

## Tin Pan Alley



At the end of the nineteenth century, composers of American popular music had very little control over who published their music. The publishers could print any number of versions of a piece of music that was popular at the time without the permission of the composer. So, even though a musician such as Stephen Foster or Scott Joplin would compose a new popular tune, other people could copy it and make money from it without ever giving any of the profit to the composer. The right to control who publishes your music is called copyright. Finally, at the end of the century, stronger copyright laws were passed that helped protect composers and their rights to their own music.

Because of these new, stricter laws, composers and music publishing companies (called publishers) began working together more closely so that each could make more money. The largest publishers were found in New York City. They all established themselves in an area near West 28th Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenue that came to be known as Tin Pan Alley beginning in about 1885. This area got its name from the sound that came from these publishing houses as many "song pluggers"—pianists and singers—played and sang the new tunes on pianos that could be heard from the sidewalk. The sound was described by many as being similar to the sound produced from banging on tin pans.

This music business district in the Manhattan area of New York became an important center for popular music because nearly all new music came through the publishing houses here. If a composer wanted his music produced and sold around the country, he almost always had to go through Tin Pan Alley.

Some of the great composers of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century American popular music whose music was published in Tin Pan Alley are included below:

- Scott Joplin – Inventor of Ragtime and composer of "Maple Leaf Rag"
- Irving Berlin – Composer of "White Christmas" and "God Bless America"
- George M. Cohan – Composer of "Give My Regards To Broadway" and "You're a Grand Old Flag"
- George Gershwin – Composer of "I Got Rhythm" and *Porgy and Bess*
- Fats Waller – Composer of "Ain't Misbehavin'" and "Honeysuckle Rose"

Tin Pan Alley remained central to the publishing and marketing of popular music into the early 1930s. The rise in popularity of the radio and record player replaced Tin Pan Alley as the most important and widely used means to promote popular music. Although its importance as a music center for demonstrating and selling new music diminished, the area known as Tin Pan Alley continued throughout much of the twentieth century as the center for music publishing. It helped to firmly establish the music publishing business in America and made it possible for many musicians to have viable careers as composers.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Mismatched Meanings

Match the definitions on the right with the terms on the left by placing the correct letter on the line of the corresponding term.

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|----------------------------|---|
| _____ 1. Song Pluggers     | A. Named this because it sounded like banging on tin pans |
| _____ 2. Irving Berlin     | B. Composer of "Maple Leaf Rag"                           |
| _____ 3. George Gershwin   | C. Musicians could have careers as these                  |
| _____ 4. Fats Waller       | D. Radio and record player take over                      |
| _____ 5. Tin Pan Alley     | E. Beginning of Tin Pan Alley                             |
| _____ 6. New York          | F. Early composer who didn't have benefit of copyright    |
| _____ 7. Publishers        | G. The right to control who publishes your music          |
| _____ 8. George M. Cohan   | H. Pianists and singers                                   |
| _____ 9. Scott Joplin      | I. Composer of "Honeysuckle Rose"                         |
| _____ 10. Stephen Foster   | J. Composer of "You're a Grand Old Flag"                  |
| _____ 11. 1885             | K. City of Tin Pan Alley                                  |
| _____ 12. Early 1930s      | L. Composer of "White Christmas"                          |
| _____ 13. Copyright        | M. Actual location of Tin Pan Alley                       |
| _____ 14. West 28th Street | N. Companies who printed and sold music                   |
| _____ 15. Composers        | O. Composer of "I Got Rhythm"                             |