

Music

6 Articles

Check articles you have read:

☐

Singing Without Instruments
235 words

☐

Ragtime, an American Style of Music
212 words

☐

Experimenting with Music
230 words

☐

Making Music with Electronics
244 words

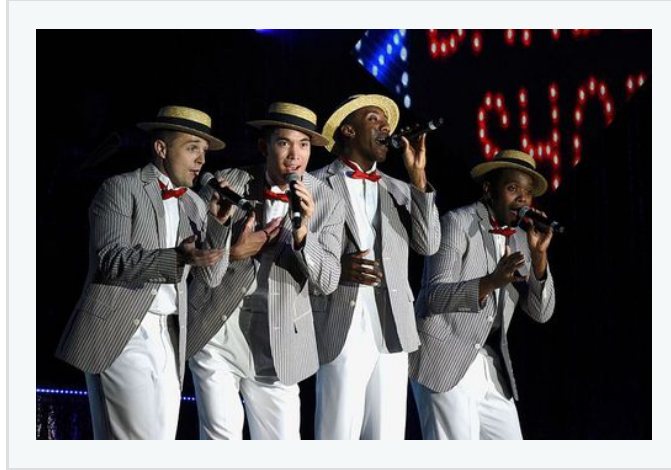
☐

Imagine an Opera
242 words

☐

Jazz Music
239 words

Singing Without Instruments



U.S. Air Force

Have you ever heard a chorus sing without instruments playing in the background? If so, then you have heard a cappella music.

A cappella music is music that is sung without any background music. The words “a cappella” mean “in the church style” in Italian. That’s because a cappella music was sung in churches hundreds of years ago. Choruses still sometimes sing a cappella in churches today. But today, this kind of music is sung in many places. And it is sung in many ways.

One kind of a cappella music people sing today is called barbershop. This is often sung by a group of four people. This group is called a quartet. Each person in the group sings a different part. One person sings the main tune of the song. The others sing different tunes that go well with the main tune. The four parts come together. They form beautiful harmonies!

When people listen to barbershop, they can tell that there are no instruments. But with some styles of a cappella, it can be harder to tell! Some a cappella groups today try to sound like instruments. They often have someone singing the words to the song. The rest of the group may try to sound like guitars, pianos, or even trumpets. These groups may even have someone who makes drum noises. And they do all this with just their voices!

Ragtime, an American Style of Music



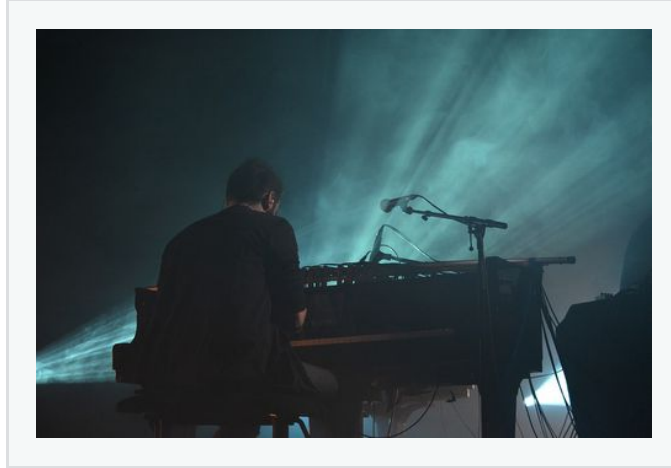
Music has always been played in America. For a long time, most of the styles played in America were ones that had started in Europe. But after a while, that started to change.

One of the first American styles of music started to become popular at the very end of the 1800s. The style was called ragtime. It came from communities of black musicians. The new style put together parts of their music with parts of music from Europe.

Ragtime is played on the piano. In ragtime music, the main tune does not always follow a steady beat. Instead, it is syncopated. That means the tune might have notes at times when you wouldn't expect there to be a note. Or the tune might have breaks when you'd expect there to be a note. The background parts, though, follow a steady beat. So all in all, the music feels bouncy and exciting!

Ragtime was very popular for about twenty years. Then, another American style of music became more popular. That style was jazz. Ragtime didn't go away, though. It's still known today. In fact, you may have heard a famous ragtime song called "The Entertainer" on a hot summer day. Many icecream trucks play this song as they go down the street!

Experimenting with Music



When people think of music, they may think of lots of things. They may think of a piano playing a smooth song. They may think of a song on the radio with a strong beat. They may think of a band playing a march. But not many people think of silence!

A man named John Cage did, though. He was an American composer who lived in the 1900s. He wrote experimental music. The pieces he wrote played around with the way people thought of music. One of his most famous pieces was called 4'33" (four minutes, thirty-three seconds). It was a song made of silence! The song was first performed by a man giving a piano concert. He closed the lid of the piano at the beginning of the song. He sat for four minutes and thirty-three seconds without playing one note!

John Cage also experimented with music in other ways. He wrote some pieces for something he called "prepared piano." A regular piano has strings. When a player plays a piano's keys, a small hammer hits the strings. This is how it makes sound. John Cage put screws, bolts, rubber, and other things in between the strings of a piano. Then he played the piano's keys. This changed the way the piano sounded.

John Cage's experiments with music changed the way lots of people thought about music.

Making Music with Electronics



Music is made with lots of different kinds of instruments. If you turn on a radio, you can hear some of those instruments. You may hear pianos, drums, and more. You may also hear music that was made with computers! This kind of music is called electronic music. Electronic music is music that is made with electronic machines.

Today, this kind of music is common. Computers are often used in music. They are able to create sounds that sound like other instruments. And they are also able to create noises that don't sound like any other instruments! This opens up people's choices when they are making music. With computers, people don't need to stick to the instruments that they have in front of them.

Synthesizers are also electronic instruments. These are used in a lot of music today. Like computers, they give people a lot of control over the kinds of sounds they can make in their music. Many of them can be played like keyboards. They let people change the sound of the keyboard in a lot of ways. People can make it sound loud and harsh. Or they can make it sound smooth and soft. They can make a steady note get loud, then soft, then loud again. Or they can make it waver between other notes!

So the next time you turn on the radio, listen closely. Is that a piano you hear? Or is that a computer or a synthesizer?

Imagine an Opera



This picture shows a scene from an opera.

Imagine you are sitting in a theater. The curtain on the stage goes up. Music starts to play. A drama is acted out on the stage, with music playing the whole time. People sing and act out the story. When the show ends, the crowd claps as the singers bow.

You just imagined seeing an opera! An opera is a drama, or play, that is completely set to music. The music has pieces that are sung through and parts that are just played by instruments. It is performed by singers who act out the play.

Operas can be funny or serious. But they almost always are very emotional! The music helps convey the emotion to the people watching an opera.

In an opera, the singers are very important. The people who play the main roles must be very good singers. A lot of the time, the main female character in an opera is played by a soprano. A soprano is someone who can sing very high. The main male character in an opera is often played by a tenor. A tenor sings lower than a soprano, but higher than some other male singers.

Different kinds of music have been used in operas. Many operas have classical music and singing. But people have also written operas with jazz music. Some operas even use rock music! What kind of opera would you most like to hear?

Jazz Music



Jazz music was one of the first American styles of music. It first started being played in the early 1900s. It was first played by African American musicians in the city of New Orleans. Jazz music grew out of ragtime, blues, and other kinds of music.

So, what does it sound like? It's hard to give an answer that fits all jazz music. But there are some things found in jazz that are not often found in other kinds of music.

One thing that sets jazz apart is that it often has improvisation. Improvisation is when musicians make their parts up on the spot. Sometimes in a jazz song, there is a section where someone can improvise a solo. The rest of the musicians play quietly in the background. Then, they trade. Someone else can then improvise their part.

Jazz also can have a syncopated beat. A syncopated beat is a beat that doesn't fall exactly where you think it will. Some beats feel a bit longer. Others feel a bit shorter. This can make some jazz music have a swingy feeling.

Jazz musicians also have a certain way of playing. They bring their own style to the music. So do jazz singers. For example, they may scoop up to hit notes, or play around with the melody.

Jazz is a very special type of music. Listen to a jazz song. What do you hear that makes it special?