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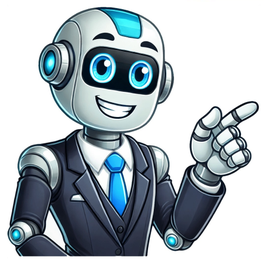

 Tin Pan Alley was an area of New York City in the United States (U.S.), near 5th Avenue and 28th Street. Many music producers, publishers and singer-songwriters set up shop in that area, and the entire group became known as Tin Pan Alley during the late 1800s and into the early 1900s. The group was considered the dominant force of popular music and music publishing in America at that time. Music publishing existed in the U.S. before Tin Pan Alley, but it was not nearly as successful. With the lax U.S. copyright laws of the early 1800s, anyone could print out sheet music, regardless of who owned it, and sell it. When copyright laws strengthened during the end of the 1800s, musicians, composers and music publishing agents saw an opportunity and began to work together to produce as much musicand moneyas possible. At the same time the piano was becoming more popular than ever before, with many families across the U.S. acquiring one for their homes. This in turn created a demand for sheet music, which in turn led to even more music publishing companies entering the business. By the end of the 1800s music publishing was a booming business, and Tin Pan Alley had become its epicenter. The songs of Tin Pan Alley were common fodder for Vaudeville performers as well, creating some of the first pop-music recordings of United States history. Many songs created during the heyday are still recognizable today, including Take Me Out To The Ball Game, My Blue Heaven, Oh by Jingo! and Give My Regards to Broadway. The list of recognizable names is even greater, and features such musical legends as Irving Berlin, Milton Ager, George Gershwin, and Hoagy Carmichael. Why that particular stretch of New York City street was chosen as the focal point for the music publishing industry is unknown. Equally unknown is where the name Tin Pan Alley came from, although common theory, and most likely an urban legend, is that the name was dubbed by people who claimed the sound of all those pianos playing at the same time sounded like tin pans banging together. The sounds weren't meant to last forever though, and while much of the musical landscape of 1900s America was directly shaped by the music coming out of Tin Pan Alley, it began to fall out of favor as time moved on. People stopped buying sheet music, preferring recorded music instead, and Vaudeville, which had served as a creative outlet for much of the music produced in Tin Pan Alley, was replaced by the movie industry. All that remains of the once bustling music area is a small plaque signifying its importance to both New York history and American history. America Explained is dedicated to providing accurate and trustworthy information. We carefully select reputable sources and employ a rigorous fact-checking process to maintain the highest standards. To learn more about our commitment to accuracy, read our editorial process. Share copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. Adapt remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms. Attribution You must give appropriate credit , provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made . You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. ShareAlike If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original. No additional restrictions You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits. You do not have to comply with the license for elements of the material in the public domain or where your use is permitted by an applicable exception or limitation . No warranties are given. The license may not give you all of the permissions necessary for your intended use. For example, other rights such as publicity, privacy, or moral rights may limit how you use the material. Tin Pan AlleyHalfway between New York Citys Union Square and Times Square is a rather unassuming block-- 28th Street, between Broadway and 6th Avenue. Today the site of electronic stores and bridal boutiques, the turn of the century saw at least a dozen sheet music publishers crammed into every brownstone on the block. Walking down this street, one would have heard composers churning out new melodies on tinny upright pianos and young singers on each corner competing to sell the latest hits. This cacophony of sounds reportedly led Monroe H. Rosenfeld to call this block, "Tin Pan Alley." Nowadays, Tin Pan Alley refers not only to this section of 28th Street, but the general explosion of publishing activity that migrated Northward up Broadway, churning out millions of copies of sheet music between 1880 and 1940. This era of hyper-productivity eventually fizzled out as radio, phonographs,and cinema began to dominate entertainment. Meanwhile,Prohibition shut down venuesand the Great Depression wiped out all but the most resolute publishers. The songs below are just a few of the greatest hits to emerge from this vibrant era. These songs represent some of the best-known hits to emerge from New York City and other cities during the Tin Pan Alley era. Notice how theyre competing for your attentioncolorful patterns, celebrity faces, and endorsements. How do these marketing practices for music continue today?First introduced by vaudevillian Emma Carus, this Irving Berlin song became an instant hit. This song was can be heard in a deleted scene from James Camerons Titanic, sung by characters Rose and Jack. George M. Cohan wrote this song as the United States was entering World War I. He was later presented a Congressional Gold Medal by President FDR for contributions to war morale. Sophie Tucker, known as the last of the red hot mamas, made this her signature song. This well-known baseball song has more lyrics than are sung todayclick the cover above to see the music. George M. Cohan wrote Give My Regards To Broadwayin 1904 for the play Little Johnny Jones. The song continues to be performed by musical theater stars today. This hit was composed by Cole Porter and became a signature song of Frank Sinatra. Composed by brothers George and Ira Gershwin, this song was introduced by Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in the film Shall We Dance. However, the most famous recording is perhaps the duet between Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong. Collection of music publishers and songwriters in New York City, USFor the film, see Tin Pan Alley (film). For the band, see Tin Pan Alley (band). For the play, see The Tin Pan Alley Rag.Buildings of Tin Pan Alley, 1910[1]The same buildings, 2011Tin Pan Alley was a collection of music publishers and songwriters in New York City that dominated the popular music of the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Originally, it referred to a specific location on West 28th Street, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues in the Flower District[2] of Manhattan, as commemorated by a plaque on 28th Street between Broadway and Sixth.[3][4][5][6] Several buildings on Tin Pan Alley are protected as New York City designated landmarks, and the section of 28th Street from Fifth to Sixth Avenue is also officially co-named Tin Pan Alley.The start of Tin Pan Alley is usually dated to about 1885, when a number of music publishers set up shop in the same district of Manhattan. The end of Tin Pan Alley is less clear cut. Some date it to the start of the Great Depression in the 1930s when the phonograph, radio, and motion pictures supplanted sheet music as the driving force of American popular music, while others consider Tin Pan Alley to have continued into the 1950s when earlier styles of music were upstaged by the rise of Rock and roll, which was centered on the Brill Building. Brill Building songwriter Neil Sedaka described his employer as being a natural outgrowth of Tin Pan Alley, in that the older songwriters were still employed in Tin Pan Alley firms while younger songwriters such as Sedaka found work at the Brill Building.[7]There are conflicting explanations regarding the origins of the term "Tin Pan Alley". The most popular account holds that it was originally a derogatory reference made by Monroe H. Rosenfeld in the New York Herald to the collective sound made by many "cheap upright pianos" all playing different tunes being reminiscent of the banging of tin pans in an alleyway.[8][9] The Grove Dictionary of American Music also cites Rosenfeld as originator of the term, dating its first use from 1903.[10] However, while an article on Tin Pan Alley can be found in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch from May of that year,[11] this is unattributed and no piece by Rosenfeld that employs the phrase has been discovered.[12]Simon Napier-Bell quotes an account of the origin of the name published in a 1930 book about the music business.[13] In this version, popular songwriter Harry von Tilzer was being interviewed about the area around 28th Street and Fifth Avenue, where many music publishers had offices. Von Tilzer had modified his expensive Kindler & Collins piano by placing strips of paper down the strings to give the instrument a more percussive sound. The journalist told von Tilzer, "Your Kindler & Collins sounds exactly like a tin can. I'll call the article 'Tin Pan Alley'."[14] In any case, the name was firmly attached by the fall of 1908, when The Hampton Magazine published an article titled "Tin Pan Alley" about 28th Street.[15]According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, "tin pan" was slang for "a decrepit piano" (1882), and the term came to mean a "hit song writing business" by 1907.[16]With time, the nickname came to describe the American music publishing industry in general.[8] The term then spread to the United Kingdom, where "Tin Pan Alley" was also used to describe Denmark Street in London's West End.[17] In the 1920s the street became known as "Britain's Tin Pan Alley" because of its large number of music shops.[18][19]These buildings (4755 West 28th Street) and others on West 28th Street between Sixth Avenue and Broadway in Manhattan housed the sheet-music publishers that were the center of American popular music in the early 20th century. The buildings shown were designated as historic landmarks in 2019.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. The commercial center of the popular music publishing industry changed during the course of the 19th century, starting in Boston and moving to Philadelphia, Chicago and Cincinnati before settling in New York City under the influence of new and vigorous publishers which concentrated on vocal music. The two most enterprising New York publishers were Willis Woodard and T.B. Harms, the first companies to specialize in popular songs rather than hymns or classical music.[10] Naturally, these firms were located in the entertainment district, which, at the time, was centered on Union Square. Witmark was the first publishing house to move to West 28th Street as the entertainment district gradually shifted uptown, and by the late 1890s most publishers had followed their lead.[8]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, and there were important regional music publishing centers in Chicago, New Orleans, St. Louis, and Boston. When a tune became a significant local hit, rights to it were usually purchased from the local publisher by one of the big New York firms.This section needs expansion. You can help by adding to it. (September 2024)The American music publishing industry before Tin Pan Alley was largely based on European art songs in an effort to get around copyright royalty fees. American music was expensive to produce in the 19th century which meant only about 10-30% of the music printed in the United States, including New York, was written by American composers. This industry, however, laid the groundwork for the publishing industry that would be built upon to create Tin Pan Alley.[20] Beginning in the early 1860s, the pianist and composer J.N. Pattison (active 1862-1890) published sheet music out of a piano and organ salesroom in Union Square in downtown Manhattan.[21] He was one of the few musicians or composers to publish his own sheet music, capitalizing on the boom in that medium as America emerged out of the Civil War, and urban middle classes grew. Piano ownership was widespread in middle-class families, and if one wanted to hear a popular new song or melody, one would buy the sheet music and then perform the piece at home."I'm a Yiddish Cowboy" (1908)The song publishers who created Tin Pan Alley frequently had backgrounds as salesmen. Isadore Witmark previously sold water filters and Leo Feist had sold corsets. Joe Stern and Edward B. Marks had sold neckties and buttons, respectively.[22] The music houses in lower Manhattan were lively places, with a steady stream of songwriters, vaudeville and Broadway performers, musicians, and "song pluggers" coming and going.[citation needed]Aspiring songwriters came to demonstrate tunes they hoped to sell. When tunes were purchased from unknowns with no previous hits, the name of someone with the firm was often added as co-composer (in order to keep a higher percentage of royalties within the firm), or all rights to the song were purchased outright for a flat fee (including rights to put someone else's name on the sheet music as the composer).[citation needed] Many Jewish immigrants became music publishers and songwriters on Tin Pan Alley.[23] Among the songwriters who frequented Tin Pan Alley were Harold Arlen, Irving Berlin, George M. Cohan, Dorothy Fields, Scott Joplin, and Fats Waller.[24] Songwriters who became established producers of successful songs were hired to be on the staff of the music houses."Song pluggers" were pianists and singers who represented the music publishers, making their living demonstrating songs to promote sales of sheet music. Most music stores had song pluggers on staff. Other pluggers were employed by the publishers to travel and familiarize the public with their new publications. Among the ranks of song pluggers were George Gershwin, Harry Warren, Vincent Youmans and Al Sherman. A more aggressive form of song plugging was known as "booming": it meant buying dozens of tickets for shows, infiltrating the audience and then singing the song to be plugged. At Shapiro, Bernstein & Co., Louis Bernstein recalled taking his plugging crew to cycle races at Madison Square Garden: "They had 20,000 people there, we had a pianist and a singer with a large horn. We'd sing a song to them thirty times a night. They'd cheer and yell, and we kept pounding away at them. When people walked out, they'd be singing the song. They couldn't help it."[13]When vaudeville performers played New York City, they would often visit various Tin Pan Alley firms to find new songs for their acts. Second- and third-rate performers often paid for rights to use a new song, while famous stars were given free copies of publisher's new numbers or were paid to perform them, the publishers knowing this was valuable advertising.Initially Tin Pan Alley specialized in melodramatic ballads and comic novelty songs, but it embraced the newly popular styles of the cakewalk and ragtime music. Later, jazz and blues were incorporated, although less completely, as Tin Pan Alley was oriented towards producing songs that amateur singers or small town bands could perform from printed music. In the 1910s and 1920s Tin Pan Alley published pop songs and dance numbers created in newly popular jazz and blues styles.Tin Pan Alley also acted as another approach to modernism. This can be seen in the use of certain influences such as, "a vernacular African-American impact coming from ragtime, 'coon' songs, the blues and jazz", as well as "input from high and middlebrow white culture".[25] Many of these new styles were used to help fuel the economy of Tin Pan Alley, allowing composers to be more creative, as well as have a continuous influx of innovative music.Plaque commemorating Tin Pan AlleyA group of Tin Pan Alley music houses formed the Music Publishers Association of the United States on June 11, 1895, and unsuccessfully lobbied the federal government in favor of the Treloar Copyright Bill, which would have changed the term of copyright for published music from 24 to 40 years, renewable for an additional 20 instead of 14 years. The bill, if enacted, would also have included music among the subject matter covered by the Manufacturing clause of the International Copyright Act of 1891.The American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) was founded in 1914 to aid and protect the interests of established publishers and composers. New members were only admitted with sponsorship of existing members.The term and established business methodologies associated with Tin Pan Alley persisted into the 1960s when artists like Bob Dylan helped establish new norms. Referring to the dominant conventions of music publishers of the early 20th century, "Tin Pan Alley is gone", Dylan proclaimed in 1985, "I put an end to it. People can record their own songs now."[26]Tin Pan Alley street sign, unveiled in April 2022 During the Second World War, Tin Pan Alley and the federal government teamed up to produce a war song that would inspire the American public to support the fight against the Axis, something they both "seemed to believe ... was vital to the war effort".[27] The Office of War Information was in charge of this project, and believed that Tin Pan Alley contained "a reservoir of talent and competence capable of influencing people's feelings and opinions" that it "might be capable of even greater influence during wartime than that of George M. Cohan's 'Over There' during World War I."[27] In the United States, the song "Over There" has been said to be the most popular and resonant patriotic song associated with World War I.[27] Due to the large fan base of Tin Pan Alley, the government believed that this sector of the music business would be far-reaching in spreading patriotic sentiments.[27]In the United States Congress, congressmen quarreled over a proposal to exempt musicians and other entertainers from the draft in order to remain in the country to boost morale.[27] Stateside, these artists and performers were continuously using available media to promote the war effort and to demonstrate a commitment to victory.[28] However, the proposal was contested by those who strongly believed that only those who provided more substantial contributions to the war effort should benefit from draft exemption.[27]As the war progressed, those in charge of writing the would-be national war song began to understand that the interest of the public lay elsewhere. Since the music would take up such a large amount of airtime, it was imperative that the writing be consistent with the war message that the radio was carrying throughout the nation. In her book, God Bless America: Tin Pan Alley Goes to War, Kathleen E. R. Smith writes that "escapism seemed to be a high priority for music listeners", leading "the composers of Tin Pan Alley [to struggle] to write a war song that would appeal both to civilians and the armed forces".[27] By the end of the war, no such song had been produced that could rival hits like "Over There" from World War I.[27]Whether or not the number of songs circulated from Tin Pan Alley between 1939 and 1945 was greater than during the First World War is still debated. In his book The Songs That Fought the War: Popular Music and the Home Front, John Bush Jones cites Jeffrey C. Livingstone as claiming that Tin Pan Alley released more songs during World War I than it did in World War II.[29] Jones, on the other hand, argues that "there is also strong documentary evidence that the output of American war-related songs during World War II was most probably unsurpassed in any other war".[29]Tin Pan Alley composers and lyricists include:Milton AgerThomas S. AllenHarold ArlenErnest BallHarry BarrisIrving BerlinBernard BiermanGeorge BotsfordShelton BrooksLew BrownNacio Herb BrownIrving CaesarSammy CahnHoagy CarmichaelGeorge M. CohanCon ConradJ. Fred CootsGussie Lord DavisBuddy DeSylvaWalter DonaldsonPaul DresserDave DreyerAl DubinVernon DukeDorothy FieldsTed Fio RitoMax FreedmanCliff FriendT. Mayo GearyGeorge GershwinIra GershwinAlbert GumbleOscar Hammerstein IIE. Y. "Yip" HarburgCharles K. HarrisLorenz HartSilvio HeinRay HendersonBen JeromeWilliam JeromeJames P. JohnsonIsham JonesScott JoplinGus KahnBert KalmarJerome KernTed KoehlerAl LewisSam M. LewisFrank LoesserJimmy McHughF. W. MeachamJohnny MercerHalsey K. MohrTheodora MorseOwen MurphyEthelbert NevinMitchell ParishBernice PetkereMaceo PinkardLew PollackCole PorterWilliam RaskinJ. A. RaynesAndy RazafRichard RodgersHarry RubyJean SchwartzAl ShermanAbner Silver[30][31]Lou Singer[32]Sunny SkylarLee Orean Smith[33]Ted SnyderKay SwiftEdward TeschemacherAlbert Von TilzerHarry Von TilzerFats WallerHarry WarrenPaul WestRichard A. WhitingHarry M. WoodsAllie WrubelJack YellenVincent YoumansJoe YoungHy Zaret[32]Tin Pan Alley's biggest hits included:"A Bird in a Gilded Cage" (1900) written by Harry Von Tilzer"After the Ball" (1892) written by Charles K. Harris"Ain't She Sweet" (1927) written by Jack Yellen and Milton Ager"Alabama Jubilee" (1915) written by Jack Yellen and George L. Cobb"Alexander's Ragtime Band" (1911) written by Irving Berlin"All Alone" (1924) written by Irving Berlin"At a Georgia Campmeeting" (1897) written by Kerry Mills"Baby Face" (1926) written by Benny Davis and Harry Akst"Bill Bailey, Won't You Please Come Home" (1902) written by Huey Cannon"By the Light of the Silvery Moon" (1909) written by Gus Edwards and Edward Madden"Carolina in the Morning" (1922) written by Gus Kahn and Walter Donaldson"Come Josephine in My Flying Machine" (1910) written by Fred Fisher and Alfred Bryan"Down by the Old Mill Stream" (1910) written by Tell Taylor"Everybody Loves My Baby" (1924) written by Spencer Williams"For Sentimental Reasons" (1936) written by Al Sherman, Abner Silver and Edward Heyman"Give My Regards to Broadway" (1904) written by George M. Cohan"God Bless America" (1918; revised 1938) written by Irving Berlin"Happy Days Are Here Again" (1930) written by Jack Yellen and Milton Ager"Hearts and Flowers" (1899) written by Theodore Moses Tobani"Hello Ma Baby (Hello Ma Ragtime Gal)" (1899) written by Emerson, Howard and Sterling"Honeysuckle Rose" (1929) written by Andy Razaf and Thomas "Fats" Waller"I Cried for You" (1923) written by Arthur Freed and Nacio Herb Brown"I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles" (1919) written by John Kellette"In the Baggage Coach Ahead" (1896) written by Gussie L. Davis"In the Good Old Summer Time" (1902) written by Ren Shields and George Evans"In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree" (1905) written by Harry Williams and Egbert van Alstyne"K-K-K-Katy" (1918) written by Geoffrey O'Hara"Let Me Call You Sweetheart" (1910) written by Beth Slater Whitson and Leo Friedman"Lindbergh (The Eagle of the U.S.A.)" (1927) written by Al Sherman and Howard Johnson"Lovesick Blues" (1922) written by Cliff Friend and Irving Mills"Mighty Lak' a Rose" (1901) written by Ethelbert Nevin and Frank L. Stanton"Mister Johnson, Turn Me Loose" (1896) written by Ben Harney"My Blue Heaven" (1927) written by Walter Donaldson and George Whiting"Now's the Time to Fall in Love" (1931) written by Al Sherman and Al Lewis"Oh, Donna Clara" (1928) written by Irving Caesar"Oh by Jingo!" (1919) written by Albert Von Tilzer"On the Banks of the Wabash, Far Away" (1897) written by Paul Dresser"Over There" (1917) written by George M. Cohan"Peg o' My Heart" (1913) written by Fred Fisher and Alfred Bryan"Shine Little Glow Worm" (1907) written by Paul Lincke and Lilla Cayley Robinson"Shine on Harvest Moon" (1908) written by Nora Bayes and Jack Norworth"Some of These Days" (1911) written by Shelton Brooks"Stardust" (1927) written by Hoagy Carmichael and Mitchell Parish"Swanee" (1919) written by George Gershwin"Sweet Georgia Brown" (1925) written by Maceo Pinkard"Take Me Out to the Ball Game" (1908) written by Albert Von Tilzer"The Band Played On" (1895) written by Charles B. Ward and John F. Palmer"The Darktown Strutters' Ball" (1917) written by Shelton Brooks"The Little Lost Child" (1894) written by Marks and Stern"The Man Who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo" (1892) written by Charles Coborn"The Sidewalks of New York" (1894) written by Lawlor and Blake"The Japanese Sandman" (1920) written by Richard A. Whiting and Raymond B. Egan"There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight" (1896) written by Joe Hayden and Theodore Mertz"Warmest Baby in the Bunch" (1896) written by George M. Cohan"Way Down Yonder in New Orleans" (1922) written by Creamer and Turner Layton"Whispering" (1920) written by Malvin Schonberger and John Schonberger"Yes, We Have No Bananas" (1923) written by Frank Silver and Irving Cohn"You Gotta Be a Football Hero" (1933) written by Al Sherman, Buddy Fields and Al LewisIn 2019, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission took up the question of preserving five buildings on the north side of the street as a Tin Pan Alley Historic District.[34] The agency designated five buildings (4755 West 28th Street) individual landmarks on December 10, 2019,[24][35][36] after a concerted effort by the "Save Tin Pan Alley" initiative of the 29th Street Neighborhood Association.[37] Following successful protection of these landmarks, project director George Calderaro and other proponents formed the Tin Pan Alley American Popular Music Project.[38]On April 2, 2022, 28th Street between Broadway and 6th Avenue was officially co-named "Tin Pan Alley" by the City of New York.[38][39]The Bob Geddins blues song "Tin Pan Alley (AKA The Roughest Place in Town)", recorded by Jimmy Wilson, was a top 10 hit on the R&B chart in 1953[40] and became a popular song among West Coast blues performers.[41] The song was a favourite of, and covered many times, by Stevie Ray Vaughan.In the 1970s to early 1980s, a Times Square bar named Tin Pan Alley, its owners, Steve d'Agroso and Maggie Smith, and many of its patrons were the real-life inspiration for the HBO series The Deuce. The bar was renamed The Hi-Hat in the series.[42]The song "Who Are You" by The Who has the stanza "I stretched back and I hiccupped / And looked back on my busy day / Eleven hours in the Tin Pan / God, there's got to be another way", which references a long legal meeting with music publisher Allen Klein.[43][44][45]The last lines in the Dire Straits song "It Never Rains" on the album Love Over Gold, refers to a woman in the entertainment industry being taken advantage of in 'Vaudeville Valley' and Tin Pan Alley.[46]Music Row Historical district in Nashville, TennesseePrinter's Alley Alley in downtown Nashville, Tennessee, United StatesRadio Row Urban area with a large number of businesses selling radio equipmentThe Tin Pan Alley Rag Musical written by Mark SaltzmanGreat American Songbook Canon of American jazz standards, popular songs and show tunes^ Reublin, Rick (March 2009) "America's Music Publishing Industry: The story of Tin Pan Alley" The Parlor Songs Academy^ Dickerson, Aitlin (March 12, 2013) "'Bowery Boys' Are Amateur But Beloved New York Historians" NPR^ Mooney Jake (October 17, 2008) "City Room: Tin Pan Alley, Not So Pretty" The New York Times^ Gray, Christopher (July 13, 2003) "Streetscapes: West 28th Street, Broadway to Sixth; A Tin Pan Alley, Chockablock With Life, if Not Song" The New York Times^ Spencer, Luke J. 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Easy to Remember: The Great American Songwriters and Their Songa. Jaffrey, NH: David R. Godine. ISBN1567921477. OCLC45080154.Scheurer, Timothy E., American Popular Music: The nineteenth century and Tin Pan Alley, Bowling Green State University, Popular Press, 1989 (Volume I)Scheurer, Timothy E., American Popular Music: The age of rock, Bowling Green State University, Popular Press, 1989 (Volume II)Wikimedia Commons has media related to Tin Pan Alley.Listen to this article (19 minutes)This audio file was created from a revision of this article dated 26November2018(2018-11-26), and does not reflect subsequent edits.(Audio help More spoken articles)Tin Pan Alley American Popular Music ProjectParlor Songs: History of Tin Pan Alley404444N 735922.5W / 40.74556N 73.989583W / 40.74556; -73.989583Retrieved from " of music publishers and songwriters in New York City, USFor the film, see Tin Pan Alley (film). For the band, see Tin Pan Alley (band). For the play, see The Tin Pan Alley Rag.Buildings of Tin Pan Alley, 1910[1]The same buildings, 2011Tin Pan Alley was a collection of music publishers and songwriters in New York City that dominated the popular music of the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Originally, it referred to a specific location on West 28th Street, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues in the Flower District[2] of Manhattan, as commemorated by a plaque on 28th Street between Broadway and Sixth.[3][4][5][6] Several buildings on Tin Pan Alley are protected as New York City designated landmarks, and the section of 28th Street from Fifth to Sixth Avenue is also officially co-named Tin Pan Alley.The start of Tin Pan Alley is usually dated to about 1885, when a number of music publishers set up shop in the same district of Manhattan. The end of Tin Pan Alley is less clear cut. Some date it to the start of the Great Depression in the 1930s when the phonograph, radio, and motion pictures supplanted sheet music as the driving force of American popular music, while others consider Tin Pan Alley to have continued into the 1950s when earlier styles of music were upstaged by the rise of Rock and roll, which was centered on the Brill Building. Brill Building songwriter Neil Sedaka described his employer as being a natural outgrowth of Tin Pan Alley, in that the older songwriters were still employed in Tin Pan Alley firms while younger songwriters such as Sedaka found work at the Brill Building.[7]There are conflicting explanations regarding the origins of the term "Tin Pan Alley". The most popular account holds that it was originally a derogatory reference made by Monroe H. Rosenfeld in the New York Herald to the collective sound made by many "cheap upright pianos" all playing different tunes being reminiscent of the banging of tin pans in an alleyway.[8][9] The Grove Dictionary of American Music also cites Rosenfeld as originator of the term, dating its first use from 1903.[10] However, while an article on Tin Pan Alley can be found in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch from May of that year,[11] this is unattributed and no piece by Rosenfeld that employs the phrase has been discovered.[12]Simon Napier-Bell quotes an account of the origin of the name published in a 1930 book about the music business.[13] In this version, popular songwriter Harry von Tilzer was being interviewed about the area around 28th Street and Fifth Avenue, where many music publishers had offices. Von Tilzer had modified his expensive Kindler & Collins piano by placing strips of paper down the strings to give the instrument a more percussive sound. The journalist told von Tilzer, "Your Kindler & Collins sounds exactly like a tin can. I'll call the article 'Tin Pan Alley'."[14] In any case, the name was firmly attached by the fall of 1908, when The Hampton Magazine published an article titled "Tin Pan Alley" about 28th Street.[15]According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, "tin pan" was slang for "a decrepit piano" (1882), and the term came to mean a "hit song writing business" by 1907.[16]With time, the nickname came to describe the American music publishing industry in general.[8] The term then spread to the United Kingdom, where "Tin Pan Alley" was also used to describe Denmark Street in London's West End.[17] In the 1920s the street became known as "Britain's Tin Pan Alley" because of its large number of music shops.[18][19]These buildings (4755 West 28th Street) and others on West 28th Street between Sixth Avenue and Broadway in Manhattan housed the sheet-music publishers that were the center of American popular music in the early 20th century. The buildings shown were designated as historic landmarks in 2019.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. The commercial center of the popular music publishing industry changed during the course of the 19th century, starting in Boston and moving to Philadelphia, Chicago and Cincinnati before settling in New York City under the influence of new and vigorous publishers which concentrated on vocal music. The two most enterprising New York publishers were Willis Woodard and T.B. Harms, the first companies to specialize in popular songs rather than hymns or classical music.[10] Naturally, these firms were located in the entertainment district, which, at the time, was centered on Union Square

2011. "We used to think of Tin Pan Alley, which is what they called Denmark Street years ago when all the music publishers were there, as rather old-fashioned," recalls Peter Asher^ "Tin Pan Alley (London)", musicpilgrimages.com, November 7, 2009^ Peter Watts. Denmark Street: Londons Street of Sounds (2023)^ Mathieu, Jane (July 1, 2017). "Midtown, 1906: The Case for an Alternative Tin Pan Alley". American Music. 35 (2): 206. doi:10.5406/americanmusic.35.2.0197. ISSN0734-4392.^ John C. Schmidt, "Pattison, John Nelson", Grove Music Online.^ Whitcomb (1986), p.44.^ Starr, Larry & Waterman, Christopher (2003). American Popular Music: From Minstrelsy to MTV. New York: Oxford University Press. pp.2931. ISBN019510854X.^ a b Culwell-Block, Logan (December 12, 2019). "Tin Pan Alley Buildings, Birthplace of American Popular Music Publishing, Designated Landmarks". Playbill. Retrieved February 22, 2024.^ Lindberg, Ulf (2003). "Popular modernism? The 'urban' style of interwar Tin Pan Alley". 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Von Tilzer kept an office in that locale, and for good reason. On every building along 28th Street signs advertised the music publishers operating within: M. Witmark and Sons, Shapiro-Remick, T.B. Harms, Leo Feist, and others. Through open windows along West 28th blared a cacophony of pianos being pounded in a raucous range of keys and states of tune. Entering Von Tilzers office, Rosenfeld greeted his pal. It sounds like a bunch of tin cans, Rosenfeld cracked. Well, Von Tilzer replied, I guess this must be Tin Pan Alley. Several versions of this anecdote exist, and both Rosenfeld and Von Tilzer took credit for the nickname thereafter associated with that stretch of West 28th Street. Gotham newspaper legend holds that Rosenfeld, who wrote for the New York World, had a column called Tin Pan Alley, but no supporting evidence has ever surfaced. Nevertheless, in the tradition of stories too good to check, the phrase Tin Pan Alley caught on, first referring to the street along which Von Tilzer and rivals toiled and eventually as a synonym for the popular music industry that sprouted in New York around 1890 and blossomed in the first few decades of the 20th century. Ragtime, which was named for its ragged syncopated style, evolved in the late 19th century in Midwestern saloons, dance halls, and brothels. Tin Pan Alley came into being to serve a market for sheet music, sales of which were indicators of songs popularity. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, recorded music existed, first on carnauba wax-coated tubes, then on fragile lacquer disks, but playback equipment was costly. However, Americans were crazy for pianos, and the music they played and listened to on pianos at home, in church, in saloons, and onstage at vaudeville houses and music halls came packaged on paper printed with a numbers key, chords, and, if there were lyrics, words. Tin Pan Alleys songwriters, song pluggers, and song publishers made their living making music make money, and besides creating a vast body of unforgettable tunes they established what became the American recording industry. America has always had popular songwritersin the mid-1800s Stephen Foster had fans humming and singing tunes like Oh, Susanna, I Dream of Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair, and Beautiful Dreamer, among more than 200 others that he wrote. In Fosters heyday, the music industry was a scattershot proposition, dominated by hymns and light, classically inflected numbers. Publishers were often music store owners or local printers who distributed sheet music and instrumental instruction books as a sideline, according to Tin Pan Alley by David A. Jansen. Mass production of pianos changed the market. Following the Civil War, piano sales boomed to as many as 25,000 instruments yearly. Sitting in the parlor with relatives and friends listening to and singing along to the tinkling 88s became a popular middle-class amusement. Often pianists required notation to play songs new to them. Sheet music answered that need. Publication in 1892 of the sheet music to After the Ball by Milwaukeean Charles K. Harris set off a trend. Harriss song tells a story as old as time of heartbreak and loss. After the Ball sold two million copies of sheet music its first year at around 50 cents per copy, and by the end of the 1890s had sold five million copies. Clockwise from left: Gus Edwards, W.C. Handy, Eubie Blake, Scott Joplin. (University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, jws16189; American Stock Archive/Getty Images; MPI/Getty Images; Hulton Archive/Getty Images) Suddenly, music was a business, and everybody wanted in. Entrepreneurs migrated from other sectors. Max Dreyfus, head of the T.B. Harms organization, started out selling picture frames. Edward B. Marks was a notions salesman. Leo Feist sold corsets. Once established in the trade of making musical tastes, these businessmen strove to give Americans what they wanted to hear, sometimes missing the mark. In 1922, neophyte songsmith Richard Rodgers visited Dreyfus to pitch material. There is nothing of value here, Dreyfus told the young man. I dont hear any music. Three years later, after Rodgers had written the scores of several Broadway musicals, Dreyfus invited him back and offered Rodgers a contract, Ben Yagoda wrote in American Heritage. Along with the publishers came a new generation of songwriters: young, ambitious men, often the sons of immigrants, who hired on at a salary to churn out songs of all sorts, from tragedies like Von Tilzers A Bird in a Gilded Cage to celebrations of transportation, as in Gus Edwardss In My Merry Oldsmobile, and the regional nostalgia of Lewis Muirs and Wolfe Gilberts Waiting for the Robert E. Lee to novelty tunes that mocked Blacks, Jews, and other minorities. A vogue for coon songs in the minstrel style began to wither around 1905, when African American songwriters and performers denounced them, but it persisted into the `30s. Black composers introduced novel musical forms. Starting in 1909, many set up shop in the new Gaiety Building in Midtown. The first of these genres was ragtime, so called for its ragged syncopated style. Ragtime took form in the late 1800s in Midwestern saloons, dance halls, and brothels. In 1899, Scott Joplin, a music teacher, pianist, and composer, walked into music retailer and publisher John Starks store in Sedalia, Missouri. Joplin presented Stark with Maple Leaf Rag, which began a nationwide craze. Pianists competed in ragtime cutting contests, and the music inspired dance steps. Stark publicized Joplin as king of the ragtime writers and published more of the composers rags, including The Entertainer. In 1907, Joplin relocated to New York City, where he tried without success to get his ragtime opera, Treemonisha, produced. He reportedly suspected Irving Berlin of having lifted the opening musical phrase of his hit Alexanders Ragtime Band from Treemonisha, which Joplin had dropped at Berlins publisher. Berlin denied this. Joplin died in 1917. In 1921 Joplin inheritor Eubie Blake made a notable transition from that form to early jazz and show tunes. With partner Noble Sissle, Blake produced and wrote the songs to Shuffle Along, the first Black musical on Broadway. As Scott Joplin was popularizing ragtime, W. C. Handy was pumping up enthusiasm for the blues. Handy, a middle-class Black cornetist and bandleader, had grown up having to hide his interest in music from strict parents. He persisted and became a professional musician. In 1903 he was traveling through Mississippi with an orchestra whose mtier was waltzes, marches, light classics, and ragtime, when he heard a guitarist sliding a knife blade across his instruments strings, playing the weirdest music I had ever heard. Handy was hearing Delta folk blues, whose flatted thirds and sevenths were what sounded weird to Handys formally oriented ear. Two years later, when Handy and his band were taking a break while playing another Mississippi town, a raggedy string band took the stage and, playing blues, got more applause than Handys more genteel ensemble. This convinced Handy that the blues had commercial prospects. In 1912 he sold Memphis Blues, titled for his adopted hometown, to a local publisher. In 1914, his new Handy and Pace firm published his St. Louis Blues. Handy moved to New York in 1917 and published anthologies of traditional blues and spirituals. He called himself the Father of the Blues. Immigrant and first-generation Jews were prominent along Tin Pan Alley at a time when anti-Semitism was open and pervasive. Hotels barred Jews, help-wanted ads specified Christians only, and colleges maintained quotas for Jewish students. Escaping the ghetto meant becoming as American as possible, and entertainment was less hidebound than other trades. Many composers of the era were JewishHarris, Von Tilzer, Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, Richard Rodgers, Jerome Kern, Harold Arlenas were lyricists like Gus Kahn, Yip Harburg, Irving Caesar, and Lorenz Hart. In the time-honored tradition, names changed: Von Tilzer was once Aaron Gumbinsky, George Gershwin was once Jacob Gershowitz, Harold Arlen was Hyman Arluck, Irving Berlin had been Israel Beilin. In The Jazz Singer, the first full-length sound film, Jakie Rabinowitz, played by Al Jolson, rebels against his father, an Orthodox cantor, by becoming the title character, Jack Robin. Real-world variations on this fictional conflict played out in many Jewish households. Grinding out songs on salary was mainly a trade pursued by working-class Jews, most of whom, unlike an earlier wave of Landsmen departing German-speaking regions, had immigrated from Russia and Eastern Europe. When Jerome Kern, whose father was a successful German-Jewish businessman in New York City, saw that plugging songs was getting him nowhere, he sailed to London, insinuated himself into that citys West End musical theater scene, and used the resulting contacts to return stateside and succeed as a Broadway tunesmith. Berlin, raised in a basement apartment on the Lower East Side, did not seek such options. The original gauge for songs popularity was the figure for sales of a given numbers sheet music. To catch the eye of an amateur or professional musician shopping for new material to play at home or onstage, publishers relied on illustrations. Library of Congress; Lebrecht Music Arts/Bridgeman Images; Sheridan Libraries/Levy/Gado/Getty Images(3); Library of Congress; Sheridan Libraries/Levy/Gado/Getty Images; New York Public Library; National Archives) Some songwriters became publishers. When Von Tilzers melodramatic ballad My Old New Hampshire Home became a hit in 1898 but only earned him $15, he joined an existing publishing house as a partner. In 1902 he founded Harry Von Tilzer Music. He and other Tin Pan Alley denizens relied on song pluggers who used any means necessary to publicize songs. Biographer James Kaplan recounts how in 1902 young Israel Beilin went to work for Von Tilzer. The tyros assignment was to frequent music halls where performers were singing Von Tilzer songs; at the end of his employers numbers, he was to jump up and applaud loudly. More refined methods of promotion emerged. Novice songwriter Jerome Kern hired on at Wanamakers department store to play a piano positioned on the establishments sales floor as a way to encourage sheet music purchases. Kern went on to hawk sheet music to stores up and down the Hudson Valley, eventually going on to great success as a tunesmith. Gershwin quit high school in 1913 to flog songs for potential customers at Remick Music. Vaudeville was another medium of song promotion. Vaudeville theaters booked varied actsjugglers, comedians, musicians, singersthat toured regionally and nationally. When troupes played New York, the performers often made the rounds of publishers hunting for new tunes to freshen their acts. In making a reputation for themselves as comedic singers in 1912, the four Marx brothers, raised in Manhattans Yorkville neighborhood, paid $27 for Peasie Weasie, a tune whose lyrics never came out quite the same when the head Marx, Julius, known as Groucho, sang them. Some vaudeville impresarios wrote songs that they assigned to players in stage companies they ran. Gus Edwards, who wrote By the Light of the Silvery Moon, School Days, and others, had a kid act starring him as an exasperated teacher coping with a clownish class of rising performers such as George Jessel, Phil Silvers, and Eddie Cantor. Young Julius Marx also apprenticed under Edwards. Another song-selling tool was the player piano, akin to the familiar parlor instrument but able to reproduce music automatically. Powered by foot-pumped treadles, player pianos used piano rolls, continuous sheets of heavy paper perforated to cause the keys to strike chords and notes. Mass-marketed starting in the 1890s and improving steadily in quality into the 1910s, player pianos were immensely popular. A musician made a piano roll by playing a number as a perforating tool replicated the music on a master sheet used to produce copies. A buyer fitted the roll into the player piano and pumped the treadle. This action moved the roll along and pushed air through its holes, working the pianos keys. Many songwriters embraced piano rolls not only as a record of their musicianship but as a remunerative sideline. Gershwins piano rolls illustrate his breathtaking technique and harmonics; CDs and streamed versions from the original rolls are a revelation. Eubie Blakes rolls offer a master class in playing ragtime and early jazz. Sheet music covers promoted their content. Early covers had minimal decoration, but by the 1910s covers were multicolored and illustrated, whether with an image of the songwriter or a performer associated with the number, such as Sophie Tucker or Jolson, a scene reflecting the tunes content, or, especially for novelty numbers, a cartoon. From left: George Gershwin, Gerome Kern. (Evening Standard/Getty Images; Pictorial Press/Alamy Stock Photo) Tin Pan Alley proved replicable. Writing in the Chicago Tribune in 1986, June Sawyers explained how the Windy Citys Tin Pan Alley, which dated to the latter 1800s, counted about 50 music publishers in its 1920s heyday. Most had offices downtown, within two blocks of Randolph Street between State and Clark Streets, near todays Nederlander Theater. Hits originating there included Down by the Old Mill Stream, When Youre Smiling, Let Me Call You Sweetheart, and Fred Fishers Chicago, That Toddlin Town. But the real action was in Manhattan, prompting publishers from Chicago and other cities to establish branch offices in New York City. Tin Pan Alley produced superstars. The first was George M. Cohanvaudevillian, songwriter, playwright, actor, and producer of Broadway musicals in which he starred. Cohan came from a tradition of Irish-American musical comedy dating to the 1870s, when Ed Harrigan and Tony Hart in their Mulligan Guards comedies lampooned working-class neighborhood militias. As a youth touring with his familys act, the Four Cohans, George M. Cohan caught the songwriting bug. In George M. Cohan: The Man Who Owned Broadway, John McCabe tells how the novice songsmith pitched a sheaf of songs at Witmark. The publisher bought only Why Did Nellie Leave Her Home? Eyeballing the resulting Witmark sheet music, Cohan discovered that all that remained of his composition was the title. But after his first hit show, 1904s Little Johnny Jones, publishers left Cohan and his compositions alone. He went on to write more than 300 songs and to produce and star in more than 30 musicals, composing patriotic show-bizzy numbers like Youre a Grand Old Flag,Over There, The Yankee Doodle Boy, and Give My Regards to Broadway. In 1914, Cohan helped found the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), which protects members musical copyrights. Another Tin Pan Alley graduate turned superstar was Irving Berlin. At 15, leaving song plugging behind, Izzy Beilin took a job as a singing waiter at the Pelham Caf, a Chinatown dive catering to underworld characters and tourists, and took up piano. In 1907, besides changing his name to Irving Berlin, he sold his first song, Marie From Sunny Italy, which he co-wrote with the Pelham Cafes house pianist. In 1908, Waterson and Snyder hired Berlin as a staff lyricist. Biographer Kaplan sketches the scene. Dressed in suit and tie and using a fountain pen, Berlin drafted and crafted lyrics for tunes co-owner Ted Snyder and others created. Berlin found inspiration everywhere. When fellow lyricist George Whiting said he could go to the theater that night because his wife had gone to the country, Berlin exclaimed, That would be a good title for a song! The two turned Whitings remark into My Wifes Gone to the Country! Hurrah! Hurrah! Soon, although he could not read music, Berlin was writing melodies. When an idea struck, hed bang out a rudimentary version on a piano at Waterson and Snyder; amid the chaos, a sharp-eared musical secretary would transcribe his plunking into musical notation. Of his 1911 breakthrough hit Alexanders Ragtime Band, Berlin said, I wrote the whole thing in 18 minutes, surrounded on all sides by roaring pianos and roaring vaudeville actors. Ira and George Gershwin (CSU Archives/Everett Collection/Alamy Stock Photo) After Alexander, Berlin continued his streak, forming his own publishing company. Enlisting in the U.S. Army as a sergeant during World War I, he wrote an all-doughboy revue, Yip Yip Yaphank. In 1921, Berlin and Sam Harris, Cohans former partner, opened the Music Box Theater on 45th Street between 7th and 8th Avenues, annually staging Music Box Revues. In 1925, the theater started presenting other productions, musical and theatrical. When Hollywood movies entered the age of sound, Berlin segued into soundtracks. His best remembered tunesAlways, God Bless America, Theres No Business Like Show Business, Cheek to Cheek, and White Christmasmostly date to his interwar and World War II periods. Not a few songwriters made the jump from Tin Pan Alley to Broadway, but Gershwin bounded from Tin Pan Alley to the concert hall. Classically trained, he had moved in 1918 from song plugging to composing and writing songs on salary at T.B. Harms for $35 a week. In 1920 Gershwin had his first major success with Swanee. His co-writer, young lyricist Irving Caesar, formerly Isidor Kaiser, knew singer Al Jolson, whose recording of Swanee made it a hit. That year, Gershwin began to contribute to the annual George Whites Scandals revues. For the 1922 Scandals, he worked with Paul Whiteman, the decades most popular bandleader, who played a watered-down version of jazz. Whiteman repeatedly asked Gershwin to compose a jazz concerto, and Gershwin finally did. The result, Rhapsody in Blue, premiered in February 1924 at Aeolian Hall on West 42nd Street with the Whiteman orchestra accompanying Gershwin on piano. He continued to straddle classical and popular music. He wrote the tone poem An American in Paris, and composed the opera Porgy and Bess. At the same time, with brother Ira as lyricist, Gershwin was writing songs for Broadway and Hollywood that have never gone out of fashion: I Got Rhythm, Embraceable You, Our Love Is Here to Stay, Lets Call the Whole Thing Off, and many more. George M. Cohan (Bettmann/Getty Images) Given popular songs ever-changing nature, Tin Pan Alley evolved. The first shift began to be evident around 1910, when music publishers started abandoning 28th Street for the theater district. Besides reflecting the obvious link between songwriting and musical theater, gravitating to the commercial district around 42nd and Broadway was practical. Midtowns newer buildings offered successful publishers who had expanded their staffs beyond songwriters and pluggers to include sales teams, orchestration departments, and support personnel space for all those people. A much more significant change took place after World War I, as commercial radio arrived and recording technology matured. Lacquer 78 rpm discs had been the standard in recording since 1910they held more music and were easier to store than cylinders. Broadcasting, introduced in 1920, at first put a dent in record sales. Radio stations invited singers and musicians to their studios to play on the air and, beginning with New Yorks WHN in 1924, aired broadcasts of popular bands live from ballrooms, nightclubs, and theaters. Introduction in 1925 of electrical recording improved records sound quality, reviving sales. Radio and records complemented each othera fan hearing an artist perform a song on the air could race to the record shop for a copy. Sitting around the parlor piano listening to some uncle warble along while playing Mother Machree became pass. By 1925 record sales outpaced purchases of sheet music and by 1927 had climbed from 1909s 30 million sales to 140 million. During World War I, Irving Berlin applied his skills to patriotic shows and musical themes. (Library of Congress; National Portrait Gallery) Throughout the 20s, the mastersBerlin, Gershwin, Kern, Rodgers and Hartcontinued to write great songs. Jazz greats like Thomas Fats Waller wrote masterpieces in their idiom. Singer-pianist Waller, who used humor to put his songs over, copyrighted more than 400 numbers and reputedly sold the rights to others for the cash. But the 20s also saw a trend of snappy, frothy songs like Yes Sir, Thats My Baby, by Walter Donaldson and Gus Kahn, Yes, We Have No Bananas, by Frank Silver and Irving Cohn, and Crazy Rhythm, by Irving Caesar, Joseph Meyer, and Roger Kahn. Tin Pan Alleys glow began to fade when the movies went from silent to sound. Film studios started acquiring music publishers, as in 1929, when Warner Brothers bought M. Witmark, Remick Music, and T.B. Harms, a step toward the establishment of Warner Bros. Records. As corporate units, music publishers went from promoting songs to the public to negotiating with songwriters, documenting and paying royalties, touting tunes to radio station programmers, and licensing their use in commercials and other contexts. The sheet music business withered. Aspiring tunesmiths still were working out tunes on pianos, but now their ambition was not to rack up sheet music sales at Wanamakers but to get a Russ Columbo or a Bing Crosby or a Rudy Vallee to put out a 78 featuring a song of theirs. The new era brought a new music publishing hub: the Brill Building at 1619 Broadway, opened in 1931, which publishers shared with talent agencies, entertainment lawyers, arrangers, and others. In 1939, after a dispute over fees ASCAP charged radio stations for playing songs it controlled, broadcasters formed their own publishing umbrella, Broadcast Music Inc. ASCAP had most of the major publishing firms and songwriters, so BMI sought artists in jazz, hillbilly and race music, and Latin. In tandem with small independent record companies, BMI-affiliated firms were instrumental in the post-World War II growth of country-and-western and rhythm-and-blues. Neil Sedaka (Bettman/Getty Images) In the early 1950s, a few years before rock n roll broke out, Brooklyn high schooler Neil Sedaka was writing songs with classmate Howard Greenfield. Sedaka came into contact with a veteran lyricist who had made his name in Tin Pan Alley. In his book Always Magic in the Air, Ken Emerson describes how Sedakas Spanish teacher, hearing of his musical avocation, pushed the youth to contact her brother, Irving Caesar. Besides Swanee, Caesar, now in his fifties, had written the lyrics for Vincent Youmanss 1924 hit Tea for Two. In 1935, child star Shirley Temple sang Caesars Animal Crackers in My Soup, in her movie Curly Top, and in 1956 Louis Prima had scored a hit with Caesars 1929 composition Just a Gigolo. Caesar, who had helped found the Songwriters Guild of America, was still plugging away. I met Caesar many times, said Sedaka, who had his own first big hit in 1959 with Oh, Carol, and, as a solo artist and in collaborations with Greenfield at the Brill Building and elsewhere, became a stalwart of the pop music scene. We never wrote together, but he liked my voice, Sedaka said of Caesar, and I sang on many of his demo records. The end date of the Tin Pan Alley era is ambiguous, but most agree that 1885 marked the beginning of the era when Willis Witmark, founder of one of the first publishing houses to concentrate on popular over religious or classical sheet music, moved to the 28th street location from Manhattans entertainment district, then located about 14 blocks south near Union Square. The history of the name, Tin Pan Alley, is a mystery as well although there is an apocryphal story that the term was coined by Monroe H. Rosenfeld of the New York Herald comparing the constant sound of multiple pianos with questionable intonation on the block to children banging on tin pans. The story of how Tin Pan Alley grew on 28th street is one of fiscal innovation rather than artistic idealism. In the 19th century, copyright law was a bit anarchic. There wasnt a robust central agency to protect the holders of copyrighted music until the establishment of ASCAP (The American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers) in 1914. In practice, this meant that if a piece of sheet music was released by Publisher A and became a hit, it could immediately be printed by Publishers B through Z, with little or no legal recourse available to the original publisher. Rather than battle it out in court to maintain their rights, publishers of the late 1800s chose to strike deals with their counterparts in other markets to produce alternate versions of their music; a New York publisher may have deals with publishers in Philadelphia, Cleveland, and Chicago to print and release the same song in different editions specific to that region. With this sense of cooperation in mind, a central headquarters of operation, like Tin Pan Alley, made it possible for deals to be struck with phenomenal speed in the pre-telephone era. And, more importantly, the concentration of publishers created a hub of songwriting activity, where freelance composers, as well as those with permanent positions with a publishing house, could work in a potent atmosphere of creativity. But, while it is clear that the level of songwriting from this time and place was phenomenal, producing such composers as George Gershwin and Irving Berlin amongst others, the primary goal of this artistic aggregation was less musical artistry than the transformation of music into commodity. In a period before recorded music, the family parlor was the center of musical activity, and it was the amateur musician that kept instrument shopsand especially music publishersin business. In the years after the Civil War, Americans were buying more than 25,000 pianos a year and about half a million people were learning piano by 1887. Based on a rough statistical record from the year, this meant about one in 29 households, nationwide, contained someone learning to play music at home.1 American music publishing in the late 19th century was fast becoming a viable industry. And what did these amateur musicians want to play? Before Tin Pan Alley, the majority of sheet music sold in stores consisted of religious hymns and light classical pieces. American music publishers took the late 19th upsurge in amateur music-making, however, as a cue to invest in songs coming from the most popular entertainment form of that time: minstrel shows which incorporated musical influences from African slaves, as well as the Scottish, Irish, Italian, and Jewish immigrant cultures. Composers for these shows integrated elements of jazz and blues, as well as earlier forms like cakewalk2 and ragtime3 music, into their pieces, which made them attractive to the audience learning piano in their homes. These tunes were based on a simple repetition of verses and a chorus, perhaps preceded by a short recitative to set the narrative scene.4 The harmonies were set out in an almost workman-like fashion and worked typically in the service of a singable, melody. This simplicity made these pieces easy for amateurs to perform and may have played some small part in the continuing popularity of Tin Pan Alley with later generations of singers and jazz musicians as themes for improvised variation, but more on that later. First, back to how Tin Pan Alley helped to shape the music business in America. The organization of publishers in central areas allowed them to amass a certain amount of unified power that gave them access to US politics in order promote their business interests. In 1895, many of the publishers found in Tin Pan Alley banded together to for the Music Publishers Association of the United States, an organization, which is still active in American publishing concerns and, arguably, provided a framework for modern performing rights groups such as BMI, ASCAP, and SESAC.5 On the street level, Tin Pan Alleys early attempts at mass marketing spawned one of its most widely storied and interesting subcultures: the song plugger. The song plugger was employed by a publisher to represent their wares by performing the organizations most recent songs in public settings to increase popular interest. The plugger would travel to popular past-times such as sporting events and perform the song, demonstrating its qualities to a more-or-less captive crowd. This practice created a familiarity, which then evolved into demand in some ways similar to the way constant repetition of pop songs in video form on MTV. Many of these pluggers, songwriters such as Victor Youmans, Harry Warren, and George Gershwin, worked their way up the ranks to become vital components of the Tin Pan Alley song machine. An even more aggressive of plugging was known as booming. Essentially plugging on steroids, booming used a crew of musicians that would infiltrate large to ceaselessly repeat a song the publishing house wanted pushed. The crew would perform the piece sometimes more than 30 times per event using a large metal horn to amplify the voice to crowds of over 20,000 potential customers. But, the best possible way to get their product to the widest audience was to get a star of stage or early radio to make one of the publishing houses tunes a hit. The right song, in the hands of the right singer, could mean the difference between hundreds of regional sales to thousands nationwide. And, so, each firm went to great lengths to court the entertainers most popular in the public eye; inviting them to their showrooms for private performances of new songs, the rights of which they would sometimes wave for the free promotion of the stars performance. If a singer or actor demanded a change to the composition, making it fit better with their musical ability or public persona, the in-house composer would happily make the adjustments on the spot. At its height, Tin Pan Alley was producing thousands of songs a year for the amateur musical public. The first hit of this era was Charles Pratts Wait Till the Clouds Roll By but the biggest smash by far was Charles K. Harriss surprise After the Ball which, in 1891 grossed 25,000.00 a week, eventually selling more than 5 million copies.6 Harris was one of the first songwriters to publish his own work, releasing After The Ball under his own steam after being offended by the very small amount offered for the song by the M. Witmark Company. The fact that the money from the songs success went straight to the songwriter gave other composers the confidence to start their own firms, thus beginning to undermine the larger publishing systems hierarchy. The shift to songwriter owned publishing houses, however, was only a minor factor in the ultimate demise of Tin Pan Alley. Changes in the entertainment industry began to make the simple songs of the late 19th century obsolete. In 1927, the musical Show Boat opened, which relied on a narrative through line, the first of its kind. The public loved this innovation and it marked a move away from the vaudeville-style revue that favored the popular songs of Tin Pan Alley. That same year the first talkie, The Jazz Singer, opened and the meteoric rise of the new medium of films with sound triggered a mass migration of former Tin Pan Alley composers westward to work in the film studio system. And, finally, the fledgling recording industry took the biggest piece of Tin Pan Alleys marketthe amateur musicianaway. Why listen to Uncle Pete pound through a popular song on the piano in the parlor when you could hear Eddie Condons band play it perfectly every time? The shift from home-music-making to commercial recordings almost completely nullified the need for the sheet music that Tin Pan Alley publishers were peddling. And, while there were many causes for the disappearance of Tin Pan Alley, some music historians give the very precise date of May 20, 1955 when Bill Haley and The Comets released Rock Around The Clock, as the of the beginning of the rock era and the final nail in Tin Pan Alleys coffin as the music industry made its shift from the chaotic freelance songwriters and pluggers to the corporate trappings of the Brill Building. If all the songs of Tin Pan Alley died out at this point, then the street, names, and stories of the era would be forgotten or, at best, be an historical footnote as an early attempt to modernize (and monetize) an art form, which is not an entirely new, nor interesting, story. However, the music of songwriters, such as the Gershwins, Irving Berlin, Victor Youmans, and others, persevere as the bedrock of what is known as The American Songbook. These songs continue to be used in movies and in historical revues, sung in piano bars and in the recital hall, and maybe most vitally, the music of Tin Pan Alley has been picked up as a wealth of melodic and harmonic material for generations of jazz musicians to base improvisations and their own compositions upon. The term jazz standard applies to a set of music which jazz musicians use as they hone their skills as improvisors. The group of compositions, made up in large part of pieces from the Tin Pan Alley era and musicals from a slightly later age, make up a sort of lingua franca of harmonies and song forms for the budding student of jazz to practice their improvising over. Because of this, the songs of Tin Pan Alley live on, somewhat removed from their original form, perhaps updated harmonically or rhythmically, or supplanted in the publics psyche by a legendary performance by John Coltrane or Miles Davis. Tin Pan Alley continues to be vital through these continually modernizing performances by jazz musicians, but also in its model for the increasing commodification of music; from the Brill Building era to Nashville and Hollywoods continuing use of music specifically for film and now the sale of tunes by rock bands for commercials and television shows. Tin Pan Alley may have become economically obsolete, but we are still reaping the benefits of its musical invention in the early 21st century. 77Tin Pan Alley, a bustling area of New York City during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, is often credited with laying the groundwork for what we now recognize as pop music. This article explores the origins of Tin Pan Alley, its significant contributions to the music industry, and how it introduced and shaped the concept of pop music.The Origins of Tin Pan AlleyWhat Was Tin Pan Alley?Tin Pan Alley was not a specific street or address but rather a district in Manhattan where music publishers and songwriters congregated. The term Tin Pan Alley reportedly came from the sound of many pianos, played by song pluggers, which resembled the clattering of tin pans. The area emerged as a central hub for the American music industry, fostering creativity and commercialization of music.The Birth of a Music Publishing HubIn the late 1800s, as the United States experienced rapid industrialization and urbanization, there was a growing demand for entertainment. Music publishing companies began to spring up in Tin Pan Alley, focusing on producing and selling sheet music for the masses. This era saw a significant shift from traditional folk music to more commercially viable tunes.The Rise of Songwriters and Music PublishersThe Role of SongwritersSongwriters in Tin Pan Alley were pivotal in creating catchy, memorable melodies that appealed to a broad audience. They often worked in small, cramped offices, churning out songs that could be quickly produced and sold. Notable songwriters like Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, and Cole Porter emerged from this environment, crafting songs that would become timeless classics.Music Publishers and the Business of MusicMusic publishers played a crucial role in Tin Pan Alley. They were responsible for discovering talented songwriters, promoting their songs, and ensuring their compositions reached a wide audience. Publishers invested in song pluggers, who performed new songs in vaudeville shows, theaters, and other venues to popularize them. This marketing strategy was essential in making songs hits and generating revenue from sheet music sales.The Impact on Popular MusicThe Standardization of Song StructureTin Pan Alley introduced a standardized song structure that became a hallmark of pop music. Songs typically followed a verse-chorus format, with catchy melodies and simple, relatable lyrics. This structure made songs easy to sing along to and memorable, a key characteristic of pop music.The Emergence of the Popular SongThe focus on creating songs with broad appeal led to the emergence of the popular song. These songs were designed to be enjoyed by the general public rather than a specific niche audience. This inclusivity helped songs from Tin Pan Alley reach a wide demographic, setting the stage for the concept of pop music as we know it today.Technological Advancements and Their InfluenceThe Phonograph and RadioTechnological advancements played