


1  **Country Music**  
Unit 03  
Notes

2  **Introduction**

- Country music has become one of today's most popular and profitable music genres. Since 2000, even when other areas of the music industry struggled, numbers of fans and sales of country music recordings increased.
- On the touring front, for example, more tickets were sold in 2004 for concerts by the country stars Kenny Chesney and Shania Twain than for all other genres of music.

3  **Introduction**

- Country music has its roots in the folk music traditions brought to the United States by European immigrants. In the eighteenth century, the folk music of the British immigrants dominated, because it was immigrants from these areas who constituted the majority of people who came and settled the "New England" colonies.
- As industrialism in the nineteenth century helped move the United States from a primarily rural nation to an urban one, traditional folk music was retained in the backwoods sections of the Southeast.

4  **Introduction**

- Here, in an area ranging as far north as the Ohio River and as far west as Texas, but especially in the Appalachian Mountains of Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and North Carolina, the old music traditions were preserved.
- In these remote and generally impoverished areas, people continued to live without electricity, without indoor plumbing, and without the conveniences of the "modern" world.

5  **Introduction**


- Despite their poverty, their lives were rich with music, as each successive generation passed down the songs and instrumental music that they had learned from the previous generation.
- Music was used to accompany work, worship, social gatherings, celebrations, and simply to "while away the hours" with family members and neighbors on the porch at the end of a hot summer day.

6  **Introduction**

- Because of their simple country ways, these poor white folks were derisively called "hillbillies" when they came into town to look for work or buy supplies.
- "Billy" is a name for a male goat, and "hill" reflected these people's homes in the more remote areas of the mountains.
- "Hillbilly" was also the term that was used to describe this old-time mountain music, and the term first appeared in print in the *New York Journal* on April 23, 1900.
- It is from this music that "country" emerged as a music industry genre of the 1920s.


7  **Introduction**

- After hitting a low point in the 1980s, country music "rebounded" in the 1990s and achieved an unprecedented level of commercial success.
- By 1996, country music had become the dominant radio format in the United States, with a total of 43 percent of all radio listeners.

8  **Overview of Country Music**

- The hillbilly music that was the foundation for the development of country music came from several different sources.

- One major source was the ballads, lyric songs, and lullabies of the folk song tradition that had been brought over by British immigrants.
- Another source was the instrumental music that was used to accompany group activities from barn raisings and hog slaughterings to weddings and harvest celebrations.
- This instrumental music was performed by small string bands, usually some combination of [fiddles](#), [guitar](#), [dulcimer](#), [banjo](#), and [autoharp](#).

9  **Overview of Country Music**

- A third source was the religious music of the churches.
  - Many whites in this area also were followers of the Holiness Pentecostal churches that began to appear in the mid-nineteenth century.
    - In these churches, instruments (especially banjos and guitars) and rhythmic clapping were welcomed.
    - It was in these churches that black (and white) Gospel music was created.

10  **Stylistic Categories**

- Old-Time Country
- Cowboy Songs
- Western Swing
- Bluegrass
- Honky Tonk
- The Nashville Sound and Country Pop
- The Outlaws (The Texas Sound)
- Contemporary Country (New Country, Young Country)
- Traditional and Alternative Country

11  **Stylistic Categories**

- Old-Time Country
  - This term is now used for the string band and “hillbilly” music that constitutes the earliest country music genre.
  - The most popular instruments were the fiddle, banjo, and guitar, but after 1900, other instruments were added such as the [mandolin](#), [string bass](#), and [Hawaiian steel guitar](#).
  - Old-time music was disseminated across the country in the first recordings and radio broadcasts from the 1920s and 1930s.

12  **Stylistic Categories**

- Old-Time Country
  - Some of the famous early musicians and bands were Jimmie Rodgers, the Carter Family, Gid Tanner and the Skillet Lickers, Charlie Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers, and prominent fiddlers included Uncle Jimmy Thompson, Blind Joe Mangrum, and Uncle Am Stuart.
  - Later musicians, such as Roy Acuff, Doc Watson, Uncle Dave Macon, and the Red Clay Ramblers maintained that style.
  - *Wildwood Flower* - The Carter Family
    - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewnfWoSQz3o>

13  **Stylistic Categories**

- Cowboy Songs
  - An immensely popular derivative of country in the 1930s, this included romantic, composed songs about the prairie and the Old West, sung by cowboys and cowgirls dressed in fringed, rhinestone-studded clothes and wearing Stetson hats
  - This style of music corresponded with the rage in “Westerns,” films romanticizing life in

America's "Wild, Wild West."

14  **Stylistic Categories**

- Cowboy Songs
  - Popular musicians in this genre included Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, Patsy Montana, Tex Ritter, Sons of the Pioneers, and Riders in the Sky.
  - *Mexicali Rose* – Gene Autry
    - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCqD6iFUxOY>

15  **Stylistic Considerations**

- Western Swing
  - This is a category of music that developed in the late 1930s in the Southwest. Traditional string ensembles incorporated characteristics from other music genres, especially jazz, into a big-band sound that accompanied dancing. In Western swing bands, instrumentation was expanded to include drums, pianos, and electric guitars.
  - One of the leaders of this style was Bob Wills with the Texas Playboys.
    - *Ida Red* – Bob Wills & The Texas Playboys
      - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZFef08YZ6qk>

16  **Stylistic Considerations**

- Bluegrass
  - Although closely related to old-time hillbilly music, bluegrass developed as a distinct style in the 1940s. Led by the mandolin player Bill Monroe, the band called themselves The Blue Grass Boys after the famous bluegrass of their home state, Kentucky.
  - Bluegrass music's chief characteristic was a return to a purely acoustic instrumental ensemble that typically included some combination of fiddle, banjo, mandolin, guitars, and string bass to accompany high-range solo singing.

17  **Stylistic Considerations**

- Bluegrass
  - Furthermore, it incorporated solo improvisation at a fast, virtuosic pace.
  - Other artists include Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs, the Stanley Brothers, and the Osborne Brothers.
  - *I Ain't Gonna Work Tomorrow* – Earl Scruggs & Lester Flatt
    - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBZ64W7URoE>

18  **Stylistic Considerations**

- Honky Tonk
  - Honky tonk music embodied the spirit of living hard – dancing, drinking, violence – that thrived in the dance halls of the same name. These "honky tonk" dance halls had sprung up in the 1930s throughout the Southwest, especially in Alabama and Texas.
  - Working-class white folks gathered there to relax after a long, hard day. The honky tonk music that evolved in the 1940s out of this context was most closely related to the old-time string bands, but with a harder, rhythm-based edge appropriate for dancing and drinking, and the angst and Depression-imbuéd lyrics of losing loved ones, often due to affairs.

19  **Stylistic Considerations**

- Honky Tonk
  - Although the most famous of honky tonk singers was Hank Williams, other important artists include Floyd Tillman, Ernest Tubb, Al Dexter, Hank Thompson, Ray Price, Kitty Wells, Webb Pierce, and Carl Smith.

- *Hey Good Lookin'* – Hank Williams
  - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95aP0OWx4jY>
- *Your Cheatin' Heart* – Hank Williams
  - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0rvLeCMTofE>

20  **Stylistic Considerations**

- The Nashville Sound and Country Pop
  - In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Nashville became the acknowledged center of country music. Recording artists attempted to create music that reflected folk origins, while absorbing elements from the broader popular culture.
  - The band was sometimes expanded to an entire orchestra, performing music in pop-style arrangements designed to appeal to both country and pop audiences.

21  **Stylistic Considerations**

- The Nashville Sound and Country Pop
  - In any particular recording, the pop elements or the traditional elements might be more or less emphasized.
  - Examples of musicians who have recorded in this style include Jim Reeves, Patsy Cline, Eddie Arnold, Loretta Lynn, Tammy Wynette, Kenny Rogers, the Mandrell Sisters, Crystal Gayle, Glen Campbell, and Dolly Parton.
  - *Crazy* – Patsy Cline
    - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-wJNpWgss8>
  - *Islands In The Stream* – Dolly Parton & Kenny Rogers
    - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lixDK\\_tMEhE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lixDK_tMEhE)

22  **Stylistic Considerations**

- The Outlaws (The Texas Sound)
  - During the 1960s and 1970s, primarily as a reaction against the dominance of Nashville and the popular music industry, various styles of country emerged in other parts of the country.
  - Bakersfield, California, was home to musicians such as Buck Owens and Merle Haggard.
  - In Austin, Texas, the thriving club scene generated “rebel” country musicians including Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, and Lyle Lovett. These musicians were called “outlaws” because of their rejection of the mainstream country music industry.

23  **Stylistic Considerations**

- The Outlaws (The Texas Sound)
  - By the end of the 1990s, another related genre of country music emerged in which the musicians were referred to as “The Hats,” because one of their signature looks was their cowboy hats.
  - Musicians such as George Strait, Garth Brooks, and Lyle Lovett – important “Hat” acts – sing in a traditional style as well as a style that has been influenced by rock ‘n’ roll.
  - *On The Road Again* – Willie Nelson
    - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8NELajFQ7ng>
  - *Friends In Low Places* – Garth Brooks
    - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KtF82Q99oI>

24  **Stylistic Considerations**

- Contemporary Country (New Country, Young Country)
  - Sometimes termed “New Country” or “Young Country,” this genre refers to the highly produced, pop-oriented country that is heard on most commercial radio stations. The music is marked by a youthful and fresh energy, incorporating characteristics of different


musical styles (particularly pop and rock 'n' roll) or a singer's own artistic innovations into country-based music.

25  **Stylistic Considerations**

- Contemporary Country (New Country, Young Country)
  - Beginning with groups such as Alabama in the 1980s, this genre encompasses performers such as Randy Travis, Trisha Yearwood, LeaAnn Rimes, Garth Brooks, Alan Jackson, George Strait, Travis Tritt, and Kenny Chesney.
  - Many country musicians have moved out of the confines of the “country” labels altogether and are marketed to broader audiences. Examples of musicians who began in country but have had broad crossover appeal or have eventually shifted into other music styles are Wynonna Judd, Shania Twain, The Dixie Chicks, Faith Hill, Rascal Flatts, Carrie Underwood, and Taylor Swift.

26  **Stylistic Considerations**

- Contemporary Country (New Country, Young Country)
  - *Song of the South* – Alabama
    - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHdXOAOHjd8>
  - *Achy Breaky Heart* – Billy Ray Cyrus
    - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OIqMflhH1LY>
  - *Wide Open Spaces* – The Dixie Chicks
    - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nIDPPu53V80>
  - *What Hurts The Most* – Rascal Flatts
    - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dITL7hrKJk&feature=fvw>

27  **Stylistic Considerations**

- Traditional and Alternative Country
  - “Traditional” is used to refer to any of the older styles as well as to describe younger country musicians who record in these styles. These musicians purposefully strive to retain the simpler, acoustic roots of traditional country music.
  - “Alternative” is similar, describing country music that is made and distributed outside of the mainstream Nashville music industry and that does not typically get airplay on commercial radio.

28  **Stylistic Considerations**

- Traditional and Alternative Country
  - Musicians in this category include k.d. lang, the Palace, Jeffrey Jeff Walker, and Robert Earl Keen.
  - Often music is eclectic, pulling from a variety of styles, even to create new fusions with names such as “Cow Punk” – a fusion of country and punk, created by groups such as The Beat Farmers, Mojo Nixon, and Dash Rip Rock.
  - *Rose Garden* – k.d. lang & Kathy Lee Gifford
    - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gA2qsQYsKSo>

29  **Structural Characteristics**

- Melody, Rhythm, and Harmony
  - Melodies in country music are constructed in clear, regular phrases, frequently organized into “parallel” construction emulating speech patterns of question and answer. They are generally simple and designed to be easily remembered, often with a “hook” that captures people's attention.
  - The rhythmic organization is divisive, with strong, steady metrical organization, most frequently in duple and quadruple meters.

- The melodies and the supporting harmonies are in European tonal systems, with major mode predominating. In most of the styles, the accompanying chords stress the primary triads of I, IV, and V.

30  **Structural Characteristics**

- Instrumentation, Texture, and Form
  - Textures are homophonic, and the performance style is direct. The formal structure is typically strophic, with repeated verses of text set to the same music or they are strophic with a refrain.
  - In terms of instrumentation, early songs were sung with simple accompaniment that emphasized strings, such as the fiddle, guitar, banjo, string bass, dulcimer, and autoharp. Later instrumentation varies with the particular style.

31  **Country Music in a Historical and Social Context**

- The 1920s and the Beginnings of “Country” Music
  - The 1920s was a glitzy decade in which the United States thrived in the post-World War I economy and extravagant lifestyle known as “The Roaring Twenties.”
  - Excitement was generated by experiments in new technologies, and foremost among these were the technologies of recording and radio broadcasting.

32  **Country Music in a Historical and Social Context**

- Developments in Electrical Recording
  - The first practical phonograph had been built by the American inventor Thomas Edison in 1877. Edison, however, had intended the phonograph to be used as a dictating machine in business offices.
  - It was not until the invention of the flat-disk phonograph in 1887 by another American inventor, Emile Berliner, that there was a machine used to record music.

33  **Country Music in a Historical and Social Context**

- Radio Broadcasting
  - Along with the development of recording there, was the development of the radio. The first transmission of a human voice over “radio” waves occurred in 1906, but the idea of using radio for broadcasting to mass audiences was not formulated for another decade.

34  **Country Music in a Historical and Social Context**

- The New Radio Programs
  - One idea for programming that began at WLS in Chicago was to broadcast amateur musicians in a “Barn Dance of the Air.” This broadcast was so immediately popular that soon “barn dances” and “hayrides” could be heard on several radio stations at all hours of the day and night.
  - The program was renamed *The National Barn Dance*, and a newspaperman from Indiana named George D. Hay was hired as the “master of ceremonies.”

35  **Country Music in a Historical and Social Context**

- The New Radio Programs
  - George D. Hay broadcasted string bands, square-dance callers, and fiddlers. The radio and recording programs called this “hillbilly” music.

- In 1925, the National Life and Accident Insurance Company lured George D. Hay to Nashville where he began to emcee a new program titled “The WSM Barn Dance” on their radio station WSM.
- By 1926, the WSM show title was changed to *Grand Ole Opry*.
  - *Don't Just Stand There* – Carl Smith
    - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqfTijSU8ak>

36  **Country Music in a Historical and Social Context**

- Impact of the Depression
  - When the stock market crash of 1929 brought the “Roaring Twenties” to an end and issued in the Great Depression, the simplicity and sincerity of “hillbilly” music continued to attract large audiences.

37  **Country Music in a Historical and Social Context**


- The 1950s and the Creation of “The Nashville Sound”
  - The post-World War II boom years were good years for country music. Americans were happy that the war was over. They had money to spend, they were buying records, and they were going to concerts.
  - The Grand Ole Opry was broadcast to millions of listeners every Saturday night on network radio, and television performances by country musicians were becoming more and more frequent.

38  **Country Music in a Historical and Social Context**

- The 1950s and the Creation of “The Nashville Sound”
  - But this decade also saw the birth of a new form of music: “rhythm and blues.”
  - “Rhythm and blues” was the term record companies had come up with to replace the older category of “race records” – records made by and for black audiences.
  - Covers (re-recordings) of these black records were made by white musicians and introduced onto the pop charts as “rock ‘n’ roll.” This new sound became immensely popular with young audiences and, as more rock records were sold, radio programmers began switching their formats from country music to rock ‘n’ roll.

39  **Country Music in a Historical and Social Context**

- The Impact of Rock ‘n’ Roll
  - The success of these early rock ‘n’ roll musicians, such as the country boy Elvis Presley (who recorded in a style called “rockabilly”), combined with the success of new “urban” folksingers such as the Kingston Trio, put pressure on country musicians to update their sound.
  - The resulting changes were known as the “Nashville Sound.” The “Nashville Sound” focused on solo singers.

40  **Country Music in a Historical and Social Context**

- The 1960s and 1970s and the Impact of Television
  - As the 1950s blended into the 1960s and television became an important new broadcast medium, several new “country” programs such as ABC’s *The Johnny Cash Show* and CBS’s *Hee Haw* brought the Nashville Sound to mainstream audiences.
  - This in turn spawned an era known as the “Country Pop Superstars,” with the next

- generation of singers, such as Johnny Cash, propelled to superstardom.
- As country music was adapted to reach even wider audiences, a style known as “crossover country” with musicians, such as John Denver, developed that appealed to country and pop music audiences alike.

41  **Country Music in a Historical and Social Context**

- The 1960s and 1970s and the Impact of Television
  - *The Johnny Cash Show*
    - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0WZuqAVgGwA>
  - *Hee Haw*
    - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQ5ob9B9yD4>
  - *Take Me Home Country Roads* - John Denver
    - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWzeInQaUk4>

42  **Further Research**

- Movie: *Walk The Line*
  - Rated: PG-13 (Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13)
  - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GsvZGwd8vrl>

43  **Performer Spotlight**

- Shania Twain
  - Shania Twain was born in Windson and raised in Timmins, Ontario, in Canada.
  - She was the second oldest of five children, born to a poor working-class family.
  - Before Shania met her husband, Mutt Lange, her debut on PolyGram records had only two charting singles, both which reached only number fifty-five on the charts. Mutt helped her become what is known as a “progressive” country singer, because (unlike “traditional country” singers) she records and performs songs that have fusion elements with other musical styles such as rock ‘n’ roll and pop.

44  **Performer Spotlight**

- Shania Twain
  - This has upset the more traditional country fans that have (apparently) denounced her for “tainting” “real” country music.
  - Since 1995, however, she has won over forty awards, including Grammy Awards, Country Music Awards, and American Music Awards.
  - *Forever and For Always* – Shania Twain
    - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpT-FW\\_G8-A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpT-FW_G8-A)

45  **Conclusion**

- At the beginning of the millennium, country music includes a vast array of styles, each with its own music industry “label.”
- In each of these styles, musicians strive to preserve their music’s rural heritage and folk origins, while searching for and absorbing elements from other musical styles that are satisfying on a personal artistic level and/or popular in mainstream American culture.
- In this way, country musicians continue to refresh and adapt their music for contemporary audiences, while preserving the essence of the traditional folk music brought over by the first European immigrants almost four centuries ago.

46  **Assignment**

- List five different types of Country music.

- List five artists in the Country music genre.
- List five albums in the Country music genre.
- Do a listening report in MLA format of no more than ONE PAGE of any song in the Country music genre.
  - Listening Report Example on the Music History portion of the Huron Bands Website.
- PAPER SUBMISSION OR E-MAIL DUE BY 3:00 P.M. THE DAY OF THE UNIT 03 TEST.
  - [matthew.herr@huronbands.com](mailto:matthew.herr@huronbands.com)
  - Microsoft Word Documents (.doc / .docx) and Portable Document Formats (.pdf) only.