

100 years of Pop Music

(in the home, on radio, in the music business)

Please take this information with a grain a salt. I am no expert and spent only two or three evenings synthesizing it from old memories and other web sources. Feel free to contact me with corrections and suggestions. I will revise the document from time to time.

1900-1920 – Orchestrated Popular Music and Roots Music

Radio – none

Home – significant number of pianos, some guitars, fiddles, banjos, lots of sheet music

Music urban – bandstand music, formal ballads, minstrel show tunes, ragtime tunes, vaudeville stage music, some early Broadway songs. Towards 1920, seminal jazz and city blues music can be found.

Music rural – fiddle music, cowboy and traditional mountain songs, early country blues

Music industry revenue – sheet music and local theatre and concert hall performance wages

1920-1930 – Improvisation Begins

Radio – 100+ stations provide a limited amount of network drama and comedy, daytime local live music shows begin in late 20's after electronic recording/transmission techniques emerge

Home – pianos, some guitars, some radios and record players

Music urban – mainly orchestrated dance band music in nightclubs and hotel ballrooms with optional megaphone singers. Broadway and Tin pan Alley tunes. Dixieland and improvisational horn based jazz emerge. Urban blues emerges using jazz musicians. The era of the nightclub begins. Crooners define singing styles.

Music rural – fiddle music, country songs, (Grand Ole Opry and Radio create a new market for listeners) country blues matures.

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Music industry revenue – sheet music, local theatre and hall wages, nightclub wages, record sales

1930-1948 – Swing Music and Jazz

Radio - 600 (circa 1940) stations provide a full roster of network drama, comedy and dance band and singer based shows, day time local live music thrives

Home – many radios, fewer record players, some guitars, many underused pianos

Music urban – swing band songs (with vocalist optional). Broadway, movie musical songs, Tin Pan Alley songs, Boogie-woogie. In the early-mid 1940's, Jump, Jive, small jazz combos and Bee Bop emerge as offshoots of swing bands. In the late 1940's R&B emerges from the jump, jive and boogie-woogie and urban blues styles. Jitterbug dancing emerges based on upbeat swing music and is the first concerted young people's style to raise adult eyebrows.

Music rural – Country songs via strong radio support. Western Swing and Cowboy Movie music thrives in the late 1930's. Fiddle music and juke joint blues start out strong but have nearly disappeared by 1948. Roots music styles are also adopted by “union supporting” activist singers who bring it into the big cities.

Music Industry Revenue – dance club and ballroom wages, school auditorium dances, record sales and sheet music

1948-1952 – The Singing Star

Radio – 2300 stations provide network drama, comedy, daytime local live music, some recorded music begins to be played. Big Band shows dwindling because the bands are breaking up. They can no longer survive on live performance income. Listeners are less inclined to go out to hear music. Black radio stations emerge in some large cities

Home – radio in every house, many record players, some TV's, unused pianos and guitars

Music urban – adult pop tunes, Broadway and Tin Pan Alley, the era of the

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singing star. Modern jazz is born and R&B thrives. Night clubs are significant income source but live performance is losing out to records, radio and TV. A single hit parade covers all styles except most Black music supported by dedicated stations in large cities. Electric Chicago style blues emerges. The era of the formal Hit Parade arrives.

Music rural – big time country music spends a lot more time in the recording studio and some songs begin to cross over into mainstream pop, sometimes covered by pop artists. The Country & Western hit parade chart is born. Country blues barely subsists.

Music Industry Revenue – record sales, increasing airplay royalties, club wages.

1953-1959 – The Singles Era

Rock arrives and incorporates 1940's jitterbug dancing. It limits careers of adult pop stars like Patti Page, Tony Bennett and Nat King Cole. Pop artists begin to cover "softer" versions of R&B songs. R&B crosses over and coexists with rock/pop for next 15 years or more while still getting exclusive access on urban Black stations. Rock and R&B win most young ears except in "country music" territory. Most young people have no problem listening to a mix of rock R&B and "Perry Como" pop which coexists on the same station playlist. They like rock and R&B best and claim it as their own but still thoroughly enjoy and buy "pop" records. The rock/R&B/pop chart is born. The age of the hi-fidelity long-playing album has arrived but singles still dominate. Adults willingly gravitate to albums.

1960-1964 – The Industry Finally Digests Rock and R&B

Radio – 2300 AM stations all playing records (huge loss of audience due to television) two main station types - rock/R&B/pop stations and adult pop stations, plus some R&B and Country stations. FM is just an infant.

Home – radio, TV and record player in every house

Music urban – young people listen to the rock/R&B/pop chart. Adults avoid the rock sound in favour of softer Pop stations with less emphasis on the Hit Parade top 40 concept. The Record Industry has finally got a handle on Rock and R&B

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and in the process has robbed Rock of some of its raw, rebel quality. Adults increasing learn to tolerate rock/R&B. The British arrive and fully define the concept of the rock band. Previously, the chart was dominated by singers backed by un-credited musicians.

Music rural – Big country music thrives but true rural roots music is a thing of the past. Some of its spirit continues in the form of city based Folk music

Music industry revenue - record sales and airplay royalties are the mainstay. Live club venues are sparse but some nightclubs still thrive on adult pop acts e.g. Vegas.

1965-1970 – The Songwriter/Performer/Album Alternative to the Singles Hit parade

Protest rock, folk rock and drug-influenced rock emerge to large album sales but only selective radio airplay. Enthusiasts begin to disdain mainstream rock/R&B/pop. Older or more conservative rock/R&B/pop fans dislike the hippie/protest culture and prefer to watch Go-Go dancers. But many listeners continue to enjoy both, with AM radio providing established rock/R&B/pop top 40 songs while record albums provide the alternative/counter-culture/underground/flower-power music. Acts, like The Beatles and The Doors, swim in both streams. The top 40 hit parade exists but no longer contains all popular music styles. Large concert revenues begin to contribute significantly. Stereo recordings now dominate and most people have switched to stereo equipment by 1970.

1970-1971 – Divergence

Radio - New “alternative” FM stations emerge (from moribund Mantovani frequencies) focusing on album music and counter-culture. Co-incident with the emerging Black Power movement, some Black music now takes on a new more militant and autonomous edge, disdaining some of the melodic, chordal and harmonic sophistication created by Black musicians in the earlier decades which transformed and liberated White musicians’ styles. The long established single audience of the rock/R&B/pop chart (respecting and enjoying each others’ music styles) now begins to fragment. Black music still retains a strong presence on the mainstream chart.

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1972-1973 – Convergence and The Era of the Creative Artists

AM Radio music stations are combining their play lists (top 40) with Alternative (hippie) album tracks and relocating to their sister FM frequencies, frequently forcibly replacing the format of 1970 FM stations which pioneered Alternative broadcasting. It's the co-opting of 60's alternative music. The AM frequencies begin to convert to Talk based programming. Hard Rock emerges as its own genre and some fans begin to disdain broad based play lists in favor of their favourite style. The counter-culture ethic has dissipated as businessmen sport long hair and colorful clothing. The reformed Top 40 hit parade once again dominates most radio music stations except Black and Country ones but the fragmentation that began in the mid 60's is increasing. Television finally begins to provide high quality rock/R&B/pop shows in contrast to the "quaint" and sparse access provided in the Ed Sullivan era. Performers who don't write and songwriters who don't perform have significantly less access to the top 40, but country and R&B still rely on the back room songwriter. Did this new requirement to both write and perform whole albums contribute to a dilution in the quality of the pop charts? How many great writers took early retirement? How many great performers?

1974-1978 – Industry Rule Consolidated

Disco, Punk and Break-dancing emerge. Disco and new Black music styles are comfortably absorbed into the mainstream rock/R&B/pop market but punk is too jarring for non-devotees. The cocaine era begins in earnest. A mainstream listener finds fewer popular songs enjoyable than he/she did in the 1960's and earlier. At the individual level, there's more to hear but less to like because of the genre phenomenon and possibly the reduced supply of dedicated songwriters. We learn to enjoy as much of what we're given by the Industry as possible since there's no escaping it on radio. Go-Go dancing enthusiasts from the 60's finally have Disco to satisfy needs that mere "listening to music" cannot. The big concert era is now in full bloom.

1980 – Rebellion Resurfaces

Following on the example of Punk; RAP/ Hip Hop and New Wave emerge and Punk expands its influence. Country music begins to reassert itself and woos disaffected rock/R&B/pop fans. Rebellion in 1956 was a cheeky talking back to

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parents and getting a rise out of old fuddy-duddies Rebellion in 1965 was an attempt to infuse a materialistic and unjust society with altruism and personal expression. Rebellion in 1980 came from anger at long-standing class oppression; and anti-social attitudes and angst burned in from years of sub-functional social and family life.

1982

Heavy Metal emerges based on hard rock. It mainly appeals to the macho side of young white males. The Video age begins.

1990 – now

RAP/Hip Hop is entrenched and becomes mainstream by the end of the decade with many white practitioners joining the trend. Sub-genres of Hip Hop emerge with polarized fans. Other special streams become entrenched e.g. Dance, Techno, Alt-rock. Many listeners are exclusive to their genres but a significant mainstream audience still cherry picks from various genres. Manufactured “teen appeal” superstars re-emerge. There are still rock/R&B/pop, Black and country music charts but many listeners only focus when their style of music is being played. The Internet begins to threaten the control over music exercised by the Recording Industry for much of the 20th century. It's now possible for curious Internet users to access much of the interesting popular music of the 20th century; an impossibility in the pay-per-record era and the age of narrow, repetitive radio formats designed to shape public tastes and market industry products.

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