The 20’s were a time when many Americans sought to escape their strict, puritanical roots, kick up their heels, and party. The First World War had ended in victory for the US and its allies, and a new sense of freedom was in the air. However the decade of the 20’s ended with a crash, leaving behind the legacy of its music, style, language, and behavior.

**Ragtime** is an original musical genre which enjoyed its peak popularity between 1897 and 1918. Its main characteristic trait is its syncopated, or "ragged," rhythm. The ragtime composer **Scott Joplin** became famous through the publication in 1899 of the "**Maple Leaf Rag**" and a string of ragtime hits that followed, although he was later forgotten by all but a small, dedicated community of ragtime aficionados until the major ragtime revival in the early 1970s.

**Jazz** is a unique blend of western and African music, with its roots in spirituals, work songs and field holler, and blues. Much of jazz is improvised (because many musicians did not read music), meaning that musicians composed as they played. Until the ‘20s, it was played in the back alleys and basements of African-American communities in the South, especially New Orleans. Then bands like King Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band, with trumpet player Louis Armstrong, spread jazz to the rest of the nation, becoming popular in the late 1920’s. Armstrong’s Jazz began taking a different side into Blues music. Eventually jazz would influence music throughout the western world.

Characteristics of Jazz music include breaks and riffs. A **break** is a very brief syncopated interlude of 2-3 bars between musical phrases. A **riff** is a musical phrase repeated over and over generally behind the main melody.

**Boogie Woogie** is a genre of music consisting of Blues and Ragtime. Trilling the treble notes and rolling the bass notes throughout the piece. This type of music came out of the Kansas City area.

The “new” music was so filled with energy that anyone listening to it could not sit still – but couples could not waltz to it either. New dances were invented, for example, the Charleston. The Cotton Club in New York’s Harlem was the most famous nightclub in the country. **Duke Ellington** opened there in 1927. Marathon dancing became the rage. The 20’s was a decade of motion, and dancing was very much part of the culture.

Music was part of the **movie houses** as well. The “sound track” ranged from a piano player on the sidelines to a full orchestra in the pit. The movie industry started the Academy Awards in 1929. Not to be outdone by the movies, live entertainment became more lavish than ever. Florenz Ziegfeld’s Follies featured top stars, elegant sets, and lavish costumes.

Popular items for kids at the time were metal roller skates, Lincoln Logs, Tinkertoys, Erector Sets, and multicolored Crayolas. **Winnie-the-Pooh** was brought to life in 1926 in a book written...
by Christopher’s father, A.A. Milne. Mickey Mouse was created in 1927 and starred in the first sound cartoon, “Steamboat Willie”.

October 24, 1929, the stock market crashed. By the beginning of 1930’s the economy was slow and The Great Depression set in.

**Music of the 1930’s** was not one sound but many. However the main dominant genre of the 30’s was Jazz and Blues coming out of the late 20’s. The “East Side Style” was dominated by the tenor sax, the romantic ballad, and the 64-bar show tune. Danceable and unchanging, it was meant to keep people on their feet. The “Crooner” was a jazz singer. Romance and smoothness was all in the music. The female jazz singer was known as the “torch Singer”. They sat atop their pianos and sang of broken hearts and love. Scat singing was a Harlem born style of music, using all the “hip” slang words of the alleys and streets. Swing music was popular from 1932-1940. It was danceable, fun and lively.

The 1930’s brought new change not only to music but also to our entire society. Parlor games and board games were popular, and people gathered around radios to listen to sports, music, and Franklin Roosevelt’s Fireside Chats. All this recreation was very inexpensive and kept the family unit together. Radio was for those who could not make it to the live clubs. Books also became very popular, as they were an inexpensive hobby. Between 1929 and 1932 the average household income in America fell by 40%, from $2300 to $1500 per year.

Movies were popular and moviegoers wanted to be entertained, to escape from their everyday troubles for a few hours. Shirley Temple became an overnight sensation with her tap dancing and singing. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers were popular with their tapping and ballroom dancing. One of the top moneymakers of all times, “Gone With The Wind”, debuted in Atlanta, GA in 1939. And Walt Disney produced its first full-length animated movie “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” in 1937.

Many of the nation’s most memorable skyscrapers were complete in the early 30’s – the Empire State Building, the Chrysler Building, and the Rockefeller Center. Monopoly was introduced in 1935.

Due to the economy, clothes had to last a long time so styles did not change every season. The simple, plain clothes replaced all the wild flapper attire of the 20’s. The use of the zipper became wide spread because it was cheaper than using buttons. Men began wearing vests and sweaters and fewer suits. The trend of long dresses in the evening and mid-calf dresses for daywear became popular. Hats were a must for both sexes.

**In 1931 Congress designated “The Star Spangled Banner” as the national anthem.** In 1938 Kate Smith sang Irving Berlin’s “God Bless America” and made it a hit.

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