



Minstrel Shows

Part of America's Musical History

The Industrial Revolution

- ❖ Factories were being built in the United States
- ❖ People moved from rural areas to the cities for industry jobs
- ❖ People had more time and money and could attend shows

Minstrel Show

- ❖ At this point in history, Opera becomes more expensive and not available to the middle class
- ❖ The average person could afford to go to a Minstrel Show

Minstrel Show

- ❖ The Minstrel Show developed during the 1840's, peaked after the Civil War and remained popular unto the early 1900's
- ❖ A product of it's time, it was the only form of entertainment born out of blind bigotry

Minstrel Shows

- ❖ In these shows, men would blacken their faces with burnt cork to make fun of African American slaves
- ❖ They would sing songs and perform skits that made slavery look fun

Minstrel Show

The Minstrel Show had everyone in the show sit on stage in a semi-circle with the announcer seated in the middle

Each person would do their act and sit back down

Here you see the actors in blackface and whiteface



Music of the Minstrels

- ❖ Minstrel Shows influenced popular music and much of the music used in Minstrel Shows became famous
- ❖ Many of these songs are considered folk songs like
 - ❖ “Polly Wolly Doodle,” “Camp Town Races” and “O Susanna”

After the Civil War

- ❖ Even though it was against the law for African Americans to perform on the same stage with White Americans in many states, some companies secretly included African Americans in their group
- ❖ Although they were making fun of themselves these black actors had only one outlet for their talent

Parts of the Show

- ❖ Minstrel Line - full ensemble sat in a semi-circle
- ❖ The Olio - after an intermission songs and variety acts were performed
- ❖ Afterpiece - Usually a one act Musical

Into the 20th Century

- ❖ These shows remained popular into the early 1900's