought to America 17th and 18th ce.

Black Spiritual - most impressive and extensive repertory created by slaves
- Conversion to evangelical Christianity
- Call and response singing
- Improvisation
- Clapping, dancing
- Polyrhythms - many rhythms, textures
- Syncopation
Rosie

- Alan Lomax (1947)
  - Mississippi State Penitentiary

- “Rosie” - 1947
  - Time the song to work at hand

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**ACTIVE LISTENING 4.3**

_“Rosie”—Excerpt from First Verse with Call-and-Response_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTER NUMBER</th>
<th>COMMENTARY</th>
<th>LYRICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0:01</td>
<td>Axes sound, call (leader).</td>
<td>Be my woman, gal I’ll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:04</td>
<td>Axes sound, response (leader and group).</td>
<td>Be your man.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:07</td>
<td>Axes sound, call (again).</td>
<td>Be my woman, gal, I’ll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:11</td>
<td>Axes sound, response (again).</td>
<td>Be your man.</td>
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African American Streams

- Banjo
  - Evidence of West African traditions in U.S.
  - Slaves played prototype of banjo
  - Rural musicians adopted
  - Associated with bluegrass music
Latin American Stream

- Caribbean, South American and Mexican influences
  - Cuban Son, Brazilian Samba, Mexican Mariachi, Colombian Cumbia

- Cuban Contradanza- African influenced variation of French country dance
  - Known as Habanera in Europe
    - influenced ragtime, blues and jazz in U.S.
“Tu”- Eduardo Sanchez
- Considered first Cuban hit song
- Habanera rhythm
- Syncopated bass rhythm
Stephen Foster

- Father of American Music
- Parlor Songs
  - “Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair”
- Minstrel Songs
  - “Camptown Races” - 1850
  - “Oh Susanna” - 1848
Minstrel Show

- Loosely Structured
- No plot or storyline
- At least 3 Minstrels
  - Interlocutor
  - 2 endmen: Tambo and Bones
  - Zip Coon and Jim Crow
  - Rest of troupe filled the gaps
Blackface Minstrelsy
Al Jolson

- “Camptown Races”
  - or “Gwine to Run All Night”
  - Perpetuates a false African American National identity
Who is Missing?

- Women!
- Men cross-dress in Minstrel performances
- Target of sexist and misogynist jokes
  - “Who was that lady I saw you with last night? That was no lady, that was my wife”
“Kneed ‘Em”

- Mr. Cleveland, why are men like dough?
  - Because they are apt to rise?
- No, sah.
  - Then because some are light, and some are heavy?
- No sah.
  - Then why are men like dough?
- Because de women (k) need ‘em
Blackface serves as a *mask* for white males
- Gender Performance
- Identity expression
- Political/social commentary/critique

Al Jolson
- Some questioned sexual orientation
- Mask for true self expression?
Post Civil War

- Blacks perform in blackface
  - Self parody
  - Reinforcing stereotypes
  - Reclaiming stereotypes
  - Empowered through employment

- More irony
  - Blackface as a mask for blacks to poke fun at whites poking fun at blacks
Cultural appropriation: the act of taking or using elements from a culture that is not your own, especially without showing that you understand or respect this culture.
Appropriation

- To go further...
- The community that adopts cultural elements **benefits**, while the community from which these elements are borrowed, does not.

- In what ways does appropriation exist today?