

## Music Appreciation - Lecture 2 Notes -22 September 2004

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Music may be characterized as “high art” or “low art.” This is not a judgment; that is, high does not equal “good,” and low does not equal “bad.” Rather we can use these terms to attempt to categorize it as follows:

- High Art - Music written for the sake of music.
- Low Art - Music written for entertainment, political, cultural, etc. purposes.

This is not an “absolute” definition of music by any means; however we are using these terms to begin a discussion on popular music in America of the past two decades, which for all purposes we will consider “low art”(note that a lot of classical music falls into this definition as well). This includes:

### **Rap**

Rap, which is well known, grew from the streets of New York City. It is one part of hip-hop culture which includes inner-city manifestations of four arts: street poetry, rap, graffiti, and break dancing. Rap was a black, male-dominated genre, but has expanded to include many cultures and genders. Like many previous forms of black popular music (blues, R&B, gospel, soul), rap represents an ethnic music that has entered the mainstream of American popular music.

The Rap style evolved from disco, incorporated a stronger beat, and was used as background for break dancing. Because rap is repetitive, it took advantage of electronic technology, particularly drum machines, prerecorded tracks, and rhythms and sounds derived from scraping turntable needles across vinyl records. The styles that emerged in the 1980s included rap-pop (a combination of hard-edged rap characteristics and pop music accessibility), and gangsta rap (a specific kind of rap with material related to inner-city gang activity).

As the style developed, the “singer” recited socially aware street poetry that ranged from light, entertaining lyrics intended to increase public awareness of social concerns to lyrics that extolled bigotry, black supremacy, and violence. Typically, the poetry described the harsh realities of American urban street life: drugs, poverty, racial injustice, gang violence, AIDS, battered women, and child abuse.

### **Rock and Roll (Rock)**

Rock had its roots in the 1950s as underground antiestablishment protest music that later become a commercially marketed “sound.” Rock grew out of an American youth culture that rejected traditional attitudes and values. It was more than just “music;” it had a kinship with folk art in its spontaneous and immediate communication, and was art not separated from life. The music and lyrics reflected a segment of the culture, politics,

morality, and taste of society.

From its beginnings, rock performers and their audiences were interracial and international. It provided common symbols, language, and dress codes for people of many different cultures alike, and appealed to members of every of social and financial level in society.

### **“Modern Rock”**

Modern styles of rock arose as a result of advanced electronic technology, including sound amplification, studio manipulation of sound, synthesizers, MIDI applications, sampling, studio mixing, and new instruments. Performances have both an audio AND visual impact. Performers stress unique, often bizarre, dress and onstage behavior.

An important fact to consider: These categories are not absolutes! Part of the greatness of styles in music is their ability to change, adapt, and adopt parts of each other over time. Many artists are successful in what is called a crossover, in which they combine two or more styles to create a new identity in music that defies specific classification.

### **New Age**

Combines elements of jazz, classical, popular, or rock styles to create a mellow, soothing, “back-to-nature” mood. Much of its processed sound (electronically produced), and occasionally combined with acoustic instruments such as piano, guitar, or harp. It often lacks a strong beat, a clearly definable melody or tune, dissonance, or any musical attributes that could detract from its intention of making its listeners feel good, enjoy the mood, and respect aspects of nature. It is heavily criticized for its lack of direction, inspiration, and overall passive quality by those who do not believe music of this type can be called “music.”

### **Soundtracks/Commercial Music**

Can draw on elements from any genre of music, but are unique in that they are composed, arranged, and produced for the sole purpose of accompanying another art form (film, television, radio, images, text). The use of music to accompany another art form aids in enhancing the emotive effects of the existing presentation (after all, what would the launching of the Titanic or a large space ship be like without stirring music to accompany it?).

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Be sure to read the class website at <http://www.solscope.com/~ochsa/> for updates and listening samples!