

zeitraum der vorletzten Jahrhundertwende tat. Ungleich näher ist zugleich die heutige Praxis an den ästhetischen Festlegungen, die damals getroffen wurden, verglichen mit der Distanz der damaligen Bemühungen zu dem, was vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg in der reichen amerikanischen Vokalquartettsszene vonstatten ging.⁴⁷ So erweist sich die Barbershop Harmony als instruktives Beispiel dafür, wie ein »Traditionalist Genre« nicht einfach entsteht, sondern aktiv geschaffen werden kann und dies abseits der etablierten Strukturen von Musikindustrie, Massenmedien und musikalischem Mainstream.

Summary

This article is a case study about the American genre of four-part a cappella music called Barbershop Harmony. At the same time, it deals with a model of genre theory developed recently by Jennifer C. Lena that includes a category called »traditionalist genre«. Barbershop Harmony is a genre of popular music that follows the self-imposed idea of being an »historical informed performance practice« while actually being an »invented tradition« in terms of Hobsbawm/Ranger. In this regard, this article describes the genre of Barbershop Harmony as a paradigm for the category of »traditionalist genre« introduced by Lena.

47 Vgl. im Einzelnen Döhl, »From Harmonic Style to Genre« (wie Anm. 30), S. 123–171.

From Versatility to Art and Authenticity The Making of Popular Music's Genre Matrix, 1890–1930

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Sociologists and social historians are interested in music as a collective practice and a medium for social relations. They study the collaborative production, dissemination, evaluation and reception of music and analyse the role of music as a marker for status and identity.¹ Genre provides an analytical lens to explore all of these aspects. Defined as »systems of orientations, expectations, and conventions that bind together an industry, performers, critics, and fans in making what they identify as a distinct form of music«², genres coordinate the actions and communication between diverse actors, making music a medium of social relations. Generic conventions offer guidance for musicians on how to play together; they supply audiences with knowledge about the »appropriate« reception of a musical performance; producers, retailers and broadcasters employ generic categories to manage and channel the music industry's output; consumers use them as search terms to explore their favourite sounds. Genres encompass criteria with which critics and fans understand and evaluate texts, recordings and performances. Finally and most important to social scientists, genres convey assumptions and expectations about the status and identity of the listeners of particular musical styles.

Genres' pivotal role in the coordination of »musicking« as a social practice has been widely acknowledged in sociology. This has motivated research on the emergence and development of particular genres³, on the role of genre in the production of popular music⁴ as well as the connection between generic classifications and social boundaries.⁵ By and large, sociological genre studies focus on popular styles that became institutionalised as genres in the second half of the twentieth century such as rock, indie, punk, soul, country, heavy metal, rap and latin music. Partly, this topical focus results from sociologists' primary interest in contemporary society as well as their methodological preference for interviews, ethnographic observation and the interpretation of quantitative data (like popularity charts) and industry classifications. To some extent, the preoccupation with the above-mentioned genres can also be explained by the fact that these are associated with distinct subcultures of producers and listeners. In this way, they confirm the connection between music, status and identity which social scientists are primarily interested in.

In contrast to genres with self-conscious followers, so-called »mainstream« music and their communities have attracted less interest among sociologists and social historians. If the musical styles of chart pop, *Schlager* and easy listening have been studied at all, it has been done in ways that rarely show concern with genre and its social construction. *Schlager* in the Federal Republic of Germany, for example, is commonly viewed

- 1 William G. Roy / Timothy J. Dowd, »What is sociological about music?«, in: *Annual Review of Sociology* 36 (2010), pp. 183–203.
- 2 Jennifer C. Lena / Richard A. Peterson, »Classification as Culture: Types and Trajectories of Music Genres«, in: *American Sociological Review* 73 (2008), pp. 697–718, here p. 698.
- 3 Instead of many see Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity*, Chicago/IL 1997.
- 4 Keith Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures*, London 1999.
- 5 Michèle Lamont / Marcel Fournier (eds.), *Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*, Chicago/IL 1992.

either as a manifestation of widely shared world views⁶ or as a fabrication of the culture industry to sedate »the masses«⁷.

Sociologists who employ the genre concept have done little to challenge such simplistic views of mainstream music because they have overlooked, if not consciously faded it out of their analysis. Jennifer C. Lena's and Richard A. Peterson's recent work may illustrate this point. Charting the trajectories of popular musical styles, their research systematises studies on individual genres in view to a comprehensive study of cultural classification, including the aspect of genre change. While their co-authored article and Lena's subsequent book cover an impressively large number of different genres, categories like Tin Pan Alley songs, Broadway show tunes, dance music tracks, chart pop and World Music are explicitly exempted from the analysis as »non-genred« music. Lena and Peterson justify this exclusion by describing mainstream music as a bland mixture of trusted formulas that are frequently refreshed with watered-down infusions of new trends, concocted by producers who are primarily motivated by the expectation of financial rewards, presented by singers who are »industrial creations« and consumed by listeners who seem to make no attempt to form self-defined musical communities.⁸

In other words, Lena and Peterson invoke the distinction between »culture« and »commerce« to separate »meaningful« and socially relevant styles from »mere« marketing categories. Instead of unpicking this opposition as a key ideological component of many contemporary genres, they re-introduce it as an analytical term to demarcate the field of study, separating the genre wheat from the sheaf of »non-genred« pop. This division between genres on the one hand and mainstream on the other does not convince, however, as the above-mentioned definition of genre (borrowed from Lena and Peterson) does not only apply to »edgy« styles with coherent fan communities, but to supposedly non-genred music as well, whose performers, producers and listeners are also guided and bound by particular expectations. Even if the listeners of chart pop do not immerse themselves in their favourite music to the same degree as, say, devoted metal fans participate in their respective genre world (a point which still remains to be tested), they are equally able to identify and value their music and are similarly placed socially on the basis of generic conventions.

A comprehensive, historically informed study of genre needs to take mainstream music into consideration. Not just because the line between culture and commerce is permeable and shifting and the »boundary work« of self-conscious genres produces mainstream music as a negative backdrop, but most importantly because the origins of the present matrix of musical classification can be traced back to mainstream songs and their business at around 1900. As Karl Hagstrom Miller has argued, the category of »Southern Music« as well as the subsequent distinction between »black« and »white« folk vernaculars that informs many music genres to this day were established between the 1880s and the 1920s not least by music promoters as marketing categories to manage the production of music and address ethnically defined audiences. His ana-

6 See, for instance, Christoph Nonn, »Der Schlager und die westdeutsche Gesellschaft nach 1945«, in: Sabine Meckling / Yvonne Wasserloos (Hg.), *Musik, Macht, Staat: Kulturelle, soziale und politische Wandlungsprozesse*, Göttingen 2012, pp. 259–285.

7 Dietrich Kayser, *Schlager – Das Lied als Ware. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der Illusionsindustrie*, Stuttgart 1975.

8 Jennifer C. Lena, *Banding Together: How Communities Create Genres in Popular Music*, Princeton/NJ 2012, p. 21.

9 Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow*, Durham/NC 2010.

lysis shows that commercial actors and their economic considerations played a major role in the production of authenticity which is at the heart of present day's self-conscious music genres.⁹ In other words, musical genres do not start as »pure« expressions before they then challenge the mainstream that ultimately absorbs and aesthetically compromises them. Instead, they begin as fluid, homogeneous practices which become stable and distinct in the process of its (commercial) mediation. The concept of generic classification is essential to commercial music, forcing emerging music at the margins of the repertoire to become defined and acquire a position in the genre panorama.

This article follows Miller's lead and studies the relationship between social distinctions and marketing categories in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American popular music. Bringing into conversation research in sociology and history (to a lesser extent in musicology), it goes back to the origins of the connection between music, identity and status that characterises popular music of the second half of the twentieth century. It focuses on Tin Pan Alley, New York's cluster of song-writing and -exploitation, and traces developments that transformed the Alley, its denizens and products from the realm of »cheap« amusements to sophistication and authenticity. While Miller concentrates on the establishment of ethnic distinctions in music, I will also highlight attempts to enhance the reputation of American popular music, raising the status of both its producers and consumers. Looking at the beginning ascription of ethnic identities to musical styles as well as early advances by pop producers to be taken seriously, I take into view the two main mechanisms of social differentiation that form the genre matrix at the heart of twentieth-century popular music. I argue that both these developments can be observed in the US during the 1910s and 1920s, precluding the emergence of socially distinct genres in the second half of the twentieth century. In addition, it should become apparent that, with varying motivations, publishers, producers, composers and performers from the mainstream engaged in the process of making popular music artistically valuable and »authentic«, indicating that culture and commerce were intertwined.

The first part of the article looks at the two decades around 1900, the period when a new system of song-writing, publishing and promotion was established that became known as Tin Pan Alley. It shows that generic terms emerged at the sales-end of the exploitation cycle, where formulaic songs were sold as sheet music in department stores. Beyond the advanced standardisation of sheet music, however, the interaction between songwriters, song-promoters, performers and audiences was characterised by versatility, a combination of stylistic promiscuity and musical improvisation. This means that genre was established on Tin Pan Alley first as a marketing device before it became relevant for the actual communication among music makers and between stage performers and live audiences. Early Tin Pan Alley was torn between songs that would sell and music that would work on stage. Music merchants had no means to »bottle up« the unconventional sounds, rhythms and performance

quirks that permeated »musicking« around the Alley and its main promotional platform, the vaudeville stage, as long as sheet music remained its primary commodity.

This shifted during the 1910s and 1920s due to legal, technological and economic changes, and Tin Pan Alley, previously a derogatory term, rose to stand for the smooth and sophisticated songs of Broadway and refined jazz, or »symphonic syncopation«. The same factors led to musical styles being divided into black and white expressions. The second part of the article traces the developments that charged popular music with status and ethnic identity, again highlighting the initiatives of music publishers, songwriters, performers and critics.

1. Standardised Sheet Music, Versatile Performances: Genre on Tin Pan Alley, 1890–1910

In 1906, Charles K. Harris published a guide to »how to write a popular song« in which the successful veteran gave advice to amateurs who aspired to »make it« in the popular music industry.¹⁰ The recommendations came with the authority of the man whose ballad *After the Ball* (1892) had sold a few million copies and who had managed to sustain a career in writing and publishing popular songs.

While Harris warns his readers that they should not expect a formula for success from his guide and that »talent and genius« are essential to write popular songs, his straightforward recommendations suggest otherwise. They do a lot to demystify the creation of hits and imply that – in principle – everybody has a fair chance of succeeding as a song-writer, as long as he follows a couple of simple rules: Read the daily papers to find material for lyrics that capture the public imagination; avoid slang and double entendres, as »refined people« would not tolerate such songs in their homes; keep melodies within the range of a C below and an E on the staff to ensure that tunes can be sung by untrained singers; write in keys with little or no sharps or flats and keep musical arrangements simple so that amateurs are able to play them; send tidy copies and polite letters to prospective publishers; try to get your song performed by popular singers as they have the power to stir public demand. For lyric writers in search of a word pairing with »moon«, the book provides a dictionary of rhymes, leading them to »soon« and »spoon« (not to »June« though, but maybe Harris drew a line at that particularly worn cliché). Harris patently describes song-writing not as a form of art, as a spontaneous, uneven and often frustrating process whereby an inspired genius gives birth to something unique, but as a craft.

In addition to general business advice, Harris provides quite specific instructions about the lyrics, melodies and harmonies that may be turned into a hit. To this end, he distinguishes between ten types of popular songs, defined by either lyrical content or social function. Among his topical tunes are »home or mother songs«, »sensational story ballads«, »comic songs« and »popular love ballads«; as pieces for particular functions he

¹⁰ Charles K. Harris, *How to write a popular song*, New York 1906.

lists »waltzes«, »marches« and »production songs«, the latter being numbers to be included in musical comedies or similar shows. The list also contains »coon songs«, further differentiated into »rough, comic, refined, love or serenade, etc.«. The coon category does not encompass tunes of black people, but *about* black stereotypes, just as mother and love songs consist of lyrics about these respective subjects. Discussing the musical features of coon songs, Harris exclusively writes about the melodic composition of their introduction and »vamps«. Even though one of his examples – the introduction to *Albany* (1904), composed by Hughie Cannon and featured by singer May Irwin, who is also credited for the lyrics – contains syncopation¹¹, Harris makes no mentioning of any rhythmic particularity.

Harris's guide appeared at a time when a number of music publishers had established a new system of marketing popular songs. This system integrated song-writing, publishing, promotion and the retailing of sheet music and »pushed« new songs following a particular sequence. To begin with, publishers acquired songs which they thought had sales potential, either paying a flat fee to the song-writer or granting him a royalty on sheet music sales. Next, publishers commissioned arrangements to be printed on cheap paper and supplied them as so-called »professional copies« to orchestras that played at entertainment venues. Crucially, publishers tried to induce vaudeville singers to include the respective songs in their repertoire, initially by befriending them, but as the method proved to be successful and competition among publishers increased, by offering them favours, fees or a share of the proceeds. Some performers were »cut in«, which means they were given an author's credit that earned them royalties. As an additional means of promotion, publishers sent song »pluggers« around town to sing the tune in bars and cafés, at street corners, beer gardens and amusement parks, trying to make people join in the chorus. Some song-writers were trying to boost their own numbers in this way. Publishers and »pluggers« came up with stunts to break new songs. Harry Von Tilzer, a highly successful song-writer and publisher during the rise of Tin Pan Alley around 1900, boosted *Please Go 'way And Let Me Sleep* (1902) in the Chicago Opera House by pretending to be asleep during its performance by vaudevillian Arthur Deming who, from the stage, called for the ushers to show the insulting patron the door. The song-writer and the singer repeated this interplay each night; newspapers reported it and helped the song to sell. According to Von Tilzer, two million copies were bought, making the song »the traditional accompaniment to any theatrical reference to sleep.«¹² Other publishers produced song slides to project photographic illustrations of a song's story in vaudeville houses. They also armed their »pluggers« with lyric sheets so that the audience could sing the chorus and knew the title when asking for the sheet music.

The aim of these promotional activities, which had the vaudeville stage at its centre, was to drum new songs into as many ears as possible to make listeners go out and buy them as sheet music. At the start of a campaign, publishers would supply shops with small editions. As soon as

¹¹ I define syncopation here as melodic stresses on the off-beat that counters a bass line that is consistently on the beat.

¹² Harry Von Tilzer Music Publishing, »The Story behind the Song (n.d.)«, in: Library of Congress, Music Division, Von Tilzer / Gumm Collection, Box 1, folder 7.

there were signs of increasing demand, they would rush to the printer and commission larger runs, with ornate covers depicting the famous singer who featured that song in his or her show. A small number of songs promoted in that way sold a million copies or more, like Harris's *After the Ball*, the song that became known to have started mass sales of popular tunes. Other compositions sold reasonably well with figures in the hundred thousands. Most songs, however, fell on deaf ears and were dropped as soon as their publisher found them to be »lame ducks«, only to make way for another possible hit.¹³

Publishers on »Tin Pan Alley«, the core of New York's popular song business on Manhattan's West 28th Street between Broadway and Sixth Avenue, integrated publishing, performance and retailing and thus required the communication between a range of actors with different skills and motivations. Song classifications as listed in Harris's guide facilitated this coordination, particularly in view to the sale of sheet music. Categories like mother songs or rustic ballads, for instance, enabled publishers to tell song-writers what they were willing to add to their catalogue and to communicate to wholesalers and retailers what kind of tunes they had on offer. Retailers, in turn, were able to manage and present their sheet music to customers. The most important outlets were department stores that installed sheet music counters in the late 1890s.¹⁴ Sales talk at these counters was unlikely to involve technical terms of music theory or sophisticated concepts of aesthetics. Instead, customers were expected to ask for functional pieces or particular songs whose words they might remember. They might also have referred to the vaudeville performer who had featured a particular tune, and they could spot the song in question by looking out for a performer's picture on the sheet music cover. Some customer might have brought a chorus sheet along they had been given during a »plug«; others may have bought a song because of its ornate and expensive looking cover.¹⁵

Topical and functional categories facilitated the coordination of song-writers, publishers and retailers sufficiently well and promised to reduce some of the risks of a business fraught with uncertainty. Easily understandable, these categories made sense to a musically uneducated mass audience that music providers imagined as aesthetically conservative, yet craving for novelty. Marketing categories made for a highly standardised sheet music output, illustrated by the conventionality of covers as well as the common practice to churn out songs with very similar sounding titles in the slipstream of a current hit. The communication between publishers and retailers in such marketing categories was facilitated by the fact that many of the former had a background in sales. Leading publishers like Edward Marks, Joseph Stern, Leo Feist, Isidore Witmark, Maurice Shapiro, Louis Bernstein and Max Dreyfus had peddled picture frames, habdashery, corsets and women's handbags and were able to take a retailer's point of view, sharing their assumptions about what female buyers of cheap, fashionable goods, the main clientele for sheet music, wanted.¹⁶

The systematic exploitation of formulaic music by song merchants and »tunesmiths« with an ear on the ground was, however, only one side

¹³ This system has been described in further detail by David Suisman, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music*, Cambridge/MA 2009, pp. 56–89.

¹⁴ Russel Sanjek, *From Print to Plastic: Publishing and Promoting America's Popular Music*, Institute for Studies in American Music 1983, p. 12.

¹⁵ Daniel Goldmark, »Creating Desire on Tin Pan Alley«, in: *Musical Quarterly* 90 (2008), pp. 197–229.

¹⁶ D. Suisman, *Selling Sounds* (see note 13), pp. 3, 33.

of Tin Pan Alley. While the sales-end of the popular music business around 1900 appears planned and controlled, the production and promotion of songs was very much improvised. And whereas marketing categories worked well for the communication between publishers, retailers and the sheet music-buying public, they played a far lesser role in the coordination of »pluggers«, stage performers and theatre audiences.

The vaudeville stage was the primary platform for music publishers to generate popular demand for a song. Variety theatre was mostly populated by performers who had little or no formal training in music or acting and relied on practical experience to make an impression on their audiences. Big stars such as Al Jolson, Eddie Cantor, Sophie Tucker or Eva Tanguay came from poor immigrant families and had learned the ropes of show business at its very bottom end before they rose to fame. Cantor, for example, found the street to be his first training ground for a career that led him from »boardwalk skill« and singing waiter over amateur contests and burlesque tours to the pinnacle of the leading vaudeville houses.¹⁷ Performing on the street taught future vaudevillians that their survival depended on their ability to bring an act across to anyone who happened to be present, regardless of frequent ignorance and adversity. They had to learn to carefully observe their audience and immediately adapt their patter to what resonated with it. They did not express themselves, but developed dramatic personas from what they could assume was familiar to their spectators. Quite often, these stage figures were based on ethnic stereotypes, and so Irish, »Dutch«, »Hebrew«, Italian or Black characters lifted from the neighbourhoods of lower Manhattan and exaggerated for immediate recognition became a staple of New York's variety bills around 1900.

Many song-writers and members of the first generation of Tin Pan Alley publishers shared the social background and the professional outlook with vaudevillians. Harry Von Tilzer, for instance, had run away from home at the age of 15 to join a travelling circus. Having experienced much of the hardships of a performer on the popular stage, he maintained friendships with vaudevillians when he turned to song-writing and publishing.¹⁸ Closely connected with vaudeville, the Witmark publishing firm consisted of five brothers who shared the work of song-writing, book keeping and performing to promote new titles between them.¹⁹ Vaudevillians' ability to impersonate a range of characters had its equivalent in song-writers' »stylistic omnivorousness«²⁰, to be understood as a preparedness to write whatever they thought would resonate with the public. Song-writers like Von Tilzer and Irving Berlin covered a great variety of styles from sentimental ballads to ragtime tunes, whatever worked on the popular market.

With few exceptions, the level of formal musical training among the denizens of Tin Pan Alley was very low. Irving Berlin famously hired »musical secretaries« who helped him to transcribe his melodies into musical notes. He never learned to play the piano »properly« and used a transposing instrument that enabled him to change the pitch by simply pushing a pedal while pressing the same keys. Apparently, he was no

¹⁷ Robert W. Snyder, *The Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York*, New York 1989, pp. 49–51.

¹⁸ Harry Von Tilzer, »Mister Tin Pan Alley, Himself« (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), in: Library of Congress, Music Division, Von Tilzer / Gumm Collection, Box 1, folder 15.

¹⁹ D. Suisman, *Selling Sounds* (see note 13), p. 3.

²⁰ Jeffrey Maggee, *Irving Berlin's American Musical Theater*, New York 2012, p. 11.

exception. During a court case in 1955, Berlin testified that at the time when he started out as a song-writer and »plugger« in 1908, »very few of the pianists that played for the singers could read music. [...] They mostly all played by ear.«²¹

The absence of formal musical knowledge shaped the communication among New York's music makers as well as their professional community and their approach to audiences. To begin with, »dilettantism« allowed people to enter and succeed in the music business who would have not stood a chance in an environment where the ability to write scores and sight-read was a necessity. This openness was partly due to the fact that the absence of formal requirements lowered the occupational status on Tin Pan Alley, a fact that is reflected in the very moniker. While the nickname is often said to have derived from the tinny sounds of the many pianos played on publishers' row, media scholar Keir Keightley has argued that the term had derived from the expression »tin can alley« and was meant to evoke associations of mass-produced, cheap goods as well as the heaps of trash resulting from throw-away articles.²² Located in the proverbial musical gutter, the popular music business had a low entry barrier, which explains why poor immigrants from Manhattan's lower East side like Berlin, but also female vaudevillians and numerous black song-writers, musicians and performers got a break in the song trade.

In addition to making the industry accessible to seemingly all comers, the lack of formal training also shaped its *modus operandi*. The many song-writers, publishers, »pluggers« and performers who were unable to communicate their ideas on paper had to meet up with their collaborators, play in front of them, listen to their performance and phrase feedback in gestures, metaphors, hums or claps. Musical illiteracy required co-presence, and so sound, rhythm and performance style rather than written notes were the prime communication medium on the Alley. Humming tunes and clapping beats, in turn, made for a particular understanding between music makers. Charles Harris in his guide uses the word »swing« to describe the relationship between the lyricists and composers who ideally establish a kind of »telepathic tie« that enables them to »grasp each other's underdeveloped or finished ideas instantaneously.«²³ Harry Von Tilzer refers to a similar connection between »pluggers« and performers, as he noticed that American vaudeville singers, who were accustomed to converse in the medium of sound, were much quicker to learn new songs than their English colleagues.²⁴ We may assume that learning a song in Von Tilzer's office entailed far more than reproducing a musical text (which, of course, a trained sight-reader could do immediately) and was primarily aimed at getting the »right« delivery in front of a bawdy variety audience.

While Tin Pan Alley »taylorised« the music industry by systematically producing highly conventional sheet music, it was also a place where song-writers, publishers, promoters and performers improvised and were so able to communicate unconventional rhythms and sounds. As a playground for dilettantes, the Alley and its close affiliate, the vaudeville stage, were open for ad-hoc solutions for the challenge of performance. Some

- 21 Alfred L. Smith vs. Irving Berlin et al., Supreme Court, New York City, Transcript of Testimony, p. 391, in: Library of Congress, Music Division, Irving Berlin Collection, Box 520.
- 22 Keir Keightley, »Tin Pan Allegory«, in: *Modernism/modernity* 19/4 (2012), pp. 717–736.
- 23 Ch. K. Harris, *How to write a popular song* (see note 10), pp. 19f.
- 24 H. Von Tilzer, »Mister Tin Pan Alley, Himself« (see note 18), p. 81.

of these solutions will have been deliberate, based on performance experience. However, given the low level of formal musical education, many an innovation may well have resulted from what formally trained musicians would call incompetence.

More than any other skill, working in the American show business around 1900 required versatility – the ability to adapt a performance to different present audiences, combined with a preparedness to improvise to »get the job done«. Some show men, like vaudevillian William Gould, prided themselves in this ability. His article, published in 1907 in the vaudeville trade journal *Variety*, nicely illustrates the qualities of the »vaude« artist by contrasting his work to that of the formally trained actor, the »legit«:

»The legit' can't dance, he cannot originate. He merely does what the stage manager taught him, and no more. The manager gives the same song to the vaudevillian, who has a different idea, which is new, and at the finish he does a dance. That is out of the ordinary and the song is a success. One new idea from the artist suggests another from the author, the stage manager, and before the week is over you would not know that it is the same song. Then the vaudevillian starts to put in a »few sure fire laughs.« He knows they are sure fire, for he has tried them out before and is positive.«²⁵

Gould's description conveys a strong sense of superiority, suggesting that versatile performers drew a considerable amount of professional pride from their ability to hit it off with present audiences. Others, however, were beginning to feel less confident about their constant dependence on the changeable mood of the public. As cracks showed in the Tin Pan Alley system from around 1910, they fled its tainted reputation, seized new opportunities and strove for art and authenticity.

2. Connecting Popular Music to Status and Identity: Aesthetic Value and Authenticity in Popular Genres after 1910

Tin Pan Alley witnessed some marvellous success stories, as anonymous buskers rose to fame. But whereas it took relatively little to land a hit, a sustained career in song-writing was very difficult to achieve. Writers experienced that a hit provided no insurance against subsequent failure. Certainly, this was to some extent true for publishers and performers as well, but while these spread risk over a larger catalogue of songs, put the burden on the shoulders of creative suppliers or were able to exploit their fame in the provinces, songwriters had to start anew as soon as the popularity of their success was waning. Gary Rosen in his recent study on Tin Pan Alley characterises publishers' row somewhat drastically as »an industrial slum populated by rapacious publishers and mostly impecunious songwriters.«²⁶ There was no other way to prevent them from falling into oblivion – and subsequent poverty – than coming up with yet another hit. Due to the populist nature of the song business and its short term economy, rises and falls were as frequent as spectacular.²⁷

But the business model of Tin Pan Alley was not only turning out to be problematic for song-writers. In addition, its conveyor-belt system of

25 William Gould, »Vaudeville versus Musical Comedy«, in: *Variety*, 14.12.1907, pp. 19, 65.

26 Gary A. Rosen, *Unfair to Genius: The strange and litigious career of Ira B. Arnstein*, New York 2012, p. 12.

27 For a contemporary sketch see Theodore Dreiser, »Whence the Song« (1900), in: *idem, The Color of a Great City*, London 1930, pp. 138–155, here pp. 149–152. Dreiser was the brother of the then popular songwriter Paul Dresser, who died penniless in 1906.

song exploitation encountered problems when the relationship between the elements of printing, promotion and retailing became fractious from around 1910. To begin with, the costs of song promotion rose, as vaudeville became concentrated in the hands of a few entrepreneurs who economised on performers' fees, expecting publishers to compensate singers for their services. »Payola« became increasingly costly for publishers who began to think of ways how to prevent these expenses from spiralling out of proportion. In 1914, 14 New York publishing firms, including the most important companies in the popular field with the exception of Feist, founded the Music Publishers' Board of Trade that threatened to fine its members for any direct or indirect payments of performers for »plugs«. ²⁸ While this measure did not end »payola«, it indicates that publishers began to see it as a potentially ruinous practice and were prepared to take concerted action to curtail it. In addition to that, cinema became apparent as a veritable competitor to vaudeville. In 1910, for the first time more people went to the movies than to see a vaudeville performance ²⁹, and the number of theatres and touring companies declined sharply in the subsequent decade. Even though these developments primarily affected »legitimate« houses and the eventual decline of vaudeville was still some ten, fifteen years away, the signs were there to see. All in all, vaudeville was draining ever greater expenses from publishers who saw less in return. For songwriters, they were even more costly, because »payola« payments were deducted from their income, because star vaudevillians were frequently credited as authors and received a share of the songwriter royalties.

Publishers were unable to pass on increasing »plugging« costs to consumers because the powerful department stores kept the price for sheet music low. Some publishers tried to set up their own retailing outlets, but gave up after some time. As with vaudeville, the relationship with the retailing sector deteriorated and became increasingly expensive for publishers to maintain. Slowly but surely, Tin Pan Alley's system, built on the integration of publishing, performance and retailing, was disintegrating. The number of published songs, which had peaked in the 1900s at an average of 25,000 per annum, declined steadily from the subsequent decade on, following the same trajectory as piano sales. Both these developments underlined that the »taylorisation« of sheet music was past its peak.

While the conveyor belt of sheet-music production was beginning to slip off the wheels, music publishers registered that there were other ways to earn money from music. The most consequential one for the subsequent development of the music industry proved to be the production of »mechanical music« in the form of player-piano rolls and records. Publishers demanded to be compensated for this commercial use of their songs by these fast-growing industries and lobbied for a copyright reform that took »mechanical reproduction« as a form of copying into account. To legal practitioners, copyright and its implementation appeared increasingly outdated at the beginning of the twentieth century and seemed ripe for an overhaul. Music publishers were keen to influence this reform and eagerly contributed to the drafting of a new bill. The result of this

²⁸ Russell Sanjek / David Sanjek, *The American Popular Music Business in the 20th Century*, New York 1991, p. 18.

²⁹ Arthur Frank Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars: How the Keith-Albee and Orpheum Circuits Controlled the Big Time and Its Performers*, New York 2006, p. 254.

³⁰ For a detailed discussion of the copyright bill see D. Suisman, *Selling Sounds* (see note 13), pp. 159–168.

³¹ Russell Sanjek, *Pennies from Heaven: The American Popular Music Business in the Twentieth Century*, New York 1996, p. 42.

³² D. Suisman, *Selling sounds* (see note 13), p. 170f. This is a major difference in the development of the popular music business in the US and Europe. See Klaus Nathaus, »Popular Music in Germany, 1900–1930: A Case of Americanisation? Uncovering a European Trajectory of Music Production into the Twentieth Century«, in: *European Review of History* 20 (2013), pp. 755–776.

³³ Rosen, *Unfair to Genius* (see note 26), p. 161.

initiative, the Copyright Act of 1909, required producers of piano rolls and phonograph records to pay a fixed royalty to the rights holders. ³⁰ While publishers and composers were disappointed about the relatively low rate (they received two cents for every record of their music) and the fact that royalties were non-negotiable, they nevertheless discovered that recorded music was a substantial source of additional revenue. As the production costs for sheet music increased steeply during the First World War, mechanical royalties rose from \$ 54,000 in 1910 to approximately \$ 2 million ³¹, effectively saving the industry.

The debate about copyright reform mainly concentrated on the question of mechanical rights. Somewhat under the radar, the new law also covered performing rights, as it reserved for the respective copyright owners the exclusive right to publicly perform a piece of music for profit. Performing right had been mentioned in a copyright act from 1897, but no financial compensation for its use was forthcoming as long as the song industry saw public performances as a promotional tool for the sales of music media. From that perspective, a fee on performance was regarded as a deterrent for »plugs« and hence counterproductive for marketing efforts. But with »plugging« costs rising, profits from sheet music sales declining and the new copyright law providing a firm basis to exploit the performing right, publishers' rationale changed during the 1910s. In 1913, a group of publishers and songwriters met in New York to discuss the formation of a collecting society to administer the licensing of music to the many venues where it was performed for profit. The group was led by lawyer Nathan Burkan, who had represented the music business's interest during the negotiations of the Copyright Act of 1909, and was probably informed by expertise from Europe, where collecting societies had been firmly established by that time. ³² In 1914, publishers and songwriters founded the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP). The society had its breakthrough when composer Victor Herbert, one of ASCAP's most prominent members, won a test case against Shanley's Restaurant, forcing the latter to pay the plaintiff a royalty for the rendition of Herbert's *Sweethearts*. In 1921, ASCAP was for the first time able to distribute a small profit to its members. Subsequently, it forced radio networks, vaudeville theatres and cinemas to pay for music licenses, and performance royalties became an increasingly important source of income for publishers and songwriters. By 1925, ASCAP collected about \$ 320,000, in 1931 \$ 1.3 million, of which the highest ranked songwriters received up to \$ 5,200. At least for members who were in ASCAP's prime »AA« category and favoured by the society's distribution scheme, performance rights were generating a considerable amount of money. ³³

With profits from records and performances growing, the hit-and-miss economy of frantically promoting sheet music sales changed into a business model that tapped several revenue streams and valued the sustained pertinence of the »evergreen« over the instant popularity of the single hit. This economic shift was intertwined with attempts of publishers and songwriters to enhance their reputation by turning away

from vaudeville and producing music for Broadway shows. In the years before the First World War, there were just about a handful of domestic composers writing entire scores for musical plays on the »Great White Way«. The most important one was Victor Herbert, who was born in Dublin and, more importantly, trained as a musician in Germany and therefore very different from most fellow American composers. Until 1914, music on Broadway was dominated by operettas and musical comedies from Europe. Works from the Continent and Austria in particular became highly prominent after the success of Franz Lehar's *Merry Widow*, which premiered in New York in October 1907. European operettas were heavily edited and supplemented with songs by domestic writers to adapt the imported score to the American stage. One of the challenges for local adaptors was to rewrite foreign music so that it could be sung by performers who had received less musical training and were recruited for their looks rather than their voices. Jerome Kern, one of the most prolific writers of »interpolations« for imported musical plays, stated in a newspaper article in 1913 that »[h]owever charming the majority of our musical comedy players may be, not many of them are prima donnas«, from which he concluded that »a great deal of the score has to be set aside or rewritten«.³⁴ Kern lamented that even though domestic composers and authors often rewrote half of the imported plays, they did not get a chance to author an entire show, let alone receive a credit for their contribution to the programme bill. The *Dramatic Mirror* as the voice of the musical establishment in the US doubted Kern's claims that domestic writers contributed substantially to imported plays and called Kern a mere »song-smith« unable to compose like the properly trained Europeans were.³⁵ Apparently, the »tin can« reputation of the Alley stuck, and it would take some effort for Alleyites to rid themselves off it.

The war in Europe provided an opportunity to achieve just this. It impeded and then stopped transatlantic communications and made the production of famed music from German-speaking countries inopportune, if books and scores could be shipped across the Atlantic at all. This meant that domestic song-writers got their chance to compose Broadway scores. Some, like the European-trained Sigmund Romberg and Rudolf Friml³⁶, did this in the mould of Viennese operettas, while others, like Kern, Irving Berlin and a few years later George Gershwin, Richard Rodgers and Vincent Youmans drew on what they had learned on the Alley and in vaudeville and included more popular melodies and dance rhythms into Broadway productions. Their style would become dominant for Broadway shows and defined the repertoire of the Alley's Golden Era. With American popular music in demand on Broadway and vaudeville losing importance, publishers upped their sticks and moved eighteen blocks further north. By the time the war ended, the leading denizens of 28th Street had left the »musical gutter« and relocated around Times Square, at the heart of middle-class entertainment.³⁷

Tin Pan Alley's move affected popular music publishing and song-writing as much as Broadway theatre. While the latter was Americanised, the former were elevated in terms of social status and cultural esteem.

34 Quoted from Gerald M. Bordman, *Jerome Kern: His Life and Music*, New York 1980, p. 83.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

36 Friml, who was trained at the conservatory in Prague, got his break in musical theatre when Victor Herbert left a running production and director Arthur Hammerstein quickly needed a replacement.

37 »New »Tin-Pan« Alley«, in: *Variety*, 2.8.1919, p. 20.

The moniker that had evoked associations about musical »tin cans« now very quickly came to stand for the great American songbook of standard tunes with lasting value. And whereas before the Alley had been a melting pot of poor and unrefined immigrants on the lowest rungs of popular entertainment, sixty per cent of the new generation of popular composers such as Gershwin, Rodgers, Youmans and Cole Porter came from more prosperous backgrounds and had attended college or its European equivalent.³⁸ Jobs in the popular music business became more stable and gained in social status.

Irving Berlin represented the economic and cultural advance of American popular music like no one else. Not only was he centrally involved in the formation of ASCAP and its subsequent struggle to expand its domain, but he also positioned himself as a composer who needed to be taken seriously as an artist. Rather than trying to repeat his breakthrough success *Alexander's Ragtime Band* (1911) with further hits, he went on to compose the score for *Watch Your Step!* (1914) at the same time as the song business discovered the economic value of music licensing. From then on, Berlin abandoned vaudeville and its often rough-and-tumble clientele and concentrated on writing music for a middle-class audience.³⁹ During the war, Berlin voluntarily joined the army and supported the American effort with *Yip Yip Yaphank*, a production that featured his fellow soldiers. This patriotic deed lent credence to Berlin's and other Alley songwriters' and publishers' claim that they were creating genuinely »American« music, a claim that was supported by journalists who blended popular culture with current affairs in new magazines like *Vanity Fair* (1913) and *The New Republic* (1914).⁴⁰ After the war, Berlin gained access to the intellectual circle around Dorothy Parker that met at the Algonquin Hotel. In 1926, he married the daughter of a wealthy industrialist (the Catholic magnate, however, disinherited her because of her marriage with a Jew). A few months earlier, Berlin's journalist friend Alexander Woollcott had published *The Story of Irving Berlin*, a first autobiography which manifested that this songwriter was an artist whose work needed to be taken seriously.

Tin Pan Alley's economic and artistic consolidation through the orientation to new royalty streams and Broadway as a more upmarket shopping-window for songs of a higher class was driven by and benefited white songwriters and publishers far more than their black colleagues. To be sure, racial segregation had played a role on early Tin Pan Alley as well. Trade organisations had kept black musicians and entrepreneurs at an arm's length, if they did not exclude them completely. The American Federation of Musicians (AFM) denied black musicians membership, and vaudeville theatres generally only reserved one single spot for black performers who were casted to play up to racist stereotypes.⁴¹ In spite of this, however, black people around 1900 were able to achieve a considerable presence in the music trade, where they contributed to writing popular music aimed at the same market as the songs of their fellow white writers. Six of the 17 songs which in 1901 sold more than 100.000

38 Edward Pessen, »The Great Songwriters of Tin Pan Alley's Golden Age: A Social, Occupational, and Aesthetic Inquiry«, in: *American Music* 3 (1985), pp. 180–197.

39 Charles Hamm, *Irving Berlin: Songs from the Melting Pot: The Formative Years, 1907–1914*, Oxford 1997, p. 67.

40 Examples for the new take of journalists on popular music are collected in Anthony Slide, ed., *Selected Vaudeville Criticism*, Metuchen/NJ 1988.

41 Thomas L. Riis, *Just before Jazz: Black Musical Theatre in New York, 1890 to 1915*, Washington/DC 1989, p. 168.

copies were penned by black writers.⁴² According to the US census, musicians and actors constituted the two largest professional employment categories for black people nationwide, with a particular concentration in New York. In 1900, there were 329 registered black actors and showmen and 268 musicians and music teachers. Most of them worked for minstrel and vaudeville shows.⁴³ Co-operation between artists with different ethnic background was not unusual, as the work of the black songwriters Cecil Mack (born Richard C. McPherson), Will Marion Cook and the team of composer Bob Cole, writer James Weldon Johnson and his brother J. Rosamond for white vaudeville performers indicates. With their income from songwriting, Mack co-founded Gotham-Attucks Publishing, the first black-owned music publishing firm, in 1905, and Johnson, Cole and Johnson mounted their own musical shows. They were not the only black artists to do so. In total, black performers staged about thirty music theatre shows in New York between 1890 and 1915.⁴⁴

The collaboration across the racial divide paid off for whites as well. White vaudevillians employed material written by black songwriters and used racialised performance styles to exoticise and eroticise their stage appearance. »Acting black« gave them a license to perform at the very edges of what was regarded respectable⁴⁵, something the old vaudeville format invited and rewarded.

But vaudeville, which had for long thrived on strong ties with a bawdy, male working-class audience, had changed as entrepreneurs had begun to »clean up« variety in order to attract families and more affluent people as patrons. This campaign for »respectable« vaudeville had gained momentum when theatrical entrepreneurs Benjamin F. Keith and Edward Albee acquired control of a string of theatres at the east coast and founded the United Booking Office (UBO) in 1906. Centralised booking allowed vaudeville managers to put more pressure on performers to comply with regulations such as the ban on swearwords on stage, because provincial directors who booked artists with UBO wrote reports on their performance which were collected at the central office, providing a means to control acts and exclude black sheep. While it would be wrong to assume that these measures completely sanitised big time vaudeville, it did nevertheless reduce elements of entertainment that began to be regarded as crude, such as ethnic jokes which met with increasing adversity from the respective groups.⁴⁶

As mentioned above, the focus of the music business shifted from vaudeville to licensing and recording music. These two new major avenues for the modern music business were largely reserved for whites. Of the 192 charter members of ASCAP, only two were black, and during the subsequent twelve years, only eight would follow. Blunt racism might be less important as an explanation for this exclusion than the determination of ASCAP members to become acknowledged as a respectable organisation whose financial claim was legitimate. From this perspective, ties to the »old« Alley needed to be cut, including the involvement of black people. The exclusion from ASCAP not only meant that black publishers, composers and authors did not partake in the distribution of

42 Ibid., p. 62.

43 Ibid., p. 32, fig. 1.

44 Ibid., p. xxi.

45 K. Miller, *Segregating Sound* (see note 9), pp. 138–140.

46 Lawrence E. Mintz, »Humor and Ethnic Stereotypes in Vaudeville and Burlesque«, in: Melus 21 (1996), pp. 19–28.

performance royalties, but also that it would in the 1920s and 30s become virtually impossible for them to get their music played by radio, which during those years advanced as the most important medium to popularise songs. The reason for this is that radio stations paid ASCAP for a blanket license to use its entire catalogue of existing and future titles from tried and tested hit makers, and so had no incentive to put other music – songs from unknown black writers, for instance – on air.⁴⁷

Recording studios had initially been closed to black performers in the early twentieth century. Coon, minstrelsy and ragtime songs were at the time not considered to be expressions of black identity, but about stereotypical blackness, and so they were written by black and white songwriters alike and almost exclusively recorded by white singers. Authenticity was not an issue at the time; quite the contrary, the more versatile a performer was the better. This changed until the early 1920s, when record companies began to address black audiences with blues and other styles that were sold on so-called »race« records. The new rationale of the industry was that certain music was particularly appealing to blacks and needed to be recorded by black singers. The story of the marketing category »race music« is instructive because it shows how changes in the music business gave rise to the concept of authenticity: the idea that musical styles are rooted in the particular experiences and traditions of ethnic groups and need to be performed by an individual who shares these experiences and traditions to speak to the other members of that group.

Authenticity came to play a role in the record industry after firms – that from an early stage tried to market the gramophone around the world – found that potential consumers outside the West could not be won over by playing to them recordings of European classical music. Record companies had focussed on producing records of »culturally uplifting« music to rid the new medium from its image as a fairground attraction and address a more affluent clientele of music connoisseurs who, hopefully, would collect recordings of »good« music. Listeners in Cairo and Calcutta, however, proved to be insensitive to the aura of European art music. Subsequently, representatives of record companies who had mobile equipment to do field recordings found that the best way to interest locals was to record local music and sell it back to them. Soon after that, American firms applied this concept to the domestic market and targeted ethnically defined consumer groups with respective recordings, offering, for instance, Greek music to consumers of Greek descent, and in the same vein and from the early 1920s on, »black« music to black people.⁴⁸

Authenticity, which tied cultural expressions to ethnic identities, not only lent itself as a principle to discover and address markets with matching product, but also as a resource to black musicians in search for their niche in a consolidating industry. The area where they managed to do this most effectively was dance music. In this particular domain, ensembles of black musicians in New York set the standard and commanded higher fees than white instrumentalists in the early 1910s. A key figure in this development was James Reese Europe, a black bandleader who had

47 John Ryan, *The production of culture in the music industry: the ASCAP-BMI controversy*, Lanham/MD 1985.

48 For this development see K. Miller, *Segregating Sound* (see note 9), pp. 157–186.

moved to New York at the beginning of the twentieth century to start a professional career in music.⁴⁹ As black musicians were denied membership in AFM, the only public venues where they could perform were nightclubs that were owned by and catered to blacks or upmarket lobster palaces around Times Square, where they were featured as bartenders or waiters who would break into apparently impromptu performances of ragtime. The latter venues were frequented by wealthy New Yorkers who hired performers for their private parties. In 1904, Europe performed at one of these parties and made such a favourable impression that he was repeatedly asked to assemble bands that were then employed at other parties. Initially, black musicians who played at such events were treated no better than servants and were far from being regarded as serious musicians. But Europe used his contacts with New York's society to elevate both the professional and the cultural status of black musicians. He achieved this by founding the Clef Club of New York City in 1910 that served its members as a union and booking agency. It provided restaurant managers, party hosts and other employers, who previously had to hunt down black musicians in the lowly dives where they played, a permanent, respectable address on West 53rd Street and a telephone number. And crucially, the Clef Club ensured employers of the reliable standard of the 135 members which enlisted in the first month of its existence, a number that would grow to over 200 until 1912. To this end, Europe required that Clef Club bands performed in tuxedos or suits, and he organised regular public concerts of the Clef Club Orchestra which showcased the ability of black musicians. These measures established the Clef Club as a brand that stood for dignified black entertainment. Very soon the Clef Club negotiated contracts and working conditions that distinguished black musicians' work from that of servants.

Reese's and the Clef Club's fame would further increase when in 1913, Irene and Vernon Castle, a married couple who made modern dance steps palatable to middle-class urban America, hired James Europe and his Society Dance Orchestra to go on an American tour. The partnership with the Castles made Europe and the Clef Club known nationally and opened the door to recording studios, making Europe's band the first black ensemble to record for the Victor Company in 1914.⁵⁰

Europe's strategy did not challenge racial stereotypes, but used popular expectations about »Negro« entertainment to raise the professional status of black musicians. Invoking the notion that blacks have an innate sense for music in general and rhythm in particular, he and his fellow Clef Club members used to learn their repertoire by heart so that they could play the songs without having to look at the written score. Clef Club musicians, many of them excellent sight-readers, pretended that they played spontaneously to cater to the common perception of blacks being »primitive« musicians who took naturally to dance and popular styles. James Europe supported the conception of black people's superiority in dance music with statements that relied heavily on the folkloristic notion of authenticity. When interviewed by the *New York Evening Post* after a Negro Symphony Orchestra's concert at Carnegie Hall in March

49 For the following see Reid Badger, *A Life in Ragtime: A biography of James Reese Europe*, New York 1995; David Gilbert, »Clef Club Inc.: James Reese Europe and New York's Musical Marketplace«, in: *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 24 (2012), pp. 430–456.
50 D. Gilbert, »Clef Club Inc.« (see note 49), p. 441.

1914, he explained the performance to an impressed reporter by pointing out that »we colored people have our own music that is part of us [...] the product of our soul«. He further claimed that »[o]ur people have a monopoly of this kind of work, for the simple reason that the negro has an inimitable ear for time in dancing«.⁵¹ The point here is not if this statement could actually be substantiated or whether or not Europe himself believed it to be true, but that authenticity was used to improve immensely the work situation of black musicians in the one field that was left to them.

From about 1910, popular music's rise in social status through artistic and intellectual claims on the one hand and the advance of authenticity on the other introduced cultural distinctions into what had been a largely undifferentiated mass of music, produced and marketed by undistinguished songwriters, performers and publishers, and aimed at an undistinguishing mass audience. The interplay of song-writers, publishers, performers and critics established two types of value, one that turned popular music into a better class of elevated pop, the other which marked certain music a true expression of the basic experiences of ethnic groups. Cultural distinctions in turn became socially consequential as they differentiated among producers and audiences of the respective music. Performing and listening to these kinds of valuable music came to be tied to inclusion or exclusion and to social status. In the 1910s, popular music's genre matrix was laid, and differentiated sounds were to be linked to social positions.

The development of the two principles of musical classification was interdependent and conflictual. In the 1920s, they collided when both representatives of higher-class pop and of authentic black music laid claim to jazz. The »art« fraction that sought to refine jazz won out. While its members acknowledged jazz to be black people's heritage, they took it out of the hands of its originators for intellectual refinement and advancement. Backed by powerful interests and institutions, white proponents of refined jazz trumped the claim of black artists. In the second half of the twenties, composers like Irving Berlin and George Gershwin and bandleader Paul Whiteman were considered to be the foremost representatives of jazz. Art triumphed over authenticity, and white musicians crowded out black creators not for the last time in twentieth-century popular music. The story of rock music's rise from rock 'n' roll in the course of the 1960s repeated the conflict and took a similar trajectory to the establishment of jazz as art music in the 1920s. This time, it were white bands like the Beatles and the Rolling Stones who »refined« a style of popular music, lifting it above mixed-race and downmarket rock 'n' roll and pushing black artists to the side.⁵² In that position, black musicians found themselves forced to play to racist stereotypes and claim superiority in genres that were associated with spontaneity and the body rather than the intellect.⁵³

51 Quoted in Ron Welburn, »James Reese Europe and the infancy of jazz criticism«, in: *Black Music Research Journal* 7 (1987), pp. 35–44, here p. 38f.
52 Elijah Wald, *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock 'n' Roll*, New York 2009.
53 See Reebee Garofalo, »Culture versus Commerce: The Marketing of Black Popular Music«, in: *Public Culture* 7 (1994), pp. 275–287.

Conclusion

The relationship between popular musical genres and »mainstream« pop is often described as an opposition between authentic sounds on one side and commercial music for the masses on the other. It is widely assumed that the former emerge from the musical practices of close communities and convey their particular experiences, values and identities, and that the latter compromises these allegedly pure sounds by diluting and controlling them and turning them into commodities.

A closer look at structural developments in the early twentieth-century popular music business qualifies and complicates this picture. To begin with, it shows that the concept of musical genres was part of the commercial music business in the US from its beginnings. Distinctions between particular forms of music in accordance to their subject matter and their social functions were employed to channel song-writers' creations, publishers' output and retailers' merchandise for easy consumption. Initially, generic distinctions served as marketing categories to streamline the sales of popular sheet music. From about 1910, they hardened and deepened, developing into what we now associate with popular music genres. They distinguished between musical expressions and tied them to particular groups of producers and consumers. They became cultural markers of social status and identity. The analysis presented here scrutinised factors within the music business that contributed to the establishment of artistic value and authenticity as the two differences at the heart of subsequent genres from blues to folk and jazz. The aim of this analysis was to show that genre, rather than being sets of musical conventions that emerge outside the commercial music business and challenge it, are based on distinctions that are drawn within the music trade and work as constraints and resources for music producers as well as consumers who position themselves in the field of popular music.

These findings undermine the older notion of independent music as a challenge to the music industry. Instead, it perceives the field of popular music as divided into three segments, with the promoters and followers of a) artistically valuable and of b) authentic music distancing themselves from c) the commercial mainstream. From both perspectives, commercial pop is a force of corruption that compromises art and authenticity. In contrast, the present study argues that the establishment of art and authenticity is connected with social divisions which should be seen in a more critical light, the division between musicians and audiences along racial lines being the most prominent and problematic. But the analysis offers also some good news for those who look for the potential to revolutionise music and break down social divisions in popular culture. This potential can be found at the heart of the emerging commercial music business, in the oral practice of the early Alleyites who operated beyond notions of aesthetic value and authenticity, working on ways to make their performance resonate with present audiences. This type of aesthetic »rebellion«, however, appears too fluid to build political movements or base songwriter careers on.

Zusammenfassung

Der Beitrag fokussiert auf Tin Pan Alley im frühen 20. Jahrhundert und zeigt, dass popmusikalische Genrekategorien zunächst einmal zur Vermarktung des Notenangebots dienten, bevor sie anschließend mit ästhetischem Wert aufgeladen und ethnischer Authentizität verknüpft wurden. Diese Veränderung resultierte aus Strukturveränderungen der Musikwirtschaft, für die der Notenverkauf in den 1910er und 20er Jahren an Bedeutung verlor, während Tonträger und Aufführungsrecht neue Verdienstmöglichkeiten eröffneten. Statt weiterhin mit einfachen Songs auf den Geschmack eines ästhetisch ungebildeten Publikums zu zielen, sprachen Songschreiber, Musiker und Verleger entweder mit Broadway-Musicals eine urbane Mittelschicht an oder bedienten mit ethnisch definierter Musik entsprechende Nischenpublika. Die dadurch etablierte Dreiteilung des Repertoires in einen »Mainstream«, in ein künstlerisch anspruchsvolles und in ein authentisches Segment strukturiert die Populärmusik bis in die Gegenwart.