Public domain sheet music collection, 1895-1923(bulk, 1903-1923)

Processed by Sonoma County Library staff; machine-readable finding aid created by Geoffrey Skinner.

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Sonoma County Library

Overview of the Collection

Title: Public domain sheet music collection
Date (inclusive): 1895-1923
Date (bulk): (bulk, 1903-1923)
Identification: SPC.00020
Compiler: Skinner, Geoffrey, 1963-
Physical Description: 1 linear foot1 file storage boxes
Language of Material: Materials are in English.
Repository: Sonoma County Library Archives
c/o Sonoma County History and Genealogy Library, Sonoma County Library
725 Third Street
Santa Rosa, CA,
URL: https://sonomalibrary.org/locations/sonoma-county-history-and-genealogy-library/sonoma-county-archive
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Abstract: Collection contains 350 examples of popular sheet music published prior to 1924. All but a few items are piano-vocal scores, a small number are piano only.

Popular Sheet music in the Late 19th and early 20th Century

In the 19th century, the music industry was dominated by sheet music publishers. In the United States, the sheet music industry rose in tandem with blackface minstrelsy. The group of New York City-based music publishers, songwriters and composers dominating the industry was known as "Tin Pan Alley". In the mid-19th century, copyright control of melodies was not as strict, and publishers would often print their own versions of the songs popular at the time. With stronger copyright protection laws late in the century, songwriters, composers, lyricists, and publishers started working together for their mutual financial benefit. New York City publishers concentrated on vocal music. The biggest music houses established themselves in New York City, but small local publishers - often connected with commercial printers or music stores - continued to flourish throughout the country. An extraordinary number of East European immigrants became the music publishers and songwriters on Tin Pan Alley-- the most famous being Irving Berlin. Songwriters who became established producers of successful songs were hired to be on the staff of the music houses.

The late-19th century saw a massive explosion of parlor music, with ownership of, and skill at playing the piano becoming de rigueur for the middle-class family. In the late-19th century, if a middle-class family wanted to hear a popular new song or piece, they would buy the sheet music and then perform the song or piece in an amateur fashion in their home. But in the early 20th century the phonograph and recorded music grew greatly in importance. This, joined by the growth in popularity of radio broadcasting from the 1920s on, lessened the importance of the sheet music publishers. The record industry eventually replaced the sheet music publishers as the music industry's largest force. (Source: Wikipedia, accessed June 4, 2019: Sheet music-- 19th century)

Scope and Contents

Examples of popular sheet music published prior to 1924. Items are arranged by accession number.

Access Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection.

Topical Terms

Popular music--United States--19th century
Popular music--United States--20th century
Sheet music--United States--19th century--Specimans
Sheet music--United States--20th century--Specimans

Genre and Format Terms
Sheet music
Specimens
Archival materials

Access Information
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