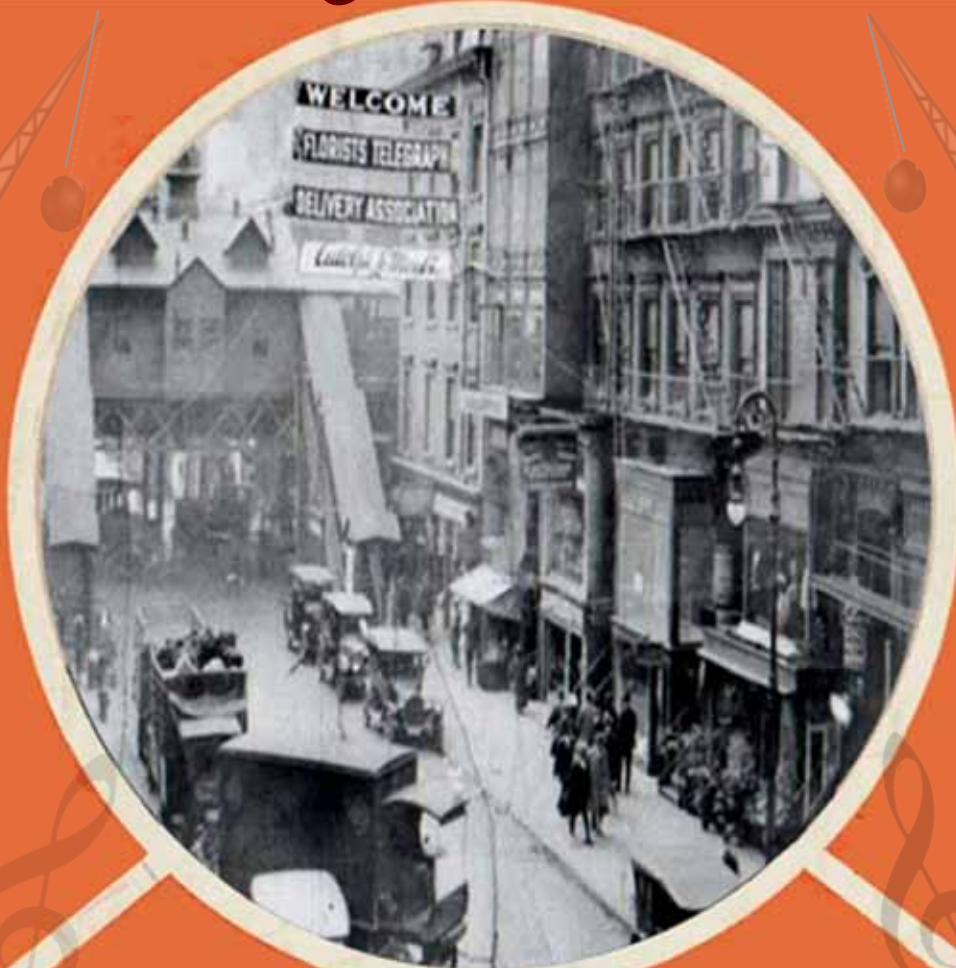


Teaching Tin Pan Alley



Saving and Celebrating **A SIDE STREET OF NEW YORK**

A manual and online resource for teachers and families designed to inform, educate, and inspire action on preserving this important site

Compiled by Lesley Doyel, educator & Instructor of PS 11 class
called *Hands On History: Preserving the Past Present*.

HOH is an Education Initiative of the **Victorian Society New York**, and has been created in collaboration with the **Save Tin Pan Alley Alliance** especially for

SAVE TIN PAN ALLEY DAY
Sunday, October 22nd, 2017 at 2 PM
on West 28th Street between Broadway and 6th Avenue.
Online version at: **[www.Save Tin Pan Alley.org](http://www.SaveTinPanAlley.org)**

“Tin Pan Alley . . . where the business of the American popular song flourished during the first decades of the 20th century.”

(From commemorative bronze plaque embedded into the sidewalk near the corner of West 28th Street and Broadway)



Plaque commemorating Tin Pan Alley's history

Brief Historical Background:

Teaching Tin Pan Alley: Saving a Side Street of New York offers an opportunity for kids to learn about a very special street in Manhattan; West 28th Street between Broadway and Sixth Avenue. Though the street's 19th century row houses, once residential, are not architecturally distinctive, they were once home to a revolution in music that still resonates today. This commercial side street, now full of retail shops, was actually the birthplace of the American popular song and modern music industry. While often thought to be an imaginary place, Tin Pan Alley was very real. In fact, from the 1890s to the 1920s, this one city block was considered the popular music center of the world. Here, music publishing houses cultivated the talents of many composers and musicians, producing an abundance of popular songs, many of which are still known today. Songs like *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*, *The Sidewalks of New York*, *A Bicycle Built for Two (Daisy Bell)*, *Alexander's Ragtime Band*, and so many more.

It's amazing to realize that much of Tin Pan Alley's music became known throughout the United States and around the world before music was widely recorded or heard over radio waves. Originally, songs were popularized through sheet music, containing lyrics and musical scores sold between artfully designed covers. Sheet music was available to and could be performed by both professional musicians, and by regular folks at home. Thanks to mass production, after the Civil War thousands of pianos became standard features in average American households. Playing the new popular music in the family parlor became a focus for social gatherings, hence the term "parlor songs." As the number of people learning to play the piano rose, so did the demand for new songs. To meet this demand, more and more music publishing houses opened for business, more and more songs were composed, and more and more sheet music was produced. And many of these publishing houses opened on West 28th Street.

During the last fifteen years of the 19th century, New York City emerged as the entertainment capital of the world. The city also became the center of popular music publishing. Additionally, introduction of stricter copyright laws led to the initial centralization of music publishing, as songwriters, composers, and lyricists sought mutually beneficial relationships, fortified by the knowledge that their publishing rights were protected. Because, in those days, Tin Pan Alley (which had become epicenter of this new industry) was next to the city's major theatre district, publishers could both exploit its nearby wealth of performing and song writing talent, and, at the same time, fulfill the huge theatrical demand for new musical material.

In fact, it's been suggested that constant noise produced by the pounding of piano keys and din of many voices plugging the newest future "hit" songs - all at the same time - may have given rise to the name, "Tin Pan Alley."

In short, Tin Pan Alley was a musical melting pot, representing an era of song writing when many musical ideas, styles, and traditions fused to form American Popular Music. In turn, the music's popularity forged new marketing practices and brought commercialism to an unprecedented sophistication for the modern age.



*Give my regards to Broadway
Remember me to Herald Square
Tell all the gang at Forty-Second Street
That I will soon be there*

Ironically, George M. Cohan's "Give my regards to Broadway," another Tin Pan Alley favorite, anticipates the progressive northward movement of the theater district and music publishing to Times Square, which, along with the growing availability of recorded music and radio, heralded the eventual decline of Tin Pan Alley as a major force in the music industry. However, many of the Alley's popular songs have stood the test of time, and continue to please and inspire generations of musicians and listeners.

Miraculously, many of the original buildings on West 28th Street survive, but as historian and music journalist David Freeland warns, "Tin Pan Alley is a place in abeyance, waiting for the next, and possibly final phase of its history to begin."¹

Let's make sure that this special place does survive; as evidence of a remarkable past, and as an important reminder that the sparks of innovation and creativity can be ignited anywhere - even on a side street in New York.

¹ Freeland, David, *Atomats, Taxi Dances, and Vaudeville: Excavating Manhattan's Lost Places & Leisure*, New York University Press, New York & London, 2009, page 105.



Tin Pan Alley then and now

Teaching Tin Pan Alley: Saving and Celebrating a Side Street in New York

See Resource list (page 4) for important Landmark & preservation advocacy groups.

The Project: The former Tin Pan Alley buildings on West 28th Street are not protected by Landmarks Law, and could be demolished and forgotten. In addition to learning about a specific location through time, this is an opportunity for young people to experience becoming invested with a historic site and surrounding area. It is also an opportunity to learn about the process involved in Landmark designations, and vital role individuals can play in assigning value to and preserving historic structures and districts within and beyond their own communities.

Field Trip: Collection and organization of data by recording information on site, increase observation skills by sketching buildings on site, develop awareness of cultural and architectural history of Tin Pan Alley and surrounding area, to be used in joining the preservation efforts of the Save Tin Pan Alley Alliance. If a visit to the actual site of Tin Pan Alley on West 28th Street is not possible, we suggest exploring another site or street nearby – look at what has or hasn't changed, how the use of buildings has changed, and learn about what some of the buildings may have been used for in the past – were they commercial, residential, public buildings? Collect and compile information, both learned and observed, and describe why the buildings of Tin Pan Alley are worthy of Landmark designation.

Suggested Class Projects:

Entire class project:

As a class, read and sign the Save Tin Pan Alley Petition. Write a letter to the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission, supporting designation of Tin Pan Alley as an official New York City Historic District. **Sign the petition** (<http://www.thepetitionsite.com/380/943/526/landmark-tin-pan-alley>)

Art: Have children design/illustrate original sheet music covers for Tin Pan Alley songs that have been introduced.

Music: Write new lyric for the melodies, updating activities with friends, games they play and sports events they participate and/or attend in their schools, local places that are important, etc. Explore the different tempos used in sentimental ballads, catchy songs, and the lively rhythms of Ragtime.

Social Studies: Learn about Tin Pan Alley composers. In doing so, it is possible to see how the experiences of many individuals and cultures merged and combined to create what we now know as popular music.

Science and Technology: Tin Pan Alley songs were performed in public venues, or played using sheet music in the home on the family piano before there were recordings and record players called phonograph cylinders (ca. 1877), then the Victrola (ca. 1901) and before there was a modern invention called Radio, which came into household use in the 1920s. How do we listen to music now? How is it the same, and how is it different.

Language Arts: Explore lyrics to Tin Pan Alley songs and compare and contrast with some familiar lyrics that the children know today. Note similarities and differences in word use and meaning, and the way in which the lyricist uses words to create songs that are either humorous or sentimental.

Recommended Resources for Teaching Tin Pan Alley:

Tin Pan Alley is the cradle of the music industry in the United States. Here, American popular music as we know it was first manufactured and promoted. This one block of 28th Street offers a glimpse into what has become a worldwide cultural force – popular music – at its specific place of creation. As an enclave of 19th-century structures, it is also largely intact as architecture. (from the Save TPA website)

The 29th Street Neighborhood Association founded both the **Save Tin Pan Alley** organization and website to inform, educate, and inspire action on preserving this important site. To get involved, participate in the discussion or for more information, email the 29th Street Neighborhood Association at: adm@29streetassociation.org.

www.savetimpanalley.org

Highly recommended: David Freeland's book: *Automats, Taxi Dancers & Vaudeville, Excavating Manhattan's Lost Places & Leisure*, New York University Press, 2009.

A wonderful Podcast and interview with NYC historian, Jim Mackin about Tin Pan Alley, produced by Tablet Magazine, located on West 28th St.

<https://www.acast.com/voxtablet/block-party>

Victorian Society NY website - Hands On History Section
<http://vicsocny.org/education>

More TPA history and Midi files:

The Parlor Songs Academy, founded as a part of the *Open Educational Resources (OER)*

parlorsongs.com/insearch/timpanalley/timpanalley.php

Diversi-Tune – also a wonderful source for MIDI files of TPA popular songs: www.divtune.com (scroll down to "Gay Nineties Songs")

Images of period Sheet Music – links:

library.sc.edu/digital/collections/timpanalley.html

Many examples of sheet music can also be found by searching Google for "Sheet Music in the Public Domain"

Secrets of New York - Tin Pan Alley - Brill Building - Carole King can be viewed on YouTube at: <https://youtu.be/cide5mNOYBE>

Crosswords and Word Searches

Make your own printable crossword puzzles and word searches to reinforce Tin Pan Alley related by using ABCYA online for free:

www.abcya.com/make_a_word_search.htm and www.abcya.com/crossword_puzzle_maker.htm

More Preservation Information:

To learn about the *New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission*:

www1.nyc.gov/site/lpc/about/contact-us.page

Important Preservation Advocacy Organizations:

Historic Districts Council: hdc.org

The Neighborhood Preservation Center:

www.neighborhoodpreservationcenter.org

Students may be surprised that they already know at least two songs from Tin Pan Alley - complete lyrics to both are below.

The Sidewalks of New York, lyrics by James W. Blake and music by Charles E. Lawlor (1894), and *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*, music by Jack Norworth and lyrics by Albert Von Tilzer (1908).

To hear vocal versions of the songs below: Wikipedia *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*, which includes a sound clip of original 1908 vocal performance: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Take_Me_Out_to_the_Ball_Game

YouTube features numerous renditions of 'The sidewalks of New York', a particularly lovely version is performed by Robert Sean Leonard, from "New York: A Documentary Film", Ep 3, 'Sunshine and Shadow'



Lyrics of two favorite Tin Pan Alley Songs:

The Sidewalks of New York (1894)

Down in front of Casey's old brown wooden stoop
On a summer's evening we formed a merry group
Boys and girls together we would sing and waltz
While Jay played the organ on the sidewalks of New York

East Side, West Side, all around the town
The tots sang "ring-a-rosie," "London Bridge is falling down"
Boys and girls together, me and Mamie O'Rourke
Tripped the light fantastic on the sidewalks of New York

That's where Johnny Casey, little Jimmy Crowe
Jakey Krause, the baker, who always had the dough
Pretty Nellie Shannon with a dude as light as cork
She first picked up the waltz step on the sidewalks of New York

Things have changed since those times, some are up in "G"
Others they are wand'ers but they all feel just like me
They'd part with all they've got, could they once more walk
With their best girl and have a twirl on the sidewalks of New York

Take Me Out to the Ball Game (1908):

Katie Casey was baseball mad,
Had the fever and had it bad.
Just to root for the home town crew,
Ev'ry sou1 Katie blew.
On a Saturday her young beau
Called to see if she'd like to go
To see a show, but Miss Kate said "No,
I'll tell you what you can do:"

Chorus

Take me out to the ball game,
Take me out with the crowd;
Buy me some peanuts and Cracker Jack,
I don't care if I never get back.
Let me root, root, root for the home team,
If they don't win, it's a shame.
For it's one, two, three strikes, you're out,
At the old ball game.

Katie Casey saw all the games,
Knew the players by their first names.
Told the umpire he was wrong,
All along,
Good and strong.
When the score was just two to two,
Katie Casey knew what to do,
Just to cheer up the boys she knew,
She made the gang sing this song:

[repeat chorus]