

Developing wider listening: pop music of the 1960s

KS4/5

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Introduction

Last month, we began the latest part of our wider listening series, exploring the diversity of pop music in the second half of the 20th century, decade by decade. We looked at four specific genres of [1950s pop](#) and discovered how three of them – popular songs, country, and rhythm and blues (R&B) – became increasingly interlinked, resulting in the explosion of the fourth – rock 'n' roll – in the latter half of the decade, led by artists such as Elvis Presley and Chuck Berry.

We also looked at how popular music took off so astronomically in the 1950s, exploring the influence of teenage culture and the post-war boom economy, as well as the quickly developing technology that made music so much more accessible.

In the 1960s, things continued to develop and change unbelievably quickly in the wider world of popular culture. Rock 'n' roll managed pretty much to destroy its own reputation just as quickly as it had built it, and confident young British bands challenged the grip of US artists on the pop charts. This was the decade of the British invasion, the rise of rock, soul and folk music, the peace culture of the hippies in the face of the Vietnam War, and the desire to experiment. Pop music became even more intrinsically linked with popular culture, and it continued to be driven by the changing tastes of the younger generation.

Now that wider listening is such a key part of the exam boards' music specifications, students taking GCSE and A level music need to have a broad understanding of a range of musical styles in addition to any set works they're studying. But an appreciation and understanding of the background and context of *any* music they listen to or play is an incredibly useful skill for *all* musicians, irrespective of what they're studying. It increases their enjoyment as they make links between music they do and do not know, and helps them to find parallels across genres, cultures, traditions and time periods.

In this resource, we will take a broad look at some of the key pop styles of the 1960s, via a range of listening-related activities, links to interesting video clips and ideas for performing. First, let's see where things stood in the world of popular music at the beginning of the decade.

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Social and musical changes in the early 1960s

Of course, the music scene did not suddenly change as the 1950s became the 1960s, but a good deal of upheaval in society, culture, attitudes and fashion began in the early years of the decade. Nonetheless, in the early years of the 1960s many of the sounds and styles of the 1950s still remained, and the charts were largely dominated by artists who had made their names in the previous decade, such as Elvis Presley and Ray Charles.

The day the music died

The spread of **rock 'n' roll** across America and Europe went hand in hand with the rise in importance and influence of youth culture, and in particular the 'teenager', beginning an association between pop music and rebellion that remains to this day.

On 3 February 1959 – dubbed 'the day the music died' in Don McLean's 1971 song 'American Pie' – a small plane carrying artists Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and JP Richardson (aka The Big Bopper) to a concert crashed, killing all on board. Inadvertently, this tragedy began a string of scandals and circumstances that tarnished rock 'n' roll with a reputation from which it never quite recovered.

The upshot of this was that the charts of the early 1960s looked very much like those of the early 1950s, with crooners, balladeers, squeaky-clean singers and jazz artists featuring strongly. However, in 1963 and throughout the subsequent years of the decade, there were some seismic events that not only changed popular culture but also impacted on society and day-to-day life in such a way that their influence is still felt today. In the sections that follow, we'll briefly look at three significant events in the history of the US which, among many others, affected the mood of American culture and began to shape the diversity of the music of the 1960s.

The assassination of President Kennedy

On 22 November 1963, three shots rang out as President John F Kennedy passed through Dealey Plaza in downtown Dallas, Texas, in an open-top limousine, part of a motorcade on its way to a lunch where the President was to give a speech. Kennedy was hit twice and taken quickly to a nearby hospital, where he was pronounced dead 30 minutes later. Kennedy's alleged assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, who is thought to have fired the shots from the sixth floor of the nearby Texas Book Depository building, was himself shot and killed by nightclub owner Jack Ruby two days later as he was being transferred to the county jail.

Conspiracies quickly arose as to the reasons for the assassination, some suspecting communist links to a plot allegedly involving the Soviet Union or Cuba, while others thought that organised crime might be behind the killing. Whatever the reasons – and we still don't know them – the event heralded a number of years of tension within the US and internationally that were reflected in the culture and music of that period. There's more about the influence of the assassination on music here:

www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/assassination-history-jfk-death-songs-974198/

The progress of the civil rights movement

'I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal".' (Dr Martin Luther King Jr, 1963, Washington, DC)

African Americans had endured racist prejudice and violence since the time of slavery and the Civil War in the 19th century, and the 1950s saw a marked escalation in protests and action against segregation, discrimination and racism that became known as the civil rights movement. Events such as Rosa Parks's refusal to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama (1955), the attempts in 1957 to integrate African-American students into a previously white-only school in Little Rock, Arkansas, and various new Civil Rights Acts being signed into legislation by Presidents Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy culminated in a peaceful march on Washington, DC, in August 1963, where prominent activist Martin Luther King Jr gave his famous 'I have a dream' speech. This speech gave new momentum to the movement and became a slogan for equality and freedom, leading to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, signed into law by President Johnson, which guaranteed equal employment and integration.

These were positive steps, but the civil rights struggle did not end there, and the music of the 1960s reflects this through the songs of both black and white artists, and the rise of **Motown** and **soul** as effectively all-black genres. Tragically, King was murdered in 1968 in Memphis, and the article linked below traces some of the songs inspired by the great man, from the 1960s and beyond, by artists including Stevie Wonder, Nina Simone, Marvin Gaye and U2: www.udiscovermusic.com/stories/best-martin-luther-king-songs-tribute/

There's more detail on the moral scandals of rock 'n' roll here: www.usi.edu/news/releases/2017/02/rock-n-roll-and-moral-panics-part-one-1950s-and-1960s/

The war in Vietnam

The division between North Vietnam – which desired a communist regime – and the more westernised South Vietnam led to a protracted conflict that lasted from 1954 to 1975 and embroiled hundreds of thousands of young American soldiers in a war that many Americans felt had nothing to do with them. In the late 1960s, when so many US troops were stationed in Vietnam, a strong anti-war, pro-peace movement dominated popular culture, infiltrating music festivals and political rallies, underscored by the rise of **folk-rock** and **protest songs**.

Singers including Bob Dylan and Joan Baez spearheaded a movement of revolution and free speech that began to permeate all parts of society. Songs such as Dylan's 'Blowing in the Wind' (1962) (www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWwgrjjIMXA) became anthems calling for change, protesting about discrimination and war and providing soundtracks for marches and civil action.

These influential events all happened in America, of course, but their impact was felt strongly in Britain since much of the UK's popular culture was influenced by what was coming across the Atlantic. However, in 1963 – arguably for the first time – a British musical movement had an equally explosive impact on American culture.

The British Invasion

Rock 'n' roll and **R&B** had not gone unnoticed on this side of the Atlantic. Many British bands started out covering American songs. As they gained popularity, these bands began to write their own music and create their own sound. At the forefront was the Beatles, who first charted in the UK in 1962 after some years playing clubs in both Britain and Germany. They took the US by storm in 1964 when they appeared on the *Ed Sullivan Show* (www.youtube.com/watch?v=jenWdylTtzs).

The Beatles dominated the charts across the world for the rest of the decade before breaking up in 1970. The term 'Beatlemania' was coined to describe the hoards of screaming fans that followed them everywhere, and fellow British bands like the Rolling Stones and the Animals amassed similar followings.



Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones, performing in the Netherlands in 1976

Comparison exercise: the Beatles and the Rolling Stones

- ▶ www.youtube.com/watch?v=_qXyw1JiW7I
- ▶ www.youtube.com/watch?v=peYy53RP9KY

Get your students to listen to these two songs and discuss the similarities and differences in styles, prompted by the following questions:

- ▶ What makes these two songs sound 'British'? What is 'new' about their styles?
- ▶ Why do you think these two bands made such a huge impact in American and UK culture in the 1960s?
- ▶ How has rock 'n' roll influenced the Beatles song? You could compare it with this: www.youtube.com/watch?v=aNYWl13IWhY
- ▶ How has R&B influenced the Rolling Stones song? You could compare it with this: www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAjeSS3kktA
- ▶ While the Beatles had quite a clean-cut image, the Rolling Stones went for a more rebellious look. What evidence can you see of this in the two bands' performances?

R&B becomes Motown, soul and funk

While many white musicians were looking either across the Atlantic or back in time for their influences, black musicians took R&B to new levels, encouraged by the acceleration of the civil rights movement and the slowly improving experience of African-American people in American society. A Detroit-based record label called **Motown** (a contraction of ‘motor-town’ in a nod to Detroit’s car-building industry) was set up in 1960, consisting almost exclusively of African-American groups, singers, songwriters and producers, and taking the pop world by storm, finally giving black performers chances to gain similar success to their white counterparts, many of whom – like Elvis – had gained notoriety by ‘imitating’ black styles.



Groups that came out of the Motown label included the Miracles (featuring Smokey Robinson) and the Supremes (featuring Diana Ross), who gained success with songs written by the label’s in-house songwriters, particularly Holland-Dozier-Holland and Robinson himself. These artists and their contemporaries (like the Temptations, the Four Tops and later the Jackson Five) were effectively **vocal groups**, not unlike the boy bands and girl bands of more recent years, who were highly polished in both looks and sound. There were also individual artists at Motown such as Marvin Gaye and Stevie Wonder, who went on – as did Michael Jackson much later – to develop their own signature sounds.

Motown: a listening exercise

Listen to ‘Baby Love’ by the Supremes (www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yd43nWkgUzg) and answer the questions below:

- 1 Name the instrument that plays chords from the beginning to 0:06.
- 2 When the vocal first comes in (with ‘ooh-ooh’), how are the percussive sounds made?
- 3 Is the song in a major or a minor key?
- 4 The song is made up of a string of verses, each beginning with the **hook** ‘Baby love’. How many of these verses are there?
- 5 Describe the role of the backing vocalists in the verse beginning at 0:30.
- 6 What differences are there in the verse beginning at 0:52? Answer in as much detail as you can.
- 7 What noticeable change occurs at 1:34?

Answers:

- 1 Piano
- 2 Hand claps and stamps
- 3 Major
- 4 There are seven, though the track fades out during the seventh verse, and some have repeating lyrics.
- 5 They join with the lead singer (Diana Ross) at the start, and provide countermelodies later in the verse.
- 6 Saxophones join and take over, turning part of the verse into an instrumental. Backing vocals continue for a short time.
- 7 There is a key change.

Soul music gained popularity in the 1960s, particularly thanks to the Atlantic Records label which boasted artists like Sam Cooke, James Brown, Otis Redding and Aretha Franklin. Soul in the 1960s was emotional and earthy, fronted by gospel-like voices and horn sections, contrasting with the polished harmonies and orchestral arrangements of the more poppy Motown sound.

Comparison activity: Motown and soul

Compare these two examples – one from the Motown label and one from Atlantic – and get students to focus on the instrumental and singing styles to draw up differences between the two. What makes Motown more pop-like, and soul more like gospel?

- ▶ www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Ff2ZoDqzsg
- ▶ www.youtube.com/watch?v=waSorKeuzg8

Soul artists James Brown and Sly and the Family Stone diversified in the late 1960s, developing a form of soul known as **funk** that became hugely popular into the next decade. There's an example from James Brown later in this resource.

Rock music in all its forms

Having shed itself of the stigmas surrounding rock 'n' roll in the early 1960s and taken on the strong influences of the British invasion, **rock** came into its own and dominated the airwaves, diversifying and taking on many different forms. Each genre of rock had its own style and message, enjoying popularity with specific groups of fans who dressed and behaved like their musical idols.

While it's helpful to divide rock music up into some of the genres mentioned below, it's also worth mentioning that quite a few bands and musicians moved between genres and experimented with new ideas, all in the interests of creating original, personal sounds. Any pigeon-holing below will be controversial, and you will surely have many knowledgeable students (and parents/grandparents!) who will take issue with my slightly clumsy compartmentalising of what was quite a complex, interwoven web of musical styles.

Surf rock

Based in California, the Beach Boys sang about surfing, dating, cars and other teenage-related topics. They sported clean looks and performed well-crafted songs (courtesy of the songwriting and production skills of Brian Wilson and Mike Love) with close vocal harmonies. Their initial rock 'n' roll-influenced simple style evolved into a more complex, almost symphonic genre that strongly influenced the Beatles' increasing experimentation in the mid-1960s. You can show this development by playing students these three examples:

- ▶ 'Surfin' USA' (1963): www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsDKMkPCOeA
- ▶ 'Good Vibrations' (1966): www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eab_beho7HU

'Good Vibrations' and the songs on the album *Pet Sounds* (1965) inspired the songs of the Beatles' *Revolver* and *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* albums, like this one from 1967:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhB967-AVew

Folk-rock and protest music

There were strong links between folk-rock and the protest movements that were prevalent during the 1960s. An emerging group of singer-songwriters, with Bob Dylan at the forefront, released melodic, simply crafted songs that often contained protest messages. The Byrds, Simon and Garfunkel and Peter, Paul and Mary were other strong exponents of the folk-rock sound.

Artists from other genres also released protest songs, using their platform and social reach to get their messages across. You can use any of the examples below to start a discussion about the role of music in making social, political and moral statements, in the 1960s and beyond.

Protest songs

- ▶ Sam Cooke: 'A Change is Gonna Come' (1963). This song, like Dylan's 'Blowing in the Wind', became an anthem for the Civil Rights Movement:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPr3yvkHYsE
- ▶ James Brown: 'Say It Loud - I'm Black and I'm Proud' (1968)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bJA6W9CqvE
- ▶ Bob Dylan: 'Masters of War' (1963) www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEml_FT4YHU
- ▶ The Doors: 'The Unknown Soldier' (1968) www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LSCoBk8hgU

Hard rock

Hard rock – a more 'aggressive' genre influenced by rock 'n' roll, blues and R&B – took hold in the middle of the 1960s. Singers found much higher notes, delivering lyrics with a raspy, almost shouty tone, and the music was strongly guitar-heavy, with a preference for full-sounding, distorted **barre** chords and **virtuosic** solos, often played at breakneck speed.

The hard – or heavy – rock style really developed in the 1970s, but many bands at the forefront began their success in the 1960s – most of them British. These included Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin and, to an extent, the Who and the Kinks, whose guitarist Dave Davies famously slashed the front of his amplifier with a razor blade to get a more distinctive sound in their 1964 song 'You Really Got Me'. There's more on that story here: www.thaliacapos.com/blogs/blog/the-kinks-how-dave-davies-slashed-amp-created-rock-distortion

See *Music Teacher*, March 2020, for a resource devoted to [rock classics](#).

See *Music Teacher*, February 2017, for a resource devoted to [the Beatles' album Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band](#)

Psychedelic rock

Guitarist Jimi Hendrix, a virtuoso associated mostly with the hard rock genre, joined a number of established bands who embraced the hippie counter-culture of the late 1960s, creating music that in many ways was intended to 'enhance' the experience of listeners who might be using mind-altering substances like LSD, in an era where the now obvious dangers of recreational drug use were less fully understood.

Psychedelic lyrics were often strange, songs were long and unusually structured, and 'standard' band instruments like guitars and drums were combined with more unusual ones like organ, harpsichord, Indian sitar and early synthesisers such as the **mellotron**. Along with folk-rock, psychedelic rock became the soundtrack to the 1967 'summer of love' with bands like the Beatles, Jefferson Airplane and Pink Floyd experimenting with the genre.

Listening discussion: experimental rock

You could play examples of this genre to your students and get them to identify aspects of the songs that might be described as experimental. What sounds can they hear that are unusual? How are they using developing studio and electronic technology? What makes the songs sound 'weird' or 'trippy'?

- ▶ Jimi Hendrix: 'Purple Haze' (1967) www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJunCsrhJjg
- ▶ Jefferson Airplane: 'Somebody to Love' (1967) www.youtube.com/watch?v=2EdLasOrG6c
- ▶ The Beatles: 'Tomorrow Never Knows' (1966) www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHNbHn3i9S4
- ▶ Pink Floyd: 'See Emily Play' (1967) www.youtube.com/watch?v=H6ci4pAYiUw

See *Music Teacher*, December 2017, for a resource devoted to four songs from [the Beatles' album *Revolver*](#), including 'Tomorrow Never Knows'

Roots rock and blues

Bob Dylan's 1966 album *Blonde on Blonde*, recorded in the country-music capital Nashville, focused on the basics of blues, combined with folk, country and rock 'n' roll in a style that many called 'roots rock'. This retrospective style was adopted by bands like the Band and Creedence Clearwater Revival, who wanted to steer away from the more excessive experimentation of psychedelic rock. In turn, both the Beatles and the Rolling Stones were influenced by and recreated the genre in their work of the late 1960s. At the same time, British bands like the Yardbirds and Fleetwood Mac developed a strong blues-influenced sound.

Performing activity: 'Bad Moon Rising'

Creedence Clearwater Revival's 'Bad Moon Rising' (1969)

(www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BmEGm-mraE) is a good example of roots rock, combining a simple, lively guitar-based sound with quite dark lyrics.

The simple nature of this song makes it a good one to get students to learn to play, using guitars, keyboards and percussion and following the chord sequence below, with a two-step feel:

Intro:	D	A-G	D
Verse:	D	A-G	D
	D	A-G	D
	D	A-G	D
	D	A-G	D
Chorus:	G		D
	A		D
Verse:	D	A-G	D
	D	A-G	D
	D	A-G	D
	D	A-G	D
Chorus:	G		D
	A		D
Instrumental:	D	A-G	D
	D	A-G	D
	G		D
	A		D
Verse:	D	A-G	D
	D	A-G	D
	D	A-G	D
	D	A-G	D
Chorus:	G		D
	A		D
	G		D
	A		D

Other styles

A resource like this can only scratch the surface of the vast range of music and genres that filled the charts in the 1960s, and of course I apologise for all the omissions. It's worth quickly mentioning some other popular genres of the decade and a handful of artists associated with them:

- ▶ **Country** music continued to be huge, with artists like Johnny Cash, Glen Campbell and Tammy Wynette.
- ▶ There was a talented group of **pop song** writers working at the Brill Building in New York, which included Gerry Goffin, Carole King, Barry Mann, Cynthia Weill and Neil Diamond. Some of these writers had their own hits, but they also wrote for acts such as the Drifters, Herman's Hermits and the Righteous Brothers.
- ▶ **Latin music** was popular, not only in South America and the Caribbean but also in the US charts. **Bossa nova** was probably the dominant style, the famous song 'The Girl from Ipanema' being a hit in 1964 (www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1uEy-n4lsU).

A listening journey through the 1960s

To finish, here's a selection of two songs from each year of the 1960s to provide a listening journey for you and your students to take. It will hopefully help your students to understand something of the development of pop music during this time and place some well-known songs into chronological context.

1960

- ▶ Chubby Checker: 'The Twist' www.youtube.com/watch?v=-CCgDvUM4TM
- ▶ Brenda Lee: 'I'm Sorry' www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-TkjEdB1kE

1961

- ▶ Ben E King: 'Stand By Me' www.youtube.com/watch?v=3FNTWIUk4jQ
- ▶ Etta James: 'At Last' www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZagoE3ziso

1962

- ▶ The Beatles: 'Love Me Do' www.youtube.com/watch?v=KPon7i1-T1U
- ▶ The Beach Boys: 'Surfin' Safari' www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMChBJZUDK8

1963

- ▶ Lesley Gore: 'It's My Party' www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtCldpnQoWk
- ▶ Johnny Cash: 'Ring of Fire' www.youtube.com/watch?v=1WaV2x8GXjo

1964

- ▶ Herman's Hermits: 'I'm Into Something Good' www.youtube.com/watch?v=noJ6q42zLHo
- ▶ The Kinks: 'You Really Got Me' www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2GmzyeeXnQ

1965

- ▶ Simon and Garfunkel: 'The Sound of Silence' www.youtube.com/watch?v=nwP3vPQionI
- ▶ The Rolling Stones: 'Satisfaction' www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ANhU4AcKo4

1966

- ▶ The Beatles: 'Eleanor Rigby' www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gluNoLVKiQ
- ▶ The Troggs: 'Wild Thing' www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSWInYFVksG

1967

- ▶ The Doors: 'Light My Fire' www.youtube.com/watch?v=cq8k-ZbsXDI
- ▶ Aretha Franklin: 'Respect' www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FOUqQt3Kgo

1968

- ▶ Steppenwolf: 'Born to be Wild' www.youtube.com/watch?v=93fAJe8WVjA
- ▶ Janis Joplin: 'Piece of my Heart' www.youtube.com/watch?v=7uG2gYE5KOs

1969

- ▶ Neil Diamond: 'Sweet Caroline' www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vhFnTjia_I
- ▶ David Bowie: 'Space Oddity' www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYYRH4apXDo (the video for this was made in 1972)