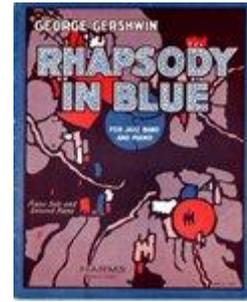
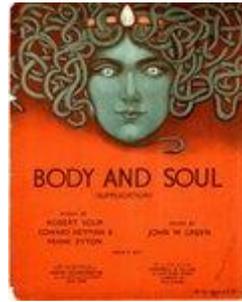
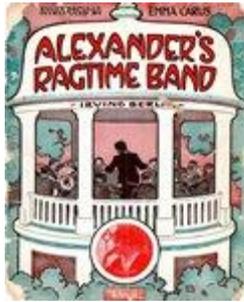


What Is the Great American Songbook?



The “Great American Songbook” is the canon of the most important and influential American popular songs and jazz standards from the early 20th century. It includes the most popular and enduring songs from the 1920s to the 1950s that were created for Broadway theatre, musical theatre, and Hollywood musical film. The music of this genre is also often referred to as “American standards”.

The times in which much of this music was written were tumultuous ones for a rapidly growing and changing America. The music of the Great American Songbook offered hope of better days during the Great Depression, built morale during two world wars, helped build social bridges within our culture, and whistled beside us during unprecedented economic growth. We defended our country, raised families, and built a nation while singing these songs.

There are a number of recognizable singers who are noted as prominent contributors to the Songbook genre. Ella Fitzgerald, Fred Astaire, Rosemary Clooney, Nat King Cole, Sammy Davis Jr., Judy Garland, Billy Holiday, Lena Horne, Al Jolson, Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra, Mel Tormé, Margaret Whiting, and Andy Williams are widely recognized for their performances and recordings which defined the genre. This is by no means an exhaustive list; there are countless others who are widely recognized for their performances of music from the Great American Songbook.

The Great American Songbook genre has emerged within the last hundred years, so there is not yet widespread consensus on exactly what falls under its heading. Several scholars have completed significant research into the genre, and have helped to shape the definition of the Great American Songbook. Alec Wilder's *American Popular Song: The Great Innovators, 1900–1950*, lists and ranks the artists he believes belong to the Great American Songbook canon. Wilder suggests that the Great American Songbook era ended in 1950; others maintain that its end coincided with the dramatic increase in the popularity of rock & roll music in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

<https://www.thecenterfortheperformingarts.org/Great-American-Songbook-Initiative/About-the-Great-American-Songbook>