

Essay on impact of jewish americans in popularizing african american music styles...

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African American music is a collective term used to refer to various musical styles made popular in the early centuries. It encompasses European and American influences in music that created an entirely new musical genre. It has traces of diverse cultural backgrounds and beliefs mixed with real-life happenings voiced out through meaningful lyrics and music. The combination of such musical influences paved the way for the development of a range of music styles such as blues, jazz, gospel, and rap music, among others. In all these developments, Jewish Americans have been in the forefront in introducing and influencing the African American music styles of today.

Among those who helped shape the music industry are Irwin Berlin and the Gershwin Brothers. Originally, African American music was considered as unpolished and unsophisticated (Goffman 1) considering that those songs often spoke of mourning, pain, melancholy, oppression, bad luck, and hardship, among others. The lyrics were often sentimental and spoke volumes about the slaves' deep, authentic emotions (Kopp). Despite how European Americans originally viewed the unfamiliar music, African American music slowly gained acceptance as it was not only viewed as a form of entertainment but recognized as serious music as well (Goffman 2). However, similar to African American composers who wrote songs out of experience or their observations, Jewish American composers also did the same, that is, write based on their own experiences of oppression, especially during the period prior to the Great Depression. The Blues, for instance, came about as heard from slaves' songs that bespoke of love, betrayal, marriage, and bad luck, among others.

Later on, Tin Pan Alley became popular among music writers and composers, which was a derogatory description of a reporter tasked to write about the "new business of sheet music publishing" ("Tin Pan Alley: 1880-1953") in Manhattan. According to studies, New York became the central location where songwriters and publishers converged. With various sounds and inharmonious music emanating from pianos along the block, the disharmony produced a sound similar to banging tin pans. This period gave wanna-be musicians and music publishers the chance to demonstrate the music they hoped would sell, considering that this was the period when "a song's popularity was determined not by the number of records it sold but by the number of sheet music copies it sold" ("Tin Pan Alley: 1880-1953").

While Tin Pan Alley focused on ballads and novelty songs, musical genres such as the blues and jazz were soon introduced, alongside with ragtime music, which was an approach to changing existing masterpieces by applying a "ragging" effect, also known as syncopation (Goffman 3). Most often, it sounded like marches, giving existing songs a new twist. As people looked for new music flavors, jazz was slowly unseating ragtime as the music of choice. Jazz was considered "as a syncopated version of the Blues" (Goffman 4) although a clear distinction between the Blues and jazz is still hard to come by.

In all, African American music, while initially thought out to be a great fusion of various cultures, not only compensated the original makers of the music, but also those who had the guts to borrow the music and recreate new music from the old. With the help of Jewish American musicians and composers,

both African American music styles and Tin Pan Alley are permanently stamped in the history of the music industry.

Works Cited

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