FROM SCOTTISH MYSTIQUE TO BLACK SOUL: THE ROOTS OF MULTICULTURALISM AND POPULAR MUSIC IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE UNITED STATES

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The dialectic between the ideology of nationalism and the multicultural character of national populations has recently become a focus of attention for both official and unofficial observers of social life in the industrialized or industrializing world. On the one hand, the process of cultural homogenization proper to the evolution of the "global village" has provided a fertile field for the political exploitation of cultural differences of all types. On the other hand, uneasiness about culturally unifying tendencies or conceptual "holism" has led to the articulation of the neo-romantic, "postmodernist" concern for diversity, a focus upon particularities in avoidance of any attempt to "unify" the sum of our understanding of complex processes. Such conceptual concerns underlay the questions addressed herein, where it is assumed that the relationship between the spiritual life of populations and the material conditions of their existence can be explored in the evolution of popular music. The examples examined here are England and the United States at the beginnings of the "modern" period. Commercial popular music evolved in both countries as a process of socio-cultural amalgamation in the context of a developing industrial-capitalist economy.

The Dark Scots

The emergence of popular music in England was intimately connected with the acceleration of capitalist evolution permitted by the revolutionary "settlement" of 1688. Most important was the set of ambiguous relationships existing between the masses of laboring people and the now triumphant and diversifying middle-class strata. Decades of generally united struggle (in spite of relative exceptions such as radicals like the levellers, diggers and ranters), plus the phenomenon of urbanization, laid the foundations of a new market. In addition, the fading of aristocratic conventions and the explosion of entreprenuerial activity forced the production of music into more commercial forms. Already during the Restoration period beginning in 1660, the versifiers and publicists of the revolutionary era, talented and well-experienced in the art of mobilizing the masses, turned their efforts towards a different kind of manipulation. Where writers previously attempted to inspire the idealistic ardor of a populace in arms, they now worked to shape more trivial sentiments with a view towards their commercial exploitation.

Given the political and economic situation of the late seventeenth century in England, it is not surprising to find there the beginnings of a music publishing industry. Important in this development was Thomas D'Urfey. Educated to be a lawyer, D'Urfey turned to literature during the halycon days of the Restoration when

an England wearied by civil strife and puritanism once again could offer struggling playwrights and other practitioners of the ludic arts at least the hope of earning a living. By the time of the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688, D'Urfey was a successful entertainer, playwright and songwright who willingly conceded that he was no William Shakespeare or Alexander Pope. The reason for his modesty was clear: royal or aristocratic patronage was now of far less importance to the vast majority of writers and performers than was the market represented by the ever-swelling ranks of entreprenuers, lawyers, clerks, public officials and a myriad of other categories of literate but non-aristocratic culture consumers.

In 1698 D'Urfey published the first edition of a collection of songs, encouragingly titled *Wit and Mirth, or, Pills to Purge Melancholy.* This presentation of catchy music as balm for the soul (an early version of the well-known "shot of rhythm and blues" designed to counteract "the rockin' pneumonia and the boogie-woogie flu") proved to be a perennial bestseller. As such, the work revealed some striking features of the new tastes in popular music. First, the songs were not primarily D'Urfey's own creations, but were rather collected from a variety of sources. Not only did they come from existing publications, from broadsides, plays, poems and other literary works, but very likely from street singers, bar rooms and working people in general. D'Urfey presented the songs as commodities after selecting or modifying them according his perception of their commercial potential. But regardless of any modifications that he might have made, it was apparently the popular, lower-class origins or orientation of the product that appealed to those willing and able to pay for it. D'Urfey had discovered that the vulgar creations of the working people were a rich vein of artistic authenticity that could be profitably worked. True or false, the impression was emerging that an essentially "middle-class" market demanded the sometimes coarse and always vivid imagery that only the "people" were capable of producing.

Another trend indicated by Thomas D'Urfey's collection was the place devoted to songs of Scottish origin. Lasting into the early decades of the nineteenth century, a marked English taste for Scottish songs was both confirmed and announced by most other *songbooks* published in the early 1700s. "By the 1720s", says Dave Harker, "the English market for 'Scots' songs was such that rather than simply import the songs, the capital [London] imported the people who made and sang them".[1] It was a persistant trend that culminated in the popularity of the poems and novels of Walter Scott.

Why were the Scots objects of fascination for the English? Although Harker is undoubtedly right when he says that Scottish culture was just foreign enough to appeal to the imagination, there may be a more profound reason why successive generations of English consumers remained fascinated by it. It is perhaps significant, for example, that throughout the eighteenth century such a taste for the exotic did not especially favor a similar attraction for Irish culture. This suggests that, instead of stemming solely from the intrinsic merits or originality of Scottish idioms, the hold of the Scots over the English imagination is more likely rooted in the historical evolution of relations between the different regions. If, on the one hand,

1. Dave Harker, *Fakesong. The Manufacture of British "Folksong" 1700 to the Present Day,* Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1985, p. 12.

some Scots and English wished to combine their cultural traditions so as to create something called "British", on the other hand the Scots represented a fierce, tenacious spirit of independence that the English had been forced to admire on a number of occasions. In addition, the Scots were protestants. Most probably it is in the evolution of changing social relations and political institutions in England that the explanation for the popularity of Scottish culture among the English middle classes is to be found.

Like the Roman conquerers before them, the English monarchy from the Norman conquests until the eighteenth century had failed to subdue the fierce tribes of Scotland. The Scots merited their reputation for heroism in the defense of their independence, their ancient culture, and a certain occult wisdom inherited from pagan days. The mystique woven around the Scots was reinforced in the sixteenth century as the land enclosures and accelerated development of a commercial economy changed English society, diluting regional cultural differences, weakening feudal codes of honor, and elevating parvenus to positions of authority irrespective of their ancestral or moral qualifications.

In the midst of the Protestant Reformation, the Scots were a nagging worry. Catholicism could not be so quickly reduced as it was in England, and it contributed to the dynastic insecurities and plots that threatened the tacit alliance existing between Elizabeth I and the commercial classes. The execution of Mary Stuart ("Queen of Scots") in 1587 was an understandable but hazardous decision on the part of an insecure monarch. The first irony in this story is that the Stuart dynasty ascended to the throne only sixteen years later in 1603. The second irony is that James I, the first of the Stuart kings of England, initiated a political crisis that simultaneously resulted in a social revolution and contributed to the Scottish mystique, all the elements of which were united in William Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* (first produced in 1606). In an England that was rapidly losing its feudal character, the Scots were seen as a dark and mysterious people, close to the elements, in touch with the supernatural and protective of their ancient ways. James I's quixotic character (as perceived in the light of his writings on witchcraft and his bisexuality) certainly did not detract from this image. Still another irony is that the English Revolution was precipitated by the Scots themselves in 1638. Their revolt forced the second Stuart King, Charles I, to recall a Parliament that he had tried to rule without.

The Scottish mystique was strengthened throughout the decades following the revolutionary settlement of 1688 as the highland clans articulated their own rivalries in terms of English politics (between the Whigs and the Tories and in relation to the movement to restore the Stuart dynasty to the throne known as "Jacobitism"). Having failed to militarily subdue the formidable Scots in any conclusive way, a combination of English pressure and internal dissensions led to the Act of Union of 1707, which allowed the Highlanders and Lowlanders a large measure of political autonomy while integrating Scotland into the economic and administrative sphere of English authority. If the Scots retained their legal system, were allowed representation in Parliament, and given tax advantages (in relation to the English), the privatization of tribal lands and their consequent enclosure created severe hardship for the Scottish people. Tens of thousands were obliged to immigrate to North America or to the industrializing urban centers.

In this context of social and economic transformation, it is not surprising that

political dissidents in Scotland ignored the Act of Union and seized upon dynastic issues in the attempt to regain complete independence. In 1715 and 1745 fullblown military rebellions broke out, abortive efforts encouraged by France, England's principal rival in world affairs. If such insurrections inevitably failed, they nevertheless succeeded in keeping the Scottish mystique strongly rooted in the minds of the English public (in 1745, 5,000 Highlanders marched to Derby, creating panic in London).[2]

Even the English colonial administration unwittingly reinforced the image of proud and indomitable Scots. When the authorities prohibited the wearing of traditional highland dress and the playing of the highland war-pipes after the rebellion of 1745 – only to remove such irritations during the Seven Years War (1756-63) so as to facilitate the recruitment of soldiers in Scotland, it was as if interest in Scottish culture was officially endorsed.

The relations between the English and the Scots remained ambivalent, ambiguous and tense. Unlike the Irish, the Scots were never truly conquered, humiliated and extirpated. In many ways they became a model for the English themselves, an alter ego for a public reconciled to the very unheroic consequences of the long, frustrating revolution of the century past. In the rapidly changing and increasingly insecure English society, the Scots represented the world that the English had lost, the pastoral, pre-industrial world of proud, independant warriors. The Scots were, from this perspective, untainted by the cupidity and egoistic calculation of the mercantile and industrial elites that some eighteenth century authors, like Daniel Defoe, tried to elevate into new heroic virtues (in works like *Robinson Crusoe)* and that others, like Henry Fielding, contrasted with the virtues of a more wholesome countryside (in, for example, *Tom Jones).* Adam Smith, in his *The Wealth of Nations (1776),* referred to the hospitality of the highland Scots as a model of the sort of harmonious social relations that freeing commercial relations of all regulation would bring back to England. The ideological character of the Scottish mystique is aptly captured by Eric Hobsbawm, who says that "the universal bourgeois admiration for Scots highlanders did not, so far as I know, lead a single writer to demand nationhood for them..."[3]

The Scottish idiom was popularized throughout the eighteenth century in virtually all dimensions of musical expression in England. To understand how this was so, it is important to note, as Derek Scott does in his perceptive book, *The Singing Bourgeois,* that the distinctions we tend to make between "folk" music and "popular" music, and between high musical culture and low musicial culture, did not yet entirely exist. "No one in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries spoke about 'folk tunes'"; they talked, instead, of old airs and minstrelsy, and the main interest was in Celtic airs...".[4] Such airs were sold cheaply as broadside tracts; they were collected into an inceasing number of songbooks; they provided the substances of operettas (like Allan Ramsay's successful *The Gentle Shepherd,* 1725); and they progressively fused with English musical expression to the point where a "British" amalgam began to emerge.

2. A.L. Morton, A *People's History of England,* London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1979 [1938], p. 301.

3. Eric Hobsbawn, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 41.

4. Derek Scott, *The Singing Bourgeois: Songs of the Victorian Drawing Room and Parlour,* Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1989, p. 22.

During this period, Scottish songwriters and publishers prospered. Ramsay's "Auld Lang Syne" was one of their more memorable products; its evocation of a clannish kind of nostalgia effectively captured the emotionalism that announced the first stirrings of Romanticism. By the end of the century, the poet Robert Burns was a major songwriter, and the composers Joseph Haydn and Ignace Pleyel were employed by various publishers to provide arrangements for ever-profitable marketing of "Scottish airs".

It is tempting to compare the hold of the Scottish mystique over the English imagination throughout the eighteenth century to the fascination secretly exerted by African-American culture over that of whites in North America. The differences are of course great. The Scots were not a servile population, nor were they crushed and humiliated as were the Irish. In addition, there was not the difference of color or religion. However, the comparison is not entirely misleading if we consider what appears to be a dynamic inherent in the creation of popular music in industrial-capitalist societies. The Scottish idiom was *perceived* to be more authentic than English culture. It thusly represented a cultural standard that provided a measure of identifiable criteria to the production of commercial music. The Scottish idiom was a raw material that had to refined, measured-out in doses or assimilated in an *artful* way. It was, therefore, an exploitable resource that could be collected, diluted and modified according to marketing needs. It was presented (marketed) and thought of (consumed) as an intangible quality; but it was dealt with by performers and music publishers as something quite concrete, quantifiable. manipulable and modifiable. The outstanding fact is that the emergence of popular, commercial music in English involved a process of cross-cultural fusion roughly similar to that in evidence in the United States in the nineteenth century. The capitalist need for a novel, catchy or exotic product to facilitate marketing strategy coincided in both cases with social and political conditions conducive to cultural (and thus social) integration.

Throughout the nineteenth century, and out of the amalgam of cultures contributed to by all social classes and categories, the new middle classes fashioned (or had fashioned for them) tastes and styles contributing to their self-identifications. The commercial production of music was an important aspect of this process, adapting working-class musical practices to the sentimental needs and aesthetic pretentions of "rising" social groups. But this political-ideological function of popular music was certainly not the intent of the songwriters, publishers or performers. Their principal objective was to maximize the profitability of the emerging "music industry". The application of capitalist practices in the production and marketing of music came as part of the same processes then shattering the customs and patterns of existence characteristic of pre-industrial society.

Music, Capitalism and the Evolution of the American "Soul"

The origins of modern musical forms in England must be traced to the social and political revolution of the seventeenth century. It was this development that at once perpetuated and modified the social divisions that continue to lie at the core of English mentality and behavior. English society as we know it today was most fundamentally formed by the social transformation caused by the Protestant Reforma-

tion and the accelerated development of commercial exchange and land enclosures of the sixteenth century, followed by the legal and political restructuring caused by the "Puritan Revolution" of the seventeenth century. The accelerated urbanization and proletarianization of the English working classes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a consequence of these social mutations. Popular music of the modern sort, that is popular music that appeals to the broad masses by artists that are generally issued from them and is produced for purposes of commercial gain, must be traced to these great transformations. Social upheaval released creative passions and energies that at once reflected the new social relationships and presented a field for eventual development and exploitation. It was in the seventeenth century that social revolution began a transition in plebian culture from the private, "folk" forms of expression to the beginnings of a music industry oriented towards the merchandising of entertainment for the broad masses.

In discussing the messianic feelings which resulted in and were, in turn, generated by the English Revolution, A. L. Morton quotes a verse from an army hymn of the Civil War period that illustrates well the powerful imagery unleashed by open social and political struggle:

> The Lord begins to honour us,
> The Saints are marching on;
> The sword is sharp, the arrows swift
> To destroy Babylon.[5]

Reading these lines may recall the gospel song (and early jazz standard) "When the Saints Go Marching-in", but it was undoubtedly sung in the very different spirit of the powerful religious-martial anthem of the American Civil War, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic". The martial spirit of retribution is similar in these songs, and the nineteenth-century, American form of it has lost nothing of the illuminated wrath of the English puritans:

> Mine eyes have seen the glory
> Of the coming of the Lord.
> He hath loosed the fearful lightning
> Of his terrible, swift sword.

In both struggles, mayhem and martyrdom were sanctioned by God in a holy cause. "John Brown's body lies a-moldering in its grave", it was granted, "but his truth goes marching on". The exhaltation of the American emancipators recalled that of the English Roundheads. Both sought ideological justification in their struggle against what they saw as entrenched aristocratic elites. In effect, in his attempt to spark a slave insurrection, John Brown must have seen himself as a latter-day Oliver Cromwell.

A major characteristic of such radical, popular movements is their emotivity and rich verbal expression. Versifying and singing are essential to the exhaltation proper to the phenomenon. The emotional-spiritual intensity of the English Revolu-

5. A.L. Morton, *The English Utopia*, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1952, p. 68.

tion was far stronger than anything remotely comparable in what became the United States of America. With one exception: the struggle of African-Americans for their own liberty and dignity. There was, in fact, a direct link between the English Revolution and the major upheaval in North American history, the War between the States. The radical, lower-class currents of the English Civil War were repressed almost immediately after the Revolution, but persisted in the slow tide of evangelical Methodism that E. P. Thompson has shown to be at once an expression of an essentially rebellious, class mentality and an obstacle to its more conscious articulation.

This same religious radicalism took strong root in the English colonies of North America, periodically animating the outbreak of collective movements such as the so-called Great Awakenings of the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In the first of these movements it was even a non-colonial preacher, John Wesley, around whom the new generation of "seekers" and "ranters" coalesced. In England as well, evangelicalism continued the tradition of militant, puritan hymn-singing, but it could not halt more dionysian impulses straining to find expression in a confused social environment. Ranting and barroom singing quickly became characteristics of lower-class culture in England, formed by its landless, proletarianized masses. Old folkways had been shattered by the social upheaval of the Revolution that "turned the world upside down"; now the commercial and productive processes that generated the Revolution began to transform popular musical culture.

The contrast between the European cultures and the African cultures that collided in North America is more than striking, it is overwhelming. If the cultural backgrounds of the black African slaves inclined them to musical expression – and then the conditions of slavery left them very few avenues for self-expression other than music – for the whites the situation was quite the contrary. In the regions where there developed the highest concentration of European settlers, especially the area of "New England", the settlers were very likely to be Protestant dissenters of an extreme Calvinist variety. For these people, music was at best a dangerous thing, and at all times a devilish temptation. Any pleasurable activity that implied abandonment to sensuality, whether gambling, dancing or simply idle revery, was not only preparing the ground for the Devil's work, it could actually *be* the Devil's work. The puritan ethic was to avoid extremes of all kinds. Any form of extasy could lead to moral lapse, sin, and damnation.

The bias against sensuality, and thus against "giving oneself over" to the sensual power of music, was strengthened by the rationalism which was increasingly characteristic of the Western mentality. The American colonies, it should not be forgotten, were founded as business ventures. Even the pilgrims were middle-class people who habitually thought in terms of profit and loss, who shared the obsession with quantitative calculation. What the sociologist Max Weber called "the protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism" was the fusion of new theological preoccupations and the rationalistic cast of mind necessary to the commercial civilization emerging between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries.

When, during the two "great awakenings" of protestant evangelicalism, emotional fervor and chiliastic hysteria wracked both England and North America, the bias against sensual abandon persisted. Even here the accent was on repression rather than release. True to the spirit of puritanism, the quakers, shakers, jumpers

and others were momentarily transported to an illuminated state or a "rebirth" by the fervor of preachers like George Whitefield, but in the end their salvation lay in greater containment of "sinful" impulses. In his study of the influence of Methodism on working-class consciousness in England, E.P. Thompson stresses the impact that such preaching must have had on the minds of children. The hymns sung by lower-class congregations were designed to terrorize them into a sort of repressive moral and emotional conformity.

> When children in their wanton play,
> Serv'd old Elisha so;
> And bid the prophet go his way,
> 'Go up, thou bald-head, go:
>
> GOD quickly stopt their wicked breath,
> And sent two raging bears,
> That tore them limb from limb to death,
> With blood, and groans, and tears.[6]

"Wanton play" was sin itself for white people, whether rich or poor.

Such a trend among working people in England was all the more significant in that the very processes of industrialization intensified the Protestant obsession with personal guilt. The crime and moral profligacy produced by the rapid urbanization of society and proletarianization of the lower classes was paralleled by the rise of religious messianism which in turn promoted a repressive individualism. The loss of rural, communal traditions, and the brutalization of the imagination produced by England's mean streets, facilitated the acceptance of the liberal ideology of nascent industrial-capitalist society. This individualistic ideology was equally the dominant ethos in the United States, where social elites actively propagated it during and after the war of independence. It was a deeply ingrained egoism and association of pleasure with moral turpitude which contrasted sharply with the cultural attitudes of the African slaves. It was frequently remarked that the Africans gave themselves over to forms of corporeal and musical expression in public without any trace of the prudery so common in white society.

This capacity for joyous abandon in the midst of oppressive bondage and social deprivation was noted by whites and blacks alike. It, and the dissimulation typical of underground culture, encouraged the whites in their belief that the blacks were simple, animal-like creatures incapable of the inner resolve characteristic of a superior people. But it also comforted the blacks in their conviction that the whites, if powerful, lacked subtlety. Oddly, and regardless of the obvious fact that Africans assimilated much of Western culture through sheer necessity, a primary characteristic of this cultural adaptation was the creation of an even greater gap between European-American and African-American cultures.

There are many poignant accounts of how central music was to the slave experience, haunting accounts of blacks in a Virginia forest singing in the cold, misty morning as they felled trees and hewed railroad ties, or a dozen black oarsmen propel-

6. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class,* New York, Penguin Books, 1963, p. 414.

ling a boat down a river in Florida as one called out a line and the others answered in chorus, the rhythm corresponding to the rowing. White observers during the slave years regularly called attention to the fact that music accompanied virtually every aspect of slave existence. The slaves and ex-slaves themselves often pointed to the importance of music for them, and expressed the opinion that they were clearly superior to the whites in their ability to make music.

The reasons for the African slaves's greater aptitude for musical expression are certainly not those articulated during the days of slavery. It was not that Africans were "naturally" more musical, or that, as one plantation owner said, "niggers is allers good singers" because "they got better lungs than white folks". Such explanations clearly stem from the racist culture that justified both slavery and racial discrimination. If Africans do have "better lungs", that must also mean that they are more suited for manual labor. No, the question of any possible physiological difference between blacks and whites is secondary to the cultural imperatives of the radically different social organization of black existence. It was the combined effect of African socio-cultural origins and the forced collectivization and communalization of slave society that made musical expression an absolutely necessary facet of African-American life. Political expression was, of course, largely denied to them. But within the tyrannically imposed confines of their lives, the slaves developed a *spiritual power* that deeply impressed the whites who glimpsed it.

Much has been made of the "negro spirituals", their symbolic richness, their contribution to American (and world) music. Sociologically they represent part of the aesthetic dimension of the deep sense of community generated by the conditions of African-American life. It was, and is, this sense of community that fascinated, and frightened white people who had contact with the powerful ccmbination of black music and black religion. In the 1850s, Frederick Law Olmsted confessed that "I was at once surprised to find my own muscles all stretched, as if ready for a struggle – my face glowing, and my feet stamping...". During the same period, Mary Boykin Chesnut had a similar experience at a black church: "I wept bitterly... It was a little too exciting for me. I would very much have liked to shout, too." After the Civil War, Elizabeth Kilham recounted what happened when she and other whites attended such a servlce. "An invisible power", she said, "seemed to hold us in its iron grasp; the excitement was working upon us also". The tension was so great that she and her companions rushed to the exit: "...a few minutes more, and I think we should have shrieked in unison with the crowd". Once they escaped, "more than one of the party leaned against the wall, and burst into hysterical tears; even strong men were shaken, and stood trembling and exhausted." Later in the century, the African-American revolutionary W.E.B. Du Bois described the same phenomenon. Raised in a privileged New England environment, the revivalistic form of worship was as alien to him as it was for most whites. Far more than just a soulful way of singing and chanting, it quickly became a kind of mass hysteria in which, as earlier observers such as Elizabeth Kilham described, was virtually irresistable. A product of university education, the future author of *Souls of Black Folk* explained the experience with a similar surprise and dread when suddenly confronted with the weakness of his rational defenses: "A sort of suppressed terror hung in the air and seemed to seize us – a pythian madness, a demoniac possession that lent terrible reality to song and word."

This seemingly irrational power of African-American music is why it elicits such an emotional response from white listeners. The various forms that black music has taken over the past century – gospel, blues, ragtime, jazz, rhythm and blues, soul, etc. – have all provoked some form of fascination, whether positive or negative, love or hatred. It is for this reason that the question of the origins of African-American music has been explored and debated so frequently, generally with some cultural or nationalist prejudice as its inspiration.

But whatever the continuity of West African culture after it was transposed to the United States, or the imitation or application of Western European music or musical instruments, the fact remains that a unique music was created in highly exceptional social and cultural conditions. As Lawrence W. Levine has said: "We have only gradually come to recognize not merely the sheer complexity of the question of origins but also its irrelevancy for an understanding of consciousness. It is not necessary for a people to originate or invent all or even most of the elements of their culture. It is necessary only that these components become their own, embedded in their traditions, expressive of their world view and life style. Interestingly, no one engaged in the debate over origins, not even advocates of the white derivation theory, denied that the slaves possessed their own distinctive music".[7]

The making of music always involves imitation and adaptation. There is no distinction between folk, popular, or "classical" musics in this regard. One performer or composer learns from another and innovations are enthusiastically incorporated in order to provide a different color or a twist. Part of this creative process is parody, the exaggeration of certain forms of expression in the attempt to express a personal point of view. Parody can be critical in its intent or merely good-naturedly humorous, but its ironic content is artistically appealing because it lends depth to a performance; there is that which is being adapted or performed and that which comments on it. Parody is, in fact, essential to the emergence of popular music in the United States. Parody of African-American music by European-American performers contributed to what has been called the "first uniquely American show business form" – the blackface minstrel show.[8]

Well over a century before Elvis Presley was found to be a white man capable of singing like a black man, it was discovered that there was enormous commercial potential in the imitation of black music by whites. American popular music emerged and has developed through the systematic, constant appropriation of black musical forms and the equally constant attempt to adapt the form and spirit of black music to the aesthetic sensibilities of white listeners. Ironic representation - parody - has traditionally been the most acceptable initial way of introducing the different, succeeding forms of black music to the larger and more affluent white audiences.

As early as the eighteenth century, African Americans were parodied in song and dance by professional entertainers. Several examples exist of white performers blackening their faces with burnt cork preparatory to rendering numbers such as the "Poor Black Boy", "The Gay Negro Boy" or "The Guinea Boy". The titles of these songs do not, however, indicate that black people were merely subjects of

7. Cited in Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 24.

8. Robert C. Toll, *On with the Show*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 81.

occasional songs concerning them. The fact that caucasian singers elected to blacken their faces for their performances indicates that the desire to caricature Africain-Americans was often a primary motivation. The element of parody (invidious or not) was also indicated by the employment of African-American patois, as indicated in early songs such as "Clare de Kitchen".

Whatever the exact motivations of the white performers of African-American music, their creations may well have represented the changing sensibilities of a new generation. Thomas Dartmouth "Daddy" Rice was the most prominant and, apparently, influential of the early "minstrel" singers. Born in 1808 of working-class origins (he was trained as a woodcarver), Rice was only twenty years old but already performing when he adapted "Jump Jim Crow" to his repertoire.

His routine involved an exaggerated imitation of a ludicrously pretentious black man. By dancing with odd, ungainly motions, and singing almost nonsensical lyrics in imitation of a barely recognizable black dialect, Rice had enormous success with a number that established the model for blackface performances in general. He became the leading creator of what he called "Ethiopean operas" but which, as David Ewen points out, "in actuality were not operas at all but blackface farces or extravaganzas with Negro songs and dances".[9] In addition, the expression "Jim Crow" quickly gained acceptance as a concept marking the differences between blacks and whites. By the early-1830s, the performance of "Jim Crow songs" by white performers disguised as blacks was popular in New York City. With money to be made, copying black music became a general phenomenon and whites began to demand recognition as the first or the most "original" imitators. The white minstrel Ben Cotton, for example, claimed: "I was the first white man they had seen who sang as they did". Whether he was or not is unimportant. What is significant is that, during the two decades leading up to the Civil War, parodies of African-American music dominated the commercial music that today we call popular.

The black-face minstrel groups that marked the second half of nineteenth-century in the United States emerged in the early 1840s when individual performers combined their forces during a period of economic depression. The first concerts given by white minstrels performing African-American music are said to have taken place in New York City on 6 February, 1843, and in Boston on 7 March, 1843. The artists were the Virginia Minstrels, a group formed in 1842 by Dan Emmett, a blackface performer born in 1815. Emmett and three other musicians formed a combo that was distinguished by its relatively serious attitude towards the music . African-American music was not performed for the expressly simple purpose of comic relief through caricature, but as a musical form worthy of serious consideration. Emmett's group developed a routine including songs, instrumental numbers, and comic dialogue. The instruments used were those popular among African-American musicians, such as the fiddle, and those of African derivation or inspiration such as the "bones", the tambourine, and the banjo (invented around 1830 by adapting European mechanics to an African instrument). Soon there were other groups like Emmett's. The Virginia Minstrels, the Christy Minstrels, and many others toured the United States and had a major impact on the evolution of tastes in popular

9. David Ewen, *All the Years of American Popular Music*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, Inc.,1977, p. 24.

music. Some became international stars, performing in European capitals where the music took hold as Europeans, in turn, were inspired to imitate the blackface whites who parodied African-American performers.

Masses of whites were thus introduced to African-American music for the first time. But this introduction did not have the immediate effect of creating more respect for the cultural accomplishments of blacks, or a greater degree of understanding and tolerance between racial groups. The outrageous caricatures of blacks, who were referred to as "coons" among other derogatory expressions, perpetuated the commonly held idea that they were simple, happy-go-lucky creatures whose antics were diverting but who could in no way be considered the equals of the more responsable and intellectually capable white race. As Giles Oakley has said, this image of African Americans went far beyond the concert hall: "Examples of minstrel show images abound in the literature of the years after the Civil War. Novels and magazine stories, anecdotes and cartoons of the time all used the same kind of derisive terms as were current in songs: 'nigger', 'darkey', 'coon', 'pickanniny', Mammy', 'aunt', 'uncle', 'buck', 'light-complected-yaller', 'yaller hussy' and so on. Blacks were thick-lipped, they had flat noses, big ears and feet, kinky or woolly hair, and most were given ludicrous names like 'Solomon Crow', 'Abraham Lincum', 'Piddlelcins', 'Had-a-Plenty' and 'Wan-na-Mo'. And just about every derogatory stereotype was applied to them – they were improvident, emotional, gossipy, high-tempered, vain, dishonest, idle, liars, cheats, superstitious, dull, stupid, ignorant, happy-go-lucky immoral, criminal, thieves and drunkards. They liked high-flown language they couldn't understand, they liked gaudy clothes and trinkets, all had a love for stolen chickens, 'water millions', 'split weet-'taters' (perhaps with 'brown gravy leakin down es sides',) 'possum' and of course liquor.[10] Such racial stereotypes must have contributed to the climate of fear and hatred of black people that intensified after the emancipation of the slaves, especially as it was at this very historical juncture that racism was finding "scientific" justification worldwide. Blackface minstrels shows undoubtedly helped prepare Europeans and Americans for a more enthusiastic reception of racist theories.

But that was not all that was behind the growing interest in African-American music. In addition to the decline of the puritan ethic as a moral ideal, and beyond the sheer infectiousness of the music, the trend was related to an increasing interest in African Americans purely and simply. By the late 1820s and early 1830s, the movement for the abolition of slavery achieved dimension and a degree of cohesion and coordination that turned the attention of all Americans to the question of slavery in the Southern states. First, the move to develop the Western territories, and then the tariff bills of 1828 and 1831 exacerbated the growing conflict between the North and the South. The "peculiar institution" of slavery quickly became the moral and ideological focal point for tensions that were largely political and economic in origin. The emergence of the "blackface" minstrel groups in this context was ambiguous. Did the attention to African-American culture indicate a new respect for the aesthetic innovations of the African-Americans, or did it reflect and reinforce racial stereotypes in such a way as to justify their continued enslavement? The ambigu-

10. Giles Oakley, *The Devil's Music: A History of the Blues*, New York, Harvest/HBJ, 1976, p. 21-22.

ities present in this evolution of musical forms and tastes are suggested with a certain irony in the fact that it was Dan Emmett, the northern creator of the first minstrel group, who composed in 1859 the famous song "Dixie", which a few years later became the virtual anthem of the insurgent southern confederacy.

Many of the most well-known American "folksongs" came out of the minstrelsy movement. Songs such as "Old Dan Tucker" and "The Blue Tail Fly ("Jim Crack Corn")" were later, during the folk revivals of the middle part of the twentieth century, reproduced by white performers without blackface and without the exaggerated African-American idiom. Because of this process of Europeanization, it is not unusual for these songs to be considered as stemming from a European-American tradition. As Ewen asserts, "it is impossible to exaggerate the influence of the Negro song on American popular music. The techniques and idioms, the moods and feelings, the personality and the idiosyncrasies of Negro songs formed the bone and marrow of American popular song expression. The songs and dances of the minstrel show, the ragtime of New Orleans, St. Louis and New York, the blues of St. Louis, the jazz of New Orleans, Chicago and New York, and the commercial melodies of Union Square and Tin Pan Alley – all these owe a profound debt to Negro folk music sources".[11] In fact, it was more than a debt. Whether borrowing African-American songs and rhythms, or creating new "black songs", European-American performers and composers were more exactly conduits for a continual penetration of black musical influences into the dominant culture. It was a process of virtual subjugation in reverse, a unique example of how a conquered and (literally) enslaved population can exert such a fascination over the master class that its tastes and even emotional sensibilities come to be transformed.

The birth of popular (commercial) music in the United States, therefore, involved a dialectically intertwined set of objective and subjective concerns. On the one hand, it was outrageously racist. Blackface performance and minstrelsy were, most openly, heavyhanded attempts to caricature African-American culture, even to humiliate the "darkies" for their lack of "European" skills and qualities. On the other hand, it gave implicit tribute to the spiritual depth and creative accomplishments of a people that remained mysterious to the whites, however reluctant they were to admit it.

The appropriation of black music was undoubtedly another way to exploit the African-Americans; but such appropriation was also a form of assimilation, and probably necessary to the spiritual well-being of the European-Americans. Sincerity and authenticity in such a context cannot be measured with simple criteria. Indeed, the peculiar dynamic of popular music lies in the complex interaction between the spiritual needs of a complex collectivity, the methods and productive characteristics of the music "business", and the creative vision and artistry of individual composers and performers. Moreover, this process of cultural fusion was international in scope. Already by the 1830s, fascination with the Scots had waned in England, and African-American music was working a profound influence on the evolution of popular music in Britain.

11. Ewen, *op. cit.*, p. 35.