

# *The Cochlear Implant User's Guide to Popular Music in America: 1940s – 1990s*

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Please read ***The Cochlear Implant User's Guide to Active Music Listening*** before embarking on the listening exercises in this guide.

This guide is designed to give you, the cochlear implant user, an understanding and basic knowledge of the genre known as popular music. It is my presumption, and that of other music educators, that the more you understand about the music you listen to, the more enjoyment it will bring. Edwin Gordon, a noted music educator, encourages listeners to think about music like a language. It is possible for us to enjoy listening to a foreign language speaker, but there is additional pleasure in understanding and contributing to the conversation. For the implanted listener, extracting meaning from every sound that is heard in a piece of music can be a daunting task. This guide will help demystify and decode this complex “organized sound” called music. It will take practice and, above all, perseverance. But, I think the results will be worth the effort.

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## **Resources**

In preparing this guide, I borrowed extensively from two sources. The first is titled, “American Popular Music: From Minstrelsy to MTV,” by Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman and published by Oxford University Press in 2003. Its companion CDs contain 43 selections recorded by a variety of artists. Each of



the selections is accompanied by a Listening Chart, which includes the lyrics, the form (how the song is constructed), who is singing and which instrument(s) is playing. I find it a useful guide for enabling novice listeners to become familiar with how popular music is put together. The second source I used is [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org). While Wikipedia is not a peer reviewed site, meaning that anyone can contribute to its contents, I feel it handles popular culture fairly accurately. However, it requires access to a computer and the internet, but is an amazing resource because it is constantly updated and can link you to many other related sites easily. For instance, to find the most requested pop music from the 1920s through the present, go to <http://www.popculturemadness.com/Music/>.

At the end of each lesson, I have included a number of YouTube sites to visit because I think it is helpful to see what you are listening to. The only caution I will give is that sometimes the video is slightly behind the music, thus giving a somewhat “out-of-sync” impression. Also, computer speakers don’t usually sound as good as a high quality stereo system. So, for optimal listening, I recommend finding the DVD or MP3 version of the selections. I highly suggest downloading the lyrics to these songs before listening. My two favorite free sites are [www.metrolyrics](http://www.metrolyrics) and [www.lyrics.com](http://www.lyrics.com).

### **Popular Music Defined**

According to Star & Christopher (2003), popular music is defined as, “music that is mass-reproduced and disseminated via the mass media; that has at various times been listened to by large numbers of Americans; and typically draws upon a variety of preexisting musical traditions.” It differs from classical music, which was traditionally enjoyed by royalty and the upper class, and also from folk music because that was disseminated orally.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the music publishing business became synonymous with New York City and 28<sup>th</sup> Street in lower Manhattan. This area was referred to as ***Tin Pan Alley*** because of the sounds of multiple pianos banging out tunes all at the same time. With Thomas Edison’s invention of the ***Victrola*** in 1877, popular music entered the parlors of many American homes. The 1920s and 1930s propelled popular music into the mainstream with the advent of radio broadcasting and sound film. The entire recording industry now had the ability to put mass produced music into the hands and ears of the American people.



## **Origins of American Popular Music**

Popular music in America basically sprang from three imported traditions: **European American music, African American music and Latin American music.**

**European American** music came from England in the form of **ballads**, or songs that tell a story. The **verses** told the story and the **chorus**, which was repeated again and again in the song, provided a catchy way for the audience to be involved in singing along. Irish, Scottish and Italian songs also influenced early popular music and brought their accompanying dance forms like the **waltz, schottische** and **polka**. Immigrants maintained their musical traditions which brought diversity to musical life here.

**African American** music arrived in America by the almost two million slaves forcibly brought between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Since these slaves were from many different parts of Africa, they each had unique musical traditions. It is not correct to assume that all “black music” is alike. The **banjo, call and response** (echo) song forms and **polyrhythmic** textures (many rhythms played at the same time) are all imported from Africa. Gospel, jazz, swing, blues, rap and even some country music are strongly influenced by African American music.

**Latin American** music is a blending of African and European traditions, including colonial powers such as Spain, Portugal and France. Much of the Latin American influence comes out of dance forms, which emphasize certain rhythms: **Habanera, tango, rumba, cha-cha-cha, salsa and samba** are examples. Mexican musicians have brought us **conjunto acordeon** (accordion band) and **mariachi** (marriage) music. Latin music has made an important contribution to rock music.

Popular music encompasses hundreds of different styles, but for the purpose of this guide, I will focus on the artists and composers who have influenced the particular genres and left lasting impressions; the icons, if you will. I have not included Folk, Country, or Jazz, because each deserves its own guide. Musical terms and performer’s names are printed in bold type. Because contemporary pop music has evolved from a number of genres, I have organized this guide in a chronological manner beginning in the 1940s and ending with the 1990s. Current pop music will be discussed in a future guide.



## **LESSON ONE: Pop Crooners (1946-1954)**

Many of the familiar singers of the post-war era had originally been big-band vocalists in the late 1930s and early 1940s. **Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby, Nat “King” Cole, Peggy Lee and Rosemary Clooney** all had their start as singers with big dance bands. After the war, they began recording under their own names, hiring business agents and even hosting their own television shows.

### **Links:**

One of the most popular songs of all time was written by Irving Berlin and sung by Bing Crosby. It's called, “White Christmas” and was from the movie of the same name.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vPfOjAw5Z0>

The velvet voice of Nat “King” Cole helped sell over five million copies of his biggest hit, “Mona Lisa”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxEmnxiUz8w>

## **LESSON TWO: Rhythm & Blues (1946-1954)**

In 1949, *Billboard* magazine coined the term, **Rhythm and Blues**, (**R & B**) to describe the music performed by black artists and adopted by the African American culture. It had its roots in southern folk traditions and moved to the cities with the migration of returning military men and other African Americans looking for work after the war. As the larger record companies discovered the popularity of this style, they began releasing **covers** of songs by their own white artists during the 1950s. For example, Bill Haley’s version of **Shake, Rattle and Roll** is perhaps the best remembered. However, the original version was recorded by black singer, **Big Joe Turner**.

**Louis Jordan** and his **Tympany Five** recorded **Choo Choo Ch’ Boogie** in 1946. It was his biggest hit and served as a link between R & B and country music and later in the development of Rock ‘n’ Roll. This is a sing-along version, complete with captions. Have fun!

**Big Mama Thornton** was the daughter of a Baptist minister, but worked in black nightclubs. Her powerful voice and imposing physique allowed her to survive the rough world of gangsters, con men and inebriated audience members! After hearing her sing, the duo of Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller wrote **Hound Dog** for her to record. Most listeners are familiar with Elvis Presley’s version, but you owe it to yourself to check out the original, quintessential blues recording.



**Links:**

Not all the music of this era was upbeat. **Charles Brown's, Black Night**, never made it to the pop charts, but is, to this day, his most successful recording.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9pOFLzPnZag>

**LESSON THREE: Rock 'n' Roll (1954-1959)**

The mid-1950s witnessed a huge cultural revolution in American popular music with the advent of **Rock 'n' Roll**. Although this style of music was at first an evolution of **R & B**, the actual term was coined by Cleveland disc jockey, **Alan Freed**. He later moved to New York to promote rock 'n' roll to a larger market. In 1960, he was arrested for **payola**, the illegal practice of taking bribes from record companies to play their artists more frequently. Disc jockeys everywhere were trying to capture the huge audience of teenagers who not only listened to the radio, but bought records as well. Thus, the term was applied to any style of music (R & B, country and western, etc.) promoted to the teenage listener.

**Links:**

**Rock Around the Clock** was recorded by **Bill Haley and the Comets** in 1954 and became the Number One hit for eight weeks, selling 22 million copies. Notice the prominence of the electric guitar, which had come into its own as the featured instrument in rock 'n' roll. The form of this song is a **twelve-bar blues**, made up of three four-bar phrases.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-T8OBCPLp4>

**Elvis Presley** was the biggest star of the Rock 'n' Roll era and American popular music. His appeal with white and black young listeners made him a superstar. This is the captioned version of the song, **Hound Dog**.

**LESSON FOUR: American Pop (1960s)**

As rock 'n' roll continued to evolve, it took on a new purpose that tackled such issues as civil rights, the Vietnam War and American political life in the 1960s. Television began to capitalize on the popularity of the movement with **American Bandstand**, a teen dance show that introduced "The Twist" to America. From there, many other dances followed; the pony, the monkey, the Freddie, and the mashed potatoes to name a few. Rock 'n' roll bands now featured "go-go" dancers along with their shows.

**Links:**

Here he is, **Chubby Checkers** doing "The Twist." Put on your dancin' shoes!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGAUTADn47U&feature=related>



In Detroit, (aka. Motor City), a new sound was emerging. Driven by Berry Gordy, Jr., **Motown** music became the first African American music success story in the country. The music was designed to transcend race, class and religion. It had a groove!

**Links:**

**My Girl** written by Smokey Robinson and performed by **The Temptations** in 1965 is a love ballad. This version is from the 1987 live concert in London.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GCRcra2o964&feature=related>

While Detroit was busy cranking out that **Motown Sound**, California, the land of sun and surf, inspired **Brian Wilson** and **The Beach Boys** to create their own genre, **Surfer Music**. Fast cars, pretty girls, big waves and guitars with lots of **reverb** (echo) characterize the music.

**Links:**

This link features an actual Beach Boys concert from 1964. It is a glimpse into the California culture of that decade. **Fun, Fun, Fun** is one of the fast car, fast drivin', pretty girls, hamburger stands, and radio songs that helped to characterize the Beach Boys' sound.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXif3HvtpNg>

### **LESSON FIVE: British Invasion**

American pop music had been successfully exported to England and other parts of Europe, but the import of **The Beatles** to America was an enormous success. In 1964, the Ed Sullivan Show hosted their first American TV appearance. John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr sang their Number One hit; **I Want to Hold Your Hand**. **Beatlemania** was now firmly entrenched in American youth culture. While many other British bands flooded the market, few had the staying power of the **Beatles**.

**Links:**

To hear **Paul McCartney** sing his masterpiece, **Yesterday**, go to:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONXp-vpE9eU>

### **Lesson Six: Soul Music**

Out of the Rhythm & Blues of the 1940s and 1950s came a new genre labeled, **Soul Music**. **Ray Charles**, a blind, singer-songwriter and pianist, recorded an old Tin Pan Alley song called, **Georgia on My Mind**, which was such a crossover success, it was on the Number One spot for both the pop and R&B charts for weeks in 1962. Two other names linked with soul music were **James Brown**



and **Aretha Franklin**. All three artists have had multidecade popularity, intense, flamboyant and individualized performance personas.

**Links:**

**The Godfather of Soul**, James Brown, sings and dances **Papa's Got a Brand New Bag**. Forget the lyrics, just enjoy the **groove!**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0Lc8dGnv00>

**Lesson Seven: Guitar Heroes**

Beginning in the 1960s, a new breed of guitarists emerged, influenced by the early electric guitar heroes, Les Paul, BB King and Chuck Berry. The technology allowed them to achieve new techniques and innovative ways to push the sound of the guitar. Some of these heroes were Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page and George Harrison, to name a few. The heavy metal guitar anthem of all time, **Stairway to Heaven**, written by **Led Zeppelin** guitarist and singer, **Jimmy Page and Robert Plant**.

**Lesson eight: The 1970s**

**Billboard** Charts and AM radio started featuring artists who appealed to the commercial mainstream. There were now two main consumer categories: teenagers born in the 1950s and now coming of age and adults raised on rock 'n' roll but wanting something more age appropriate. Thus, new styles emerged:

- **Pop rock** (Elton John, Paul McCartney)
- **Adult Contemporary** (Barbara Streisand, the Carpenters)
- **Singer-songwriters** (Paul Simon, James Taylor, Carole King)
- **Soft soul** (Al Greene, Barry White)
- **Country pop** (John Denver, Kenny Rogers)
- **Bubblegum** (Jackson Five, Osmonds)
- **Disco** (Donna Summer, the Bee Gees)
- **Reggae** (Bob Marley)
- **Latin Rock** (Carlos Santana)

**Links:**

**Elton John's** popular hit, **Your Song**, with the lyrics included.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13GD78Bmo8s>

**Donna Summer's** performance of **Last Dance** recorded on TV's **Midnight Special**. The Queen of Disco creates an irresistible dance groove.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-ecUZWTW4&feature=related>



Jamaica gave us **Bob Marley** and his rebellious songs of determination based on the indigenous **Rastafarian** belief system. His song, **I Shot the Sheriff**, was **covered** by Eric Clapton.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAixXMbyOBc>

**Carlos Santana** began playing guitar in his hometown of Tijuana, Mexico. His style was influenced by American rock and roll, jazz and Afro-Cuban dance music. His first album, **Santana**, was a huge success, in part, because of his spectacular performance at **Woodstock**. Hear him sing and play **Oye Como Va** written by Latin percussionist, **Tito Puente**. The song is sung in Spanish and the video will encourage you to Google the translation. However, the beauty of this piece is the infectious groove it generates.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LpPb2cVswII>

### **Lesson Nine: Superstars (1980s)**

Technology surged in the 1980s. Digital sound recording led to CDs, digital technology led to PCs and cable television gave us MTV. Synthesizers allowed musicians to record data, rather than have to perform live. Drum machines included an array of other sound effects not capable with real instruments. The recording industry began to consolidate and become parts of huge transnational conglomerates as music became more of a global commodity. The result of all this is the advent of the Superstar. **Michael Jackson's Thriller** is still the top selling album in American history. Second only to Jackson is **Madonna**, who has sold over 50 million albums in her career. **Bruce Springsteen's** album, **Born in the USA**, was a concept album reflecting the lives of working-class America. Finally, **Paul Simon** brought world music to the US through his collaboration with South African musicians on his album, **Graceland**. Each of these stars had music videos which accompanied the albums. Performances were usually in stadiums to large, loud audiences.

#### **Links:**

There are about a million versions of Michael Jackson's video, **Thriller** out there. But, I chose this one because it has the lyrics embedded. It begins with footsteps, a squeaky door and a few wolf howls in the background. Check out some of the dance videos that go along with the song, too.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WWjaJhqrNyY>

**Bruce Springsteen's** (aka the Boss) 1980s version of **Born in the USA**.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPudiBR15mk>

**Paul Simon** with the group from South Africa singing and dancing, **Diamonds on the sole of her shoes**.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wphqemdr\\_Uw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wphqemdr_Uw)

### **Lesson 10: The 1990s**



In this decade, American pop music became lost in blending all of the marginal genres into one huge mish mash called “Pop.” It was difficult to know where country, rock, rap, punk, and alternative left off and pop began. Music was now associated with the artist, rather than the style. This jumble of old and new did have two distinct sounds that once lived at the margin but now entered into the mainstream: **Hip Hop (Rap)** and **Alternative Rock**.

**Hip Hop** is based in African musical and verbal styles, but addressed the plight of the black communities in the United States. It began in the neighborhoods of New York City, but has since grown into a multimillion dollar industry. **Hip-Hop** of the 1970s had four main elements, **DJing, breakdancing, graffiti art,** and **rapping**. The disco DJs style of blending two turntables to make smooth transitions between records, created another musical instrument. By manipulating both at the same time, the DJ could repeat a certain phrase over and over while attempting to synchronize the dance grooves between different songs. **Grandmaster Flash**, perfected this technique called, **scratching**.

**Links:**

**Run-D.M.C.** was the most influential rap group. This trio, Joseph Simmons (Run), Darryl McDaniels (D.M.C.) and DJ (Jam Master Jay) were college graduates from Queens. Their raps were literate and complex. They were the first rap group to appear on MTV. Here is their cover of **Aerosmith’s** popular, **Walk This Way**.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9AKaV911uJA>

Another college educated group from New York, **Public Enemy**, was drawn together by their concern for hip-hop culture and political activism.

Here is Public Enemy’s **Bring the Beat Back**.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1gFH--Y1Xs&feature=related>

**Alternative music** is the term used to describe “underground” or “independent” music that is supposed to be anticommercial, antimainstream, and local, rather than corporate. However, just because a band claims to be alternative doesn’t mean that they can’t sell millions of recordings and make huge profits. In the 1990s, many local bands garnered small, devoted audiences and gained radio play through college radio stations and the Internet. **Alternative rock** included such nihilistic bands as Seattle’s, **Nirvana**, and New York’s **Sonic Youth**. At the same time, **Phish** and **The Dave Matthews Band**, offered an energetic and optimistic counterpart. Female artists such as **Annie DiFranco** and **k.d. lang** achieved identities as successful performers while keeping their distinctive and passionate voices.



**Links:**

**Dave Matthews Band** plays **Crush** (1998)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ywNbf0AXL6Y>

**Phish** never gained the music critics' favor, but were dearly loved by their fans in the same way that **Deadheads** worshipped **The Grateful Dead**. Known more for their loose, improvisational concert jams, they never had a hit single or album.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-nyE96RTOI>

**kd lange** won a Grammy and reached the Top 40 with her hit, **Constant Craving** from the album, **Ingenue**.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oaHZNTd-YVY>

## **Conclusion**

Bravo, you have finished this guide! It has been an historical journey through the best-known and most requested American pop music from the 1940s through the 1990s. It has provided you with resources to expand and continue your own journey through American popular music. Whether you have decided that pop music is enjoyable, or not, there is no denying that it is here to stay and will continue to contribute to American culture as well as to the ever expanding and always emerging world culture.

