

Four Melodies, Four Moments - A Selective History of Popular Music

A series of four workshops by award-winning songwriter-performer Rob Lutes

Session 1: Oh Susannah - Stephen Foster

Topics Covered: **Brief history of the song**

Song performance

Who was Stephen Foster?

The Birth of American Songwriting

The Folk Tradition – This song is an adaptation of two others

Multicultural influences – Foster was raised in a very diverse neighbourhood in Pittsburgh; this song incorporates a polka-influenced rhythm and refers to the African American community

Songwriting as career – First American songwriter to receive royalties and achieve massive sales

Cultural questions – Foster's lyrics are often racist; songs were performed at Minstrel Shows by white singers in blackface (Jim Crow)

Big Question: Why does this song endure?

Session 2: Maple Leaf Rag - Scott Joplin

Topics Covered: **Brief history of the song**

Song performance

Who was Scott Joplin?

The First Truly American Musical style - Ragtime

Origins – from Marches, Classical, African American songs

Popularity/Controversy – The rage in the 1890s to 1910s; church reaction

Styles/Composers – Two step, Folk Rag, Foxtrot, Cakewalk, etc.

Descendants – Jazz, Stride Piano

Big Question: What styles of music can claim to be American inventions; how do they emerge?

Session 3: St Louis Blues - WC Handy

Topics Covered: **Brief history of the song**

Song performance

Who was WC Handy?

Bringing the blues to a wider audience

The Blues – Musical game-changer

Origins and purpose of blues – field songs, spirituals, gospel, overcoming suffering

Styles – Delta, Piedmont, Chicago, Country etc.

Scale – Flatted 3, 5, 7 demo

Influence on other styles – country, jazz, rock and roll, hip hop, pop, etc.

Big Question: How important is the blues to American music?

Session 4: Blue Skies - Irving Berlin

Topics Covered: **Brief history of the song**

Song performance

Who was Irving Berlin?

Tin Pan Alley – The Birth of the Popular Music Industry

Origins – NYC, 28th St. between Broadway and Sixth Ave.

Bringing Sophistication to Song – musical and lyrical craft reinvented

The Writers – Hoagy Carmichael, the Gershwins, Johnny Mercer, Richard Rogers, Cole Porter, Harold Arlen, Sammy Kahn, etc.

The Songs – Over There, Cheek to Cheek, Stardust, Take Me Out to the Ballgame, Ain't She Sweet, God Bless America, Shine on Harvest Moon, Sweet Georgia Brown, Swanee, etc.

Lasting Influence – Enduring hits, techniques and approaches

Big Question: How did the culture of Tin Pan Alley produce such amazing writers and songs?