

The New Blue Music

Changes in Rhythm & Blues, 1950-1999

RICHARD J. RIPANI

Rhythm & blues emerged from the African American community in the late 1940s to become the driving force in American popular music over the next half-century. Although sometimes called "doo-wop," "soul," "funk," "urban contemporary," or "hip-hop," R&B is actually an umbrella category that includes all of these styles and genres. It is in fact a modern-day incarnation of a musical tradition that stretches back to nineteenth-century America, and even further to African beginnings.

The New Blue Music: Changes in Rhythm & Blues, 1950-1999 traces the development of R&B from 1950 to 1999 by closely analyzing the top twenty-five songs of each decade. The music of artists as wide-ranging as Louis Jordan; John Lee Hooker; Ray Charles; James Brown; Earth, Wind & Fire; Michael Jackson; Public Enemy; Mariah Carey; and Usher takes center stage as the author illustrates how R&B has not only retained its traditional core style but has also experienced a "re-Africanization" over time.

By investigating musical elements of form, style, and content in R&B—and offering numerous musical examples—the book shows the connection between R&B and other forms of American popular and religious music, such as spirituals, ragtime, blues, jazz, country, gospel, and rock 'n' roll. With this evidence in hand, the author hypothesizes the existence of an even larger musical "super-genre" which he labels "The New Blue Music."

Richard J. Ripani is a faculty member at Hume-Fogg Academic High School in Nashville, Tennessee. He is also a professional musician and songwriter in Nashville, performing with artists such as Ronnie Milsap, Ronnie McDowell, the Kentucky Headhunters, and Lee Greenwood. He has worked on numerous national television programs and earned gold and platinum records.

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