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What Is Country Music Anyway?

By Sintilia Miecevole

When many people think of country music, they think of sad songs about lost loves, broken down trucks and runaway dogs. In their minds, they are hearing all of these woes sung in the traditional twangy country accents of the south. However, these perceptions of country music are far from where this style of music has evolved. Today, country music is one of the most popular genres of music, normally outsold only by rock and pop genres.

Created in the late 19th century, country music has undergone many changes over the years. There are now many sub-genres to this type of music, with some of the sub-genres being commonly played on top 40 radio stations.

To understand country music, it is helpful to know about the instruments commonly associated with it. In country music, one of the most common instruments used is the fiddle (or violin). Some of these instruments can be expensive, but most are relatively inexpensive and are very easily transported since they are light in weight and not overly large. When country music first 'hit the scene', the fiddle was practically the only instrument used as accompaniment. However, as the country music style became more popular, the addition of other accompanying instruments became normal. The banjo became popular in some country music pieces in the mid 1800s, while the guitar did not break into the country music scene until the early 1900s. Electric guitars did not become a regular instrument in country music until much later in the 50s. Other various instruments used in country music are the piano (introduced in the 1930s) and the drums (used since the 1960s). Rarely used, but distinctive sounding instruments are used in certain country songs: the accordion, the harmonica, and the washboards.

Country music has roots in several different styles of music. Its beginnings started with the settlers that came from Europe. During that time, many couldn't read or write, so songs were created to pass history down from one generation to the next. Although country ballads have changed a great deal, going from the original songs about objective, though gruesome, events to more personal, subjective ballads without all the gore.

Today, the sound of country music can sometimes be very similar to other genres of pop and rock. Some country musicians, like Shania Twain, have many songs playing on stations that aren't

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considered "country". There are also musicians, like Sheryl Crow, who are considered pop/rock, but have songs popular on country stations.

Sintilia Miecevole, host of

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Modern Country Music Lyrics still retain the art of storytelling

By Syd Johnson

Modern Country Music Lyrics still retain the art of storytelling by Syd Johnson

Country music lyrics are blasting on urban music stations as younger American trying to escape the emergence of bad pop and even awful pop music turn to this stable genre. Country music is currently gaining on rock as the second most popular music format on American radio stations. It is right behind hip hop in terms of people's ability to identify a feel, a demographic, and a sense of rebellion when they hear the lyrics on many songs.

If you look back into early to mid 90's it seemed that country music was on the decline. In fact, if you look at some of the popular hits from Shania Twain and even "I will always love you" by Whitney Houston, country music lyrics could only be heard by crossover pop artists. I'm sure that many in the industry thought this would be the end of great commercial successes for modern country artists.

Fortunately, the Nashville establishment held on to their traditions and developed a new set of country artists that would appeal to young urban listeners.

So why didn't they stray and turn country music into a subgenre of crappy pop?

The answer lies in the lessons of the 1980's. Country music went through a moment as the "it music" during the early to mid 1980's with detrimental results. There were more stars, doing more tours and making more money than ever before, but the most popular country music lyrics at the time did not reflect the geographic sensibilities of the south.

They became caricatures selling urbanites on the exotic possibilities of redneck culture and vain beauty queens.

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The Nashville gatekeepers learned a very painful lesson.

Pop culture mangles, destroys, and makes fun of anything that comes in its path. They learned that:

1. You can still get country music lyrics played on urban radios, but you will need your own radio networks
2. You can compete with pop by developing younger artists like Sarah Evans and Faith Hill who can present a pop image with solid country music lyrics on their albums.

So where does this lead modern country?

Still on the forefront, experimenting with country–rock, and Rhythm and blues collaborations.

It certainly is a good time for country music and an even better time for country music fans.

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JohnsonEditor



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