

CURRICULUM GUIDE

Popular Music of the 1900s

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for the Indiana Historical Society Indiana Experience

You Are There 1914 *The Violin Maker Upstairs*



INDIANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Introduction

This lesson coordinates with the You Are There 1914: *The Violin Maker Upstairs* component of the *Indiana Experience* at the Eugene and Marilyn Glick Indiana History Center in Indianapolis. In this experience, visitors are invited to step back in time to 1914 to visit the re-created workshop of stringed instrument maker Joseph Conrath. In his shop, located at 39 Virginia Avenue in Indianapolis, Conrath repaired and crafted stringed instruments, such as violins, violas, guitars, mandolins, banjos, and cellos. As a luthier, or stringed instrument maker, Conrath served the many musicians who participated in Indianapolis's vibrant cultural scene of the early 1900s. New instruments and instrument repair were in demand due to the number of orchestras and musical societies that called Indianapolis home at the time. Though Conrath could not play any of the instruments he made, his skills as a carpenter and singer helped him produce instruments that looked and sounded beautiful.

Conrath was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, to immigrant parents. His mother was German and his father came from Alsace-Lorraine, a region that had passed between Germany and France for many years. In 1914 Alsace-Lorraine was once again a battleground between French and German soldiers. The Conrath family moved to Indianapolis around 1887 and on June 11, 1896, Conrath married Amelia Bush, whose family was also German. Being a part of the city's large German American population, the Conraths might have participated in German cultural societies, such as the Turnverein (a gymnastics and cultural society) or the Mannerchor (a music society). They may have read German-language newspapers or attended one of the city's German churches.

As Hoosiers with close ties to Germany, the Conraths and other German Americans kept tabs on the events in Europe. World War I erupted in Europe after the June 28, 1914, assassination by a Serbian nationalist of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Germany, an ally of Austria-Hungary, declared war on Serbia and its allies. President Woodrow Wilson kept America out of the war until April 1917, when the United

States joined the Allied powers of Serbia, Russia, France, and Great Britain in declaring war on the Central powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary. Leading up to and after America's entry into the war, there was growing anti-German sentiment in the United States.

This curriculum is intended to provide historical context for German American life and culture in Indianapolis in the 1910s. The materials may be used to prepare students for a visit to You Are There 1914: *The Violin Maker Upstairs* or as a follow-up lesson. The historical context and themes are relevant to classroom instruction even if a History Center visit is not possible. The You Are There 1914: *The Violin Maker Upstairs* experience will remain open through September 3, 2011.

Overview/Description

This lesson considers how popular music of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries compares to the music of today. Students will listen to ragtime music from the early 1900s and read lyrics from popular sheet music of the era. Cooperation with a band or music teacher would be helpful.

Grade Level

Middle/intermediate school (grade 8) and high school

Academic Standards

- Indiana Standards (as of March 2010)
 - Grade 8, U. S. History 8.1.31—Obtain historical data from a variety of sources to compare and contrast examples of art, music, and literature during the nineteenth century and explain how these reflect American culture during this time period.
 - High School, U. S. History, Standard 3, Emergence of the Modern United States: 1897 to 1920, USH.3.6—Identify the contributions to American culture made by individuals and groups; U.S. History, Standard 4, Modern United States

Prosperity and Depression: 1920s and 1939, USH.4.2—Describe the development of popular culture; and U.S. History, Standard 9, Historical Thinking, USH.9.2—Locate and analyze primary sources and secondary sources related to an event or issue of the past.

- National Standards
National Council for the Social Studies, *Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* (Washington D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1994)
 - I Culture
 - Explain and give examples of how language, literature, the arts, architecture, other artifacts, traditions, beliefs, values, and behaviors contribute to the development and transmission of culture.
 - IV Individual Development and Identity
 - Relate personal changes to social, cultural, and historical contexts; identify and interpret examples of stereotyping, conformity, and altruism.
 - IX Global Connections
 - Explain how language, art, music, belief systems, and other cultural elements can facilitate global understanding or cause misunderstanding.

Social Studies/Historical Concepts

Ragtime music

Learning/Instructional Objectives

Students will:

- Listen to and analyze examples of ragtime music from the early 1900s.
- Identify the sounds of specific instruments used to perform ragtime music.
- Compare and contrast ragtime music to popular music of today.
- Analyze lyrics from the early 1900s.

Time Required

One to two class periods

Materials Required

- Paper and pencil
- Computer with Internet access and speakers or a DVD player with speakers
- Examples of ragtime music
 - Audio recordings from *Indiana Ragtime: A Documentary Album* produced and annotated by John Edward Hasse and Frank J. Gillis (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 2003). *Indiana Ragtime* is available for purchase as a compact disc set (ISBN: 0-87195-170-3) from the Indiana Historical Society at <http://shop.indianahistory.org/>.
 - Refer to the Additional Resources section on page six for more suggestions.
- Examples sheet music
 - “In Ragtime Land” sheet music from the Indiana Historical Society collection. Download and print a pdf of the sheet music from Indiana University’s “IN Harmony: Sheet Music from Indiana” Web site http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/inharmony/detail.do?action=detail&fullItemID=/ihs/sheetmusic/ihs-SHMU_29_04 or select other sheet music from the “IN Harmony” Web site or other Internet sources. Refer to the Additional Resources section on page six for suggestions.
 - “Sheet-Music Analysis Worksheet”
 - This student handout is provided on pages seven of this lesson.

Background/Historical Context

The arts scene in 1914 Indianapolis was a very vibrant one. A number of theaters and concert halls, including the Murat Theater, provided the

settings for live performances of concert music or as an accompaniment to a play or movie.

The musical life of the city was influenced by German immigrants, who came from a rich musical heritage that produced Beethoven, Bach, and Brahms.¹ Many of the city's musical societies had been established by German immigrants as an outlet for their musical talents. The Mannerchor provides one example of an Indianapolis musical society founded by German immigrants. The Mannerchor started as a small *verein* (club) for a few newly arrived German immigrants with a shared interest in music. However, "The originally informal gatherings developed into rehearsals. There was singing and the playing of music, and in June of 1854, [this] living-room Verein [or society] became the 'Indianapolis Mannerchor.'"² The repertoire originally consisted of German nationalist songs that reflected the political ideals of these newcomers but eventually expanded to include other choral pieces. According to Erik L. Lindseth and Gregory H. Mobley, "For many of the young German-speaking immigrants, the preservation of their musical traditions was an important aspect of their ethnic identity and an [*sic*] crucial part of the German nationalism that had developed in the first half of the nineteenth century."³

The Mannerchor became very active in furthering the Indianapolis musical scene. It held its first public

concert in 1855 and hosted national *saengerfests* (song festivals) in 1858, 1867, and 1908.

While public performances, such as those provided by the Mannerchor, brought music lovers together and contributed to a lively cultural scene, playing music at home was also an important way to experience music in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to Anita Heppner Plotinsky, "Indianapolis residents in the 19th century enjoyed an active and participatory musical life. Music was more than entertainment: it was a shared activity that helped to build community and foster civic pride. Voluntary music associations flourished, as did the serious study of music by ordinary citizens. During the second half of the century performances took place in more than two dozen concert halls and typically involved both amateur and professional musicians."⁴ Music played at home tended to be popular music, rather than the chamber music heard on local stages.

Sheet-music publishers catered to a fledgling American popular music industry that began to grow following the Civil War. Many of the songs we now consider classics were written and performed in this era. Sheet music for these popular songs also made its way into many American parlors. While more and more American homes were equipped with phonographs allowing them to play early records, music was still largely produced at home, where families gathered around the piano or other musical instruments to play and sing together.

The popularity of ragtime music, a style born of African American roots, meant that it could be heard in many home parlors. According to John Edward Hasse and Frank J. Gillis, authors of *Indiana Ragtime*, "In Indiana, as elsewhere, ragtime was performed in many different settings and locales. Above all, it was performed in homes

4. Anita Heppner Plotinsky, "Music, Nineteenth Century," in Bodenhamer and Barrows, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, 1029.

1. Thomas J. Beckiewicz, "Chamber Music," in *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, David J. Bodenhamer and Robert G. Barrows, eds. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 399.

2. "Shaping the Circle, Exhibit—Music: Mannerchor Humble Beginnings," accessed April 29, 2010, http://www-lib.iupui.edu/static/exhibits/circle/exhibit2_1.html.

3. Erik L. Lindseth and Gregory H. Mobley, "Collection Guide for 'Indianapolis Mannerchor Records, 1866–1990 Mss 040'" (Indianapolis: Indiana University–Purdue University at Indianapolis, Ruth Lilly Special Collections and Archives, 2003).

at the old parlor upright pianos—often by younger people playing it against the wishes of their elders.”⁵ In fact, many composers of ragtime and other popular tunes hailed from Indiana—Hoagy Carmichael, Cole Porter, Paul Dresser, and Noble Sissle are all well-known Hoosier composers.⁶

Violins, banjos, guitars, and pianos were typical instruments of the ragtime era. At least one of these instruments could be found in most American homes. In Indianapolis, Conrath’s business catered to amateur home-based musicians as well as professionals. For the most part, Conrath would have repaired instruments, since new violins were considered inferior. He also would have sold bows and other stringed instruments such as guitars, banjos, mandolins, violas, and cellos, as well as sheet music and customized violin cases.

Teacher’s Instructional Plan

Introduction

Teachers should introduce the lesson by discussing the history of ragtime music and its use in the home in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These facts about ragtime music should help further student understanding of this genre of music.

- Ragtime music has its roots in the African-American community. The style is “born of folk music played by traveling black banjoists and pianists in the years prior to the 1890s.”⁷ It is characterized by a combination of dance and march rhythms with a syncopated beat (notes are played on the “off” beat).
- The first printed ragtime sheet music was produced around 1896.⁸
- Ragtime was very popular between the late 1890s through the 1910s. This was largely a

5. *Indiana Ragtime: A Documentry Album*, produced and annotated by John Edward Hasse and Frank J. Gillis (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1981), 6.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., 4.

8. Ibid.

time of optimism in America, when the country’s urban population was rapidly growing. For African Americans, however, this era was ripe with prejudice and discrimination as Jim Crow laws and other restrictions became common.⁹

- This era in Indiana was the golden age for transportation and literature. Indiana became known as the “Crossroads of America” as an extensive network of railroads and interurbans crossed the state. In addition, Indiana writers, such as Booth Tarkington and James Whitcomb Riley, experienced much success during this time.¹⁰

ACTIVITY 1

Listening to Ragtime Music

Procedure

- The teacher should read and discuss ragtime music with the class.
- Divide the class into small groups of no more than four students each.
- Play selections of ragtime music recordings for the students from compact discs or download selections from Web sites on the Internet. Refer to page six of this lesson for suggested Web sites.
- After playing the selections, each group will discuss and write answers to the following questions: What instruments do you hear in these songs? Describe the music you hear. How does the music make you feel while listening to it? What instruments in today’s music are missing in these recordings? Could you dance to this music? Why do you think this style of music was so popular?
- For students who may be unfamiliar with musical instruments, cooperation with the school’s instrumental music teacher and the school’s music students would be helpful. The music teacher and/or music students could play different musical instruments so

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

that students could hear them more clearly and become better able to identify them when they hear the musical selections.

ACTIVITY 2

Interpreting 1900s Sheet-Music Lyrics

Procedure

- Introduce the lesson by helping students to understand what sheet music is and why performers might have used it in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sample questions might include: What was its purpose? Who might use it? Why do you think sheet music was so popular at that time? Then ask students to consider the following questions: Is sheet music still as popular today? Why/why not? Where might sheet music still be used today? What may have replaced sheet music today?
- Divide the class into small groups.
- Distribute copies of the “Sheet-Music Analysis Worksheet” provided on pages seven of this lesson. Have students complete the worksheet.
- Download a copy of the tune “In Ragtime Land” from the “IN Harmony: Sheet from Indiana” Web site, last accessed on December 3, 2010 at http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/inharmony/detail.do?action=detail&fullItemID=/ihs/sheetmusic/ihs-SHMU_29_04. Provide copies of the sheet music to each group.
- To conclude the lesson, ask students to discuss the sheet-music lyrics. Explain the meaning of words or phrases that may be unfamiliar to the students. What topics might the students select for a popular song? Compare and contrast these choices with topics that songwriters might have selected for popular music in the early twentieth century. The teacher may need to guide the class discussion to identify the key topics and reasons for their responses.

Assessment

At the conclusion of these activities students should be able to successfully identify ragtime music as consisting of mostly piano, stringed instruments, or full orchestration, as opposed to today’s pop or rock music, which is comprised of drums and electronic instruments such as guitar, bass, and keyboard. Students should also recognize that ragtime music relied on the melody as the focal point, not the lyrics. They will also be able to explain that lyrics for popular music are often based on simple topics or themes that would be familiar to many people.

Suggested Modifications

Introduce students to stringed instruments by having them make a cigar box guitar, violin, or banjo. Refer to the Additional Resources section on page six for Web sites offering instructions for making cigar box instruments. After making the instruments, students would have a greater understanding of how these instruments might be played.

Have students compare the lyrics of ragtime music from different songwriters. Refer to Web sites listed in the Additional Resources section on page six of this lesson.

Ask students to compare the lyrics of ragtime music with popular songs of today. (Teachers may want to preview student music selections to avoid those which may have questionable language or subject matter.)

Have students research ragtime composers, who might include Scott Joplin, Tom Turpin, Jellyroll Morton, Hoagy Carmichael, Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, Paul Dresser, or Russell Smith among others.

Have students research the term “tin pan alley,” discuss what this means, and its effect on popular music of the day.

Additional Resources

Audio Recordings

Hasse, John E., and Frank J. Gillis. *Indiana Ragtime: A Documentary Album*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1981.

Audio recording and pamphlet relating to Indiana's ragtime musical heritage.

Web Sites

Academy for the Promotion and Advancement of Science Education. "Sounds Like Science—Guitars." Accessed March 31, 2010. <http://www.reachoutmichigan.org/funexperiments/agesubject/lessons/other/una5.html>.

Instruction for science activities related to music and sound.

EnchantedLearning.com. "Box Guitar." Accessed March 31, 2010. <http://www.enchantedlearning.com/crafts/Boxguitar.shtml>.

Instructions for making a cigar box musical instrument.

Indiana University, Bloomington. "IN Harmony: Sheet Music from Indiana." Accessed December 3, 2010. <http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/inharmony/welcome.do/>.

This site features Indiana-related sheet music, including sheet music by Indiana composers, arrangers, lyricists, or publishers, as well as sheet music about the state.

Library of Congress. "African-American Sheet Music." Accessed April 2, 2010. <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/sheetmusic/brown/>.

Sheet music from the collection of Brown University with links to related classroom resources.

Library of Congress. "Historic American Sheet Music: 1850-1920." Accessed April, 2, 2010. <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award97/ncdhtml/hasmhome.html>.

Sheet music selections from the collection of Duke University with related classroom resources.

"Old Time Victrola Music." Accessed April 2, 2010. <http://www.besmark.com/>.

Audio recordings of period music.

Speal, Shane. "Cigar Box Nation: The #1 source for all things Cigar Box Guitar." Accessed March 31, 2010. <http://www.cigarboxnation.com>.

Instructions for making a cigar box musical instrument.

The Parlor Songs Association. "Parlor Songs: Popular Sheet Music from the 1800s to the 1920s." Accessed April, 2, 2010. <http://www.parlorsongs.com>.

Audio recordings of popular music from the era.

———. "Enduring American Song Hits: The Best of American Popular Song, Part 2, 1910–1920." Accessed April, 2, 2010. <http://parlorsongs.com/issues/2002-2/thismonth/feature.php>.

University of Houston, Digital History. "Historical Music." Accessed April, 2, 2010. <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/audio/music.cfm>.

Audio recordings and classroom resources.

Unplug Your Kids. "Easy Homemade Musical Instruments." Accessed March 31, 2010. <http://www.unplugyourkids.com/?s=make+a+guitar&x=13&y=4>.

Instructions for making a cigar box guitar.

“Sheet–Music Analysis Worksheet”

Instructions:

Examine the sheet music and respond to each question. Be prepared to discuss your responses in class.

1. What is the song’s title?
2. Who wrote the lyrics (words)?
3. Who composed the music?
4. What is the publisher’s name and location?
5. What is the copyright date?
6. What is the song’s main theme or message?

7. What happens in this musical story?

8. Where does the story take place?

9. What is the song’s mood? How does it make you feel?

10. What words or phrases in the lyrics are new to you?

11. If you were able to hear the song’s music and lyrics, how might this help you better understand the mood, message, or theme?

12. Who is the intended audience for this song?

13. Where do you think this music might be heard?

14. What songs from today can you name that have lyrics similar to this one?

15. How does this song compare to your favorite music? How are they alike? How are they different?