



AMERICAN MUSIC

American music is American and ... international. This seemingly contradictory sentence may be short, but it is the most accurate description of the music that has been created, performed and enjoyed in the United States and in the rest of the world.

The American melting pot melted not only manifold traditions, customs and tastes, but also accents and music. The outcome was a unique whole with distinctly audible ingredients.

Jazz, which originated in New Orleans at the beginning of the 20th century, had its roots in African rhythms.

Blues, on the other hand, was not paralleled any place else, though it was first sung by the black slaves in the South.

Country Western music depicts the life and nature of the American South and West. It does have its unmistakably characteristic sound; a reflection of vast prairies and canyons, rivers, valleys and life in a covered wagon.

The mid -1950s brought a new kind of music whose destiny was to win the music stages all over the world, a combination of blues, rhythm and country: rock and roll. The King of Rock and Roll, Elvis Presley, first covered black singers, but soon introduced his original tunes



Carrie Underwood poses before the 49th Annual Grammy Awards Sunday, Feb. 11, 2007, in Los Angeles. Underwood won the Grammy for Best New Artist. Photo © AP Images/Matt Sayles)

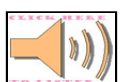
and gained recognition for his sensuous, velvety voice.

Ballads, originally brought mostly from Ireland and passed on from generation to generation by the descendants of their Irish forefathers, reached their apogee in the 1960s with Bob Dylan and other folk singers, who used music as an expression of political protest.

The history of popular music since the 1970s includes a wide variety of styles such as folk, salsa, new wave, funk, reggae, heavy metal, acid rock, punk rock, rap, hip hop, acid jazz, techno, R&B and world music.

Musicals and movie scores are yet another example of the originality and attractiveness of American music. Last but not least, there come orchestras and choruses with their virtuoso performances of classical music. The names of American composers such as George Gershwin, Aaron Copland, Bernard Herrmann, John Corigliano, and Philip Glass are recognizable worldwide, and classical music audiences, including young music lovers, are growing in number.

One thing, however, might be a decisive factor for the popularity of American music. In the music that comes from this land of immigrants, all nations can discern their own note or two.





American poet T.S. Eliot at age 6
Photo © AP Images

MUSICAL

Macavity, Asparagus, Grizabella, Old Deuteronomy, Rum Tum Tugger, Mungojerrie, Rumpleteazer, Skimbleshanks, Munkustrap, and many more similarly complicated words, are all names of cats since:

*... a cat needs a name that's particular,
A name that's peculiar, and more dignified,
Else how can he keep up his tail perpendicular.
Or spread his whiskers, or cherish his pride?*

The man who invented the above quoted names wrote a collection of poems about a clan of cats, describing their habits, characters and life stories. He can be seen in the photograph above at the age of 6.

He is Thomas Stearns Eliot (or T.S. Eliot for short), one of the greatest American and English poets of the 20th century. Though he moved to London after finishing university and made England his home, he always repeated that without his native United States, without St. Louis, where he was born in 1888, and without his experience of the American landscape, which he wrote about in his poems, he wouldn't have been the poet he was.

It definitely was his father, and his fondness of cats, that inspired T.S. Eliot to write his lightest and most humorous collection of poems "The Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats".

Andrew Lloyd Weber composed music to the poems, and this is how one of the most popular musicals of all time, "Cats", was born.

Americans really enjoy MUSICALS. The atmosphere of a pic-

turesque spectacle, large audiences, splendid stage sets, dancing and singing, colors and lights have all contributed to the popularity of the genre.

The musical "Cats" has been translated into 20 languages. It made its Broadway debut on October 7, 1982 to become one of the longest running musicals with more than 6,100 performances. "Cats" was made in a video version by Andrew Lloyd Weber, but it is still running live on some stages.



Musical "Cats" premiere in Berlin on October 21, 2002 Photo © AP Images

MUSIC AWARDS IN THE U.S.:

- The American Music Awards
- The Grammy Awards
- The Billboard Music Awards
- The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony

Some of the last year's American Music Awards winners in the category of pop/rock music included **Sean Paul, Kelly Clarkson and Red Hot Chili Peppers.**

THE GRAMMY AWARDS



The Grammy Award
Photo © AP Images

The Grammy Awards (originally The Gramophone Awards) are presented annually (usually in February) by the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences of the United States for outstanding achievements in the record industry. They are now awarded in 108 (!) categories within more than 20 musical genres. In February 2007 the 49th ceremony was held at the Staples Center in Los Angeles.

MUSIC IN LIGHTER TONES

1. The chief objection to playing wind instruments is that it prolongs the life of the player. (*George Bernard Shaw*)
2. What is worse than a flute? Two flutes. (*Anonymous*)
3. Music is the only language in which you cannot say a mean or sarcastic thing. (*John Erskine*)

(selected from: *A Treasury of Humorous Quotations*)

New hits are everywhere. The video clips help us run on the track in the gym, the beat and the rhythm that emanate through the ear phones quicken our pace as we walk down the ever so busy streets. We dance to this music, we hum it in the bathroom, we drive, cook, learn, and so on and so on, with this music in the background. But do we actually listen to it? I mean, listen to the words? Read the lyrics? What are today's music stars singing about?

Love, of course. Unfortunately, this is mostly love miserable, one-sided, unreciprocated, broken. **Justin Timberlake**, for example, sings of a girl who ran away from the one who loved her: "*Don't want to think about it / Don't want to talk about it / I'm just so sick about it / Can't believe it's ending this way.*" He is not surprised; he knew she'd hurt him: "*(should've known better that you were gonna make me cry)*". The consolation for the broken-hearted boy is that life pays back the wrong we do to others. This is the beautiful chorus: "*What goes around, goes around, goes around / Comes all the way back around.*" ('What Goes About')

We hear about the hardships of love, but also of its power to heal, help and forget the past in **Daughtry's** song 'It's Not Over'. Though the title is optimistic, it speaks of a crisis, which may or may not be overcome. The lead singer of the band, Chris Daughtry, sings: "*I'll try to do it right this time around / It's not over (...)/ But a part of me is dead and in the ground. This love is killin me / But you're the only one / It's not over.*"

It's not only men who are now singing about unhappy love. **Nelly**

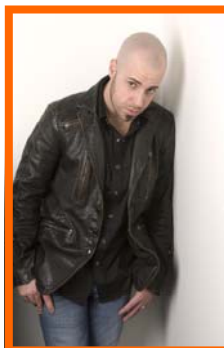
YOUR VOICE IS MUSIC TO MY EARS



Musical group The Fray
Photo © AP Images



Gwen Stefani Photo © AP Images



Chris Daughtry Photo © AP Images



Justin Timberlake, right, places his arm on the shoulder of his wax double at Madame Tussaud's NY wax museum
Photo © AP Images

Furtado in her 'Say It Right' song is torn between contradictory emotions: "*Oh. you don't mean nothing at*

all to me / No you don't mean nothing at all to me / But you know what it takes to set me free / Oh you could mean everything to me."

Another interesting and recurring theme is a wish for some new identity, an escape from the prison of the world's ways into some idyllic fairy tale: "*If I could escape / And recreate a place that's my own world / And I could be your favorite girl / Forever, perfectly together / Tell me boy, now wouldn't that be sweet?*" (**Gwen Stefani**, 'The Sweet Escape').

Lack of identity can be brought about by an attempt to please the audiences or producers. **Mika** sings about this phenomenon in his 'Grace Kelly'. It's no use to: "*try to be like Grace Kelly.../ try a little Freddie*", try to be blue or purple or "anything you like" cause we don't really know what we like. We're waiting to be told. "*Say what you want to satisfy yourself / But you only want what everybody else says you should want.*" Quite sad, isn't it?

A deeper concern and a wider perspective than our own self are revealed through the very emotional lyrics of The Fray's 'How to Save a Life'? The text mentions the complexity of human nature and human sensitivity, which still exists in some people, but is so often neglected. There is a sense of helplessness in a situation that is beyond our capability to help: "*Where did I go wrong, I lost a friend / Somewhere along in the bitterness / And I would have stayed up with you all night / Had I known how to save a life.*"

USEFUL LINK: To listen to traditional American tunes such as 'All Quiet Along the Potomac', 'Dixie Land', 'My Bonnie', 'Oh! Susanna' and lots of others visit:
<http://www.contemplator.com/tunebook/america.htm>

Win a Prize!

The answer in the March 2007 Contest was (one of these):

St. Louis, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Salt Lake City

The winners are:

Karolina from Częstochowa, Agnieszka Musiał from Kraków and Piotr

CONGRATULATIONS

Win a Prize!

APRIL 2007 CONTEST

Which Grammy Awards ceremony will be held in 2008?

Send the answer (with your home address) to:
zoom@usinfo.pl
by May 5, 2007

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in on america

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ZOOM SPECIAL REPORT

Ambassador Ashe Congratulates "Know America" Contest Winners

On March 22, 2007, U.S. Ambassador to Poland, Victor Ashe, hosted 30 high-school students from all over Poland, who were winners in this year's edition of the Know America Contest at a reception at his residence. Ashe gave certificates to each of the 30 winners and handed out sets of books awarded to five schools which had two or more students competing in the finals of the competition. The reception was attended by competition winners, their parents and principals, American studies experts, and representatives of the Ministry of Education.



Ambassador Victor Ashe with the 2007 Know America contest winners

The "Know America" contest is a nationwide competition for high school students from all over Poland that tests knowledge about the United States. For the past four years, the U.S. Embassy has supported the contest by hosting an ambassadorial reception for the competition winners. The purpose of this competition is to motivate youth to use the Internet to communicate and search for information and to expand their knowledge about the world. The competition is for high-school students throughout Poland. The organization which runs the competition, the Rural Development Foundation, was first funded with a \$10 million grant from the United States Congress. Previously, the foundation organized trainings for rural inhabitants running small scale enterprises, agro tourism, environmental protection, the basics of local democracy, and developing citizen awareness. Currently, the Rural Development Foundation supports the economic, social, and cultural initiatives of residents of villages and small towns, and initiatives associated with the improvement of the technical infrastructure of rural areas as well as the development of unconventional sources of energy.

HOW TO TAKE PART IN "KNOW AMERICA" CONTEST

Visit the website of "Fundacja Wspomagania Wsi" (<http://www.fww.org.pl/>) in September/October, when the contest is announced. Then the contest site: www.know-america.org goes live. You register online and get a password. Next step is to answer (in Polish) 80 questions about American culture, history, nature, etc. Sixty top contestants are then invited to write an essay (in Polish) on one of the given topics. The award - a three-day trip to Warsaw - is offered to about 30 winners. They sightsee, visit museums and are received by the U.S. ambassador to Poland.

»DON'T MISS IT«