

Popular music of the 20th and 21st centuries

Popular music of the 1960s: other forms



Pop ballads

- # Ballads have always been a popular form of song, found quite often in folk music.
- # A ballad is usually a solo song with a fairly slow tempo, a memorable tune, and sometimes a text that is romantic or sentimental.
- # Ballads often tell a story, so the style is usually simple and direct.
- # Many ballads are in **strophic form**, with the same music accompanying different verses.



Listening Activity

- # Listen to 'Yesterday' performed by Paul McCartney. It has all the features of a typical pop ballad. There is a solo singer, simple **acoustic** guitar accompaniment (joined by a string quartet in verse 2), steady tempo, and memorable tune that is repeated for each different verse.
- # The text is **narrative** (it tells a story), and is romantic, perhaps even sentimental.



Folk-influenced music

- # Folk music is a term usually associated with the traditional vocal and instrumental music of a particular country.
- # Its composers are often unknown, and it is music that was originally created and performed by ordinary people.
- # Folk music often provides some sort of social comment, and during the 1960s singers such as Bob Dylan wrote and performed music in a simple folk-style which dealt with issues such as the war in Vietnam, civil rights and the nuclear arms race, which concerned many young people at this time.
- # Bob Dylan's music is mostly original rather than tradition; however, it develops a tradition of social protest in American folk music that dates back to the economic depression of the 1930s.



Folk-influenced music

- # There was a renewed interest in this kind of music amongst students in American and, later, British universities in the 1960s.
- # It was these students who formed protest movements, aimed at changing the issues Bob Dylan was singing about in his music.
- # At first, Dylan performed his music in a simple, traditional way, with an accompaniment of acoustic guitar and harmonica.
- # However, in 1965 he shocked the audience at the Newport Folk Festival when he used an amplified electric guitar and was accompanied by a rock band.
- # To many he had abandoned his tradition folk roots, selling out to a more commercial style.
- # To others he had started a new style of music – folk-rock.



Listening Activity

- # Listen to the recording of Bob Dylan's 'Blowin' in the wind'. The song has a straightforward melody and a simple chordal accompaniment on the acoustic guitar.
- # After a short guitar **introduction**, 'Blowin' in the wind' has a repeated **verse-chorus** structure typical of many popular songs.
- # In between each verse there is a short instrumental **link**, played by the guitar and harmonica.
- # After the final chorus, the instrumental link is played as a **coda**.



Popular song form

- # Popular song form is usually 32 bars long.
- # The 32 bars are divided into four sections, each of eight bars.
- # The first two sections and the last section all use the same melody.
- # The third section, however, has a different melody, and may be in a different key, so that the overall plan is:

A A B A



Popular song form

- # The B section is sometimes called a 'middle 8' referring to its length in bars, and its relative position in the plan.
- # Many pop songs written during the 1960s are based on popular song form.



Activity

- # Compose and perform your own piece in popular song form.
- # Use the notes of the scale of C major.
- # Make sure that each section is 8 bars long, and that you follow the popular song form plan.
- # For your B section try composing a melody in a different key, say F major, and see if you can find a note that links back successfully into the final A section.

