

= Music of Athens , Georgia =

The music of Athens , Georgia , includes a wide variety of popular music and was an important part of the early evolution of alternative rock and new wave . The city is well known as the home of chart @-@ topping bands like R.E.M. and The B @-@ 52s , C Fresh , and several long @-@ time indie / rock hip @-@ hop groups . Athens hosts the Athens Symphony Orchestra and other music institutions , as well as prominent local music media , such as the college radio station WUOG . Much of the modern Athens music scene relies on students from the large University of Georgia campus in the city . The University sponsors Western classical performances and groups specializing in other styles .

Athens became a center for music in the region during the Civil War and gained further fame in the early twentieth century with the founding of the Morton Theatre , which was a major touring destination for African American performers . The city 's local rock music scene can be traced to the 1950s , with live music at Allen 's Hamburgers in Normaltown . International attention came in the 1970s when the B @-@ 52 's began releasing the first of several best @-@ selling recordings . Athens @-@ based rock bands have performed in a wide array of styles , and the city has never had a characteristic style of rock ; most of the bands have been united only in their quirky and iconoclastic image .

Music author Richie Unterberger describes the town as an unlikely center for musical development , as a " sleepy [place where] it 's difficult to imagine anyone working up a sweat , let alone playing rock music . " The contributions of Athens to rock , country music , and bluegrass have earned it the nickname " the Liverpool of the South " , and the city is known as one of the American birthplaces for both modern alternative rock and new wave music . Athens was home to the first and most famous college music scene in the country , beginning in the 1970s .

= = Music venues and institutions = =

Athens ' local music is based primarily in the small downtown area of the northern part of the town . The nightclub 40 Watt Club is among the most famous indie rock venues on the East Coast ; the club opened on Halloween in 1978 , with a band called Strictly American featuring Curtis Crowe , founder of the club and future member of the band Pylon . Other major music venues in the city include the Georgia Theater , (a converted cinema that hosted both local and touring performers . The Theater burned down in June 2009 , but has been fully remodelled into a state of the art music venue reopening in early August 2011) , the Caledonia Lounge , the Melting Point , and the UGA Performing Arts Center , home to the Ramsey Concert Hall and the Hugh Hodgson Concert Hall . The Morton Theater is a historic venue , a major part of the city 's African American community in the early 20th century ; it claims to be the only theater from that era remaining in operation .

Athens is home to the summer music festival Athfest , AlanFest , the Athens Popfest and the late spring Athens Human Rights Festival and North Georgia Folk Festival . The college radio station WUOG (90 @.@ 5 FM) , the low @-@ power (100 @.@ 7) FM WPPP @-@ LP and the free weekly Flagpole are the city 's most prominent modern music media . Athens has never produced a major local label like many similar indie rock towns ; the most important label of the 1970s and 1980s was DB Records , based out of Atlanta , though jangle pop pioneers Kindercore Records and Wuxtry Records were also Athens @-@ based .

Local music institutions include the Athens Symphony Orchestra , Athens Choral Society (founded in 1971) , Athens Youth Symphony and the Athens Folk Music and Dance Society . The Athens Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1978 as a firmly non @-@ profit , strictly volunteer organization , conducted by Albert Ligotti of the University of Georgia . The first performance came in 1979 ; the Orchestra now has two regular performances , one in the summer and one in the winter , and has also done shows for young people , pops concerts and Christmas concerts . In 1996 , the Athens Symphony moved into its modern home , the Classic Center Theatre in downtown Athens .

The University of Georgia 's Athens campus has long been an important part of local music .

Country Music Hall of Fame songwriter and performer "Whispering" Bill Anderson attended UGA and used to play guitar around campus. The faculty of the Hugh Hodgson School of Music operate the Georgia Brass Quintet and Georgia Woodwind Quintet. Student institutions include the ARCO Chamber Orchestra, Men's and Women's Glee Clubs, several concert choirs, jazz bands, and brass and woodwind ensembles, the Redcoat Marching Band, the University Philharmonia and a Symphony Orchestra. The University of Georgia Glee Clubs launched a pair of cappella offshoot groups. They are now called Noteworthy and Accidentals (female and male vocal groups, respectively), who are regionally known.

= = History = =

The earliest music in North Georgia, including what is now Athens, was that of the Native Americans of the area, principally the Creek and the Cherokee. Athens was officially chartered in 1806, and began growing rapidly near the middle of the 19th century. By the time of the American Civil War in the 1860s, the city was an important part of musical life in Georgia. The war accelerated the development of the city's musical importance, as Athens was largely spared widespread destruction while the larger city of Atlanta took a long time to recover. Major touring acts like the Dixie Family and The Slocums visited Athens during the war; the Dixie Family, a prominent touring group, performed disastrously, according to local newspapers, who said that the highlight of the performance came from four local African American musicians, and the Dixie Family had absconded with the concert's proceeds, which had been promised to the local Ladies Aid Society. In the 1870s, the city was almost half African American, and local black-owned industry flourished; among the residents was Bob Cole, born in 1868 to a musically active family. Cole would later become a pioneer in African American theater, known for works like the 1898 musical *A Trip to Coontown*.

African American industry, churches and other institutions grew rapidly in prominence through the end of the 19th century. The city's African American community was well established by the beginning of the 20th century, when the corner of Lumpkin and Washington Streets became a major center for the city's black culture. This area was known as the Hot Corner, and was owned by a number of black professional businesses, as well as many performance spaces and a renowned opera house in the Morton Building that hosted such national figures as Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington. The Morton Theater was one of the preeminent venues in the city in the early 20th century, and is the only such theater to survive to the present, though it was not in operation for many years, until its reopening in 1993.

= = Origins of the modern scene = = =

In the 1950s, the city's musical life consisted primarily of dances at local venues like the American Legion Hall and the YMCA, where popular bandleaders included most famously Jimmy Dorsey. The Canteen was a spot in Memorial Park in Athens, which became an important performance space after local musician Terry "Mad Dog" Melton and his group began playing there in 1958. The Canteen later hosted local Motown / beach legends The Jesters, who have continued to perform from 1964 to the present.

Later in the 1960s and into the 1970s, locally prominent bands gradually changed from primarily cover bands to more well rounded groups, while the city's musical opportunities grew with the foundation of venues and institutions. This period has been called the Normaltown River of Music, and included long-time local performers like Mad Dog Melton as well as Brian Burke, Davis Causey and Randall Bramblett, many of whom later worked with Gregg Allman and the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band. The most influential local bands to emerge from this period included the Normaltown Flyers, and Dixie Grease. The oldest bar featuring live music in Athens is Allen's Hamburgers where the Normaltown Flyers were the house band for many years. Allen's opened in 1955 on Prince Avenue, closed for a brief time, and has since reopened on Hawthorne Ave. as part of a restoration project. Bars like The Last Resort (currently the Last Resort Grille restaurant) opened

in the 1960s , beginning the local club scene just as some bands were beginning to gain some regional fame for Athens .

= = = Rock = = =

In the late 1970s , the 40 Watt Club became a well @-@ known regional attraction for music fans , and was followed by the Uptown Lounge ; with the local industry 's growth in the 1980s , both the 40 Watt Club and the Uptown Lounge moved to larger spaces , the latter taking over the landmark Georgia Theatre . The early 1980s saw a host of new bands and venues appear , while the city 's musical subculture became more diversified . LSD , a hallucinogenic drug , was widely used in the college music scene in this era . Many members of Athens 's most prominent later bands became locally renowned starting in the 1970s , including The B @-@ 52 's .

Ort 's Oldies , a used record store on Jackson Street , and its proprietor , William Orten Carlton , commonly known as Ort , were among the institutional figures that made the Athens music scene possible . Ort has an excellent memory for rock trivia , which served him well in running the store . Perhaps more importantly , his off @-@ the @-@ wall sense of humor and warmly iconoclastic personality (and his thrift @-@ sale wardrobe) were regularly on display at parties , gigs and musical venues around town .

A final element in creating and sustaining the Athens musical culture was the University of Georgia Lamar Dodd School of Art . The great majority of Athens ' musicians and their fan base were associated with the University 's liberal arts curriculum , and the School of Art , rather than the music department , was the area where the creative and musical alliances that later defined the scene began forming in the 1970s . Michael Stipe of R.E.M. was an art major (although he did not graduate) , and the Art School incubated other major figures such as Curtis Crowe , founding member and drummer for Pylon . The cinematographer for the documentary film Athens GA : Inside / Out was Jim Herbert , an art school professor . Herbert went on to direct music videos for a number of Athens bands , including 14 for R.E.M.

The B @-@ 52 's and R.E.M. became by far the most famous musical products of Athens in the 1980s , when both bands launched a string of hits . Their roots in the city 's local scene go back to the 1970s and early 1980s . The B @-@ 52 's formed after a St. Valentine 's Day party in 1977 . The members had little musical knowledge , but performed new wave music with a cheeky and humorous image and sound . They were known for their campy thrift store fashion , and their unusual and eye @-@ catching music videos for hits like " Rock Lobster " and " Love Shack " . Though the B @-@ 52 's were the first Athens band to achieve national prominence , their popularity was soon eclipsed by R.E.M. . The future members of the band R.E.M. moved to Athens to work and / or attend the University of Georgia , including bassist Mike Mills and former drummer Bill Berry . The group began performing as R.E.M. in 1980 . They became locally prominent , and released a single , " Radio Free Europe " , that was a major college rock hit . Their popularity grew with a series of singles , EPs and albums that made R.E.M. the top underground band in the country , finally breaking into the mainstream with 1987 's " The One I Love " and " It 's the End of the World as We Know It (And I Feel Fine) " . By 1991 's Out of Time album ? which featured vocals by Kate Pierson of The B @-@ 52s ? and its acclaimed follow @-@ up Automatic for the People (named after the motto of Weaver D 's , a local Athens soul @-@ food eatery) , R.E.M. had become one of the world 's biggest rock bands . The band 's style went through many evolutions but originally had a jangle pop sound and harmonies often compared to folk @-@ rock band The Byrds ; singer and songwriter Michael Stipe is known for obscure , allusive lyrics delivered in a monotonous drone . The success of R.E.M. and the B @-@ 52 's brought attention from major labels and music media to Athens , and many local bands received a career boost .

The band Pylon was a long @-@ standing and influential part of the Athens scene , and became critical darlings in the 1980s , but never achieved significant mainstream success . This was partially because they eschewed several record contracts from the major labels due to a lack of trust in their corporate goodwill . Pylon 's dance rock style was not very accessible or commercial , and was accompanied grating , chanting @-@ style vocals , funky guitars and bass @-@ heavy beats .

Other 1980s local bands with nationwide alternative followings included Love Tractor , Oh @-@ OK , with Michael Stipe 's sister Lynda Stipe , vocalist Linda Hopper (later of Magnapop) and future solo performer Matthew Sweet , Dreams So Real . The members of R.E.M. have remained fixtures in Athens as they have also become international stars , helping out local performers like Vic Chesnutt , the Chickasaw Mudd Puppies and Jack Logan . The Elephant 6 Collective , a group of like @-@ minded indie bands , gained limited nationwide exposure starting in the mid @-@ 1990s with the rise of Neutral Milk Hotel , Elf Power and Olivia Tremor Control . The same period saw the Kindercore Records roster find critical acclaim , including the bands Sunshine Fix , Masters of the Hemisphere , Japancakes , Love Tractor , Gresham Disco and Of Montreal . Candy , a DJ store owned by Michael Lachowski of Pylon , opened in 1998 ; the store became an important part of the burgeoning dance music scene that produced Danger Mouse , Phungus and DJ 43 .

= = = Other styles = = =

Athens is near the Blue Ridge Mountains area of North Georgia ; this is an important region in the development of several varieties of folk music , including the Appalachian bluegrass style and the Piedmont blues . North Georgia 's bluegrass heritage can be traced back to the 19th century , when bluegrass was a nascent style throughout Appalachia and North Georgia was home to major fiddling contests , beginning in the 1880s . A 1983 recording expedition by Art and Margo Rosenbaum documented the continued existence of many forms of folk music , including work songs , string bands , African American hymns and spirituals , banjo tunes and unaccompanied ballads ; the collection includes a chapter devoted to Doc and Lucy Barnes of Athens . Athens ' modern contributions to the field of bluegrass include the Packway Handle Band and BlueBilly Grit .

Athens ' local country scene has never been as significant as the profusion of indie rock bands ; however , modern Athens rock takes many elements from the folk , bluegrass and country traditions , including such bands as the Normaltown Flyers . The band Drive @-@ By Truckers , and the Holman Autry Band , have done much in recent years to make country rock a major part of Athens ' musical identity . The rapper Bubba Sparxxx , originally from South Georgia , has also helped diversify Athens ' country heritage , by adding a rural image and elements of country music to his Dirty South style of hip hop music .

Folk artists and singer @-@ songwriters have always flourished in the Athens atmosphere , albeit , as mentioned , not as significantly as Pop and Rock . Some of Athens ' most notable solo singer @-@ songwriter performers are Vic Chesnutt , Nathan Sheppard , Corey Smith , John Berry , Patterson Hood , Ricky Fitzpatrick , along with younger , emerging musicians like Thayer Sarrano and T. Hardy Morris .

Athens also has an Irish band community representing several Irish folk bands (e.g. The Green Flag Band , Repent at Leisure) .

Recently , a Latin music scene has emerged with a diverse array of different musical styles that include bossa nova , samba , salsa music , and tango . Notable groups include Grogus , Incatepec , Athens Tango Project , and Quiabo De Chapeu .

= = = Video game music = = =

Athens was the home of Robert Prince (Bobby Prince ? a long time Athens musician) when he wrote the music and created the sound effects for early computer and video games , including the Commander Keen series , Wolfenstein 3D and Doom .

= = = Post @-@ 2000 = = =

Recently , Athens has produced some notable rock bands , including Dead Confederate and Lera Lynn .