



Arts and Entertainment in Ohio

Learn about the diverse artistic endeavors of Ohio painters, sculptors, musicians and entertainers and the influence of Ohioans on the growth of American popular culture.

Fine Arts

Prehistoric inhabitants of North America—Paleoindians (13,000-7000 B.C.), Archaic (8000-500 BC), Adena (800 BC-AD 100), Hopewell (100 BC-AD500), Late Woodland/Intrusive Mound (AD 600-1000), and Late Prehistoric/Fort Ancient (AD 900-1650) cultures—were Ohio's first artists. They created ornaments, effigies, pipes, pottery, and other decorative items using raw materials native to the state, such as clay, flint, and animal teeth, bone, and claws. The Hopewell people also acquired copper, seashells, obsidian, and mica from trade with distant places. Some objects made from these "exotic" materials likely were status symbols or served ceremonial or religious functions.

In the 19th century, Cincinnati led Ohio in the development of the visual arts. Itinerant portrait painters were the first professional artists. As the settlement grew more prosperous, the number of artists increased. The Western Art Union, the purpose of which was to encourage teaching and exhibition of art, was established there in 1847. Not long after, an art school for women was established, which later became the McMicken School of Design, then the Art Academy of Cincinnati. In 1881, the Cincinnati Art Museum was founded, becoming one of the first art museums west of the Allegheny Mountains.

Artists associated with Cincinnati include painters James H. Beard (1811-1893), Miner K. Kellogg (1814-1889), Robert S. Duncanson (1821-1871), Charles T. Webber (1825-1911), Henry Farny (1847-1916), Frank Duveneck (1848-1919), and Robert Henri (1865-1929). Sculptors Hiram Powers (1805-1873) and John Quincy Adams Ward (1830-1910) also had ties to the Queen City. Cincinnati gained particular renown for its art pottery, including the work of Mary Louise McLaughlin (1847-1939), Maria Longworth Nichols (1849-1932), and Laura Fry (1857-1943). Fry was the daughter of prominent Cincinnati woodcarver Henry Fry (1807-1895).

The turn of the 20th century witnessed a growth of interest in the arts. In the late 1870s, art schools were established in Cleveland (Western Reserve School of Design for Women) and Columbus (Columbus Art School). Toledo incorporated its art museum in 1909 and Cleveland followed in 1913.

Possibly the most famous 20th century Ohio artist was George Bellows of Columbus. Using the themes of Robert Henri as a jumping off point, Bellows help contribute to the Ashcan School of painting with his realistic depictions that contrasted with the impressionistic paintings that had dominated the art world in the years preceding. Bellows is best-known for his painting "Stagat Sharkey's," which depicts boxers facing off in a smoky arena.

Other artists of note from Ohio include Sala Bosworth (1805-1890) and Lily Martin Spencer (1822-1902) of Marietta; Archibald Willard (1836-1918) of Wellington; Howard Chandler



Christy (1873-1952) of Morgan County; Ernest Blumenschein (1874-1960) of Dayton; Elijah Pierce (1892-1984), Charles Burchfield (1893-1967) and Emerson Burkhart (1905-1969) of Columbus; Viktor Schreckengost (b. 1906) of Sebring; and Maya Lin (b. 1960) of Athens.

Music

Making music and listening to musical performances have been popular activities in Ohio since the time of its settlement. As with fine arts, Cincinnati was an early leader in the development of music groups and institutions. German immigrants, who were particularly numerous in Cincinnati, brought with them musical traditions that encouraged the establishment of bands, choral groups, and singing festivals in the 1840s. The city earned the nickname the "Athens of the West" because of its famous May Festival of Music, which started in 1873. The Cincinnati Music Hall was built specifically for the occasion, and in 1895, it became the home of the Cincinnati Symphony—the first professional orchestra in Ohio.

In Cleveland, Adella Prentice Hughes played an important role in raising interest in music and attracting nationally-known performers. Hughes became the first leader of the Cleveland Orchestra when it was founded in 1918. Almost four decades later, the city was on the cutting edge of a new style of music when, in the early 1950s, a Cleveland record store owner and disk jockey named Alan Freed helped to popularize rhythm and blues music by promoting it as "Rock and Roll." Cleveland's distinction of being the first city to embrace rock music led to the decision to build the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum there; the museum opened in 1995.

The state song, "Beautiful Ohio," by Mary Earl and Ballard McDonald, was adopted in 1969. New lyrics by Wilbert McBride were adopted in 1989. Ohio also has a state rock song, "Hang on Sloopy," which was adopted in 1985. It was composed by Rick Derringer of Celina and recorded by Dayton rock band the McCoys in 1965.

Several successful 20th century musicians hail from Ohio. New wave band Devo formed in Akron, Ohio, in 1972, led by two Kent State University art students. Their song "Whip It" became a staple on the newly-formed MTV network, although the song never cracked the top 10 on the Billboard charts. Also from Akron, Chrissie Hind (b. 1951) is the lead singer and songwriter for the Pretenders. Singer/songwriter Tracy Chapman (b. 1964) was raised in a working class neighborhood in Cleveland, Ohio. The debut album of Macy Gray (b. 1970) of Canton yielded two top-10 Billboard hits. Grammy award-winning soprano Kathleen Battle (b. 1948) of Portsmouth studied at the College Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati before launching a successful professional career.

Entertainment and Leisure Activities

Early Ohio settlers were often too busy building homes, clearing land, farming, or housekeeping to waste time on frivolous pursuits. They did, however, combine work and play in the form of barn or house raisings, quilting bees, and corn huskings. Extended families, neighbors, and friends gathered to socialize while engaged in productive activity. At the end of the day the hosts might offer a meal, dancing, or a musical performance. Children, when they had completed their chores, played with homemade toys. Visiting and entertaining



guests were important diversions, but also necessary in areas where there were few hotels or restaurants.

As the state developed, Ohioans had more time for fun and leisure. They celebrated holidays, birthdays, engagements, weddings, anniversaries, and other observances. County and state fairs became popular. Manufacturers produced a wide range of toys, games, and equipment for leisure activities. Canals and railroads made travel convenient and created a market for resorts and tourist attractions such as museums, and numerous city and state parks and recreation areas were created.

Beginning in the middle of the 18th century, Ohioans also had more money to spend on entertainments such as the theater. The state claims some important dramatic artists, most notably Charles Gayler, originally from Dayton, whose play *The Buckeye Gold Hunters* (1849) was a smash hit, running for an unprecedented ten weeks at the National Theater in Cincinnati.

Most popular in the mid-19th century, however, were the showboats on the Ohio River in Cincinnati, which presented minstrel shows, farces, and comedies. Minstrel shows, in which white performers wearing blackface makeup performed skits and songs, were popularized by Daniel Decatur Emmett of Mt. Vernon, Ohio. Emmett also composed "Dixie," the famous Southern anthem.

The number of theaters built in Ohio in the 19th century demonstrates a growing demand for theatrical entertainment. Again Cincinnati led the way—by 1860 there were three theaters and two music halls, and by 1872 the city had two more theaters. Columbus built its first theater, Neil's Hall, in 1847, and Cleveland nearly rivaled Cincinnati for a short time, with three theaters all built in the late 1840s.

20th century entertainers born in Ohio include Melina Kanakaredes (b. 1967) of Akron; Clark Gable (1901-1960) of Cadiz; Roy Rogers (1911-1998) and Doris Day (b. 1924) of Cincinnati; Dorothy Dandridge (1922-1965), Ruby Dee (b. 1923), Paul Newman (b. 1925), Arsenio Hall (b.1956), Drew Carey (b. 1958), and Halle Berry (b. 1968) of Cleveland; Martin Sheen (b. 1940) of Dayton; Sarah Jessica Parker (b. 1965) of Nelsonville; Lillian Gish (1893-1993) of Springfield; Dean Martin (1917-1995) of Steubenville; and Jamie Farr (b. 1934) and Katie Holmes (b. 1978) of Toledo.

In the closing decades of 19th century, traveling shows such as circuses and acting companies were well-attended. Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show, which began in 1883, was one of the most successful. It featured Ohio native Annie Oakley, who amazed crowds with her impressively accurate sharp shooting.

Beginning in the 1880s, the growth of public transportation helped to fuel the rise of amusement parks. Euclid Beach Park and Luna Park in Cleveland, Indianola and Olentangy Parks in Columbus, Idora Park in Youngstown, Walbridge Park in Toledo, Meyer's Lake in Canton, and Coney Island in Cincinnati drew large numbers of visitors. Modeled on similar attractions in Europe, the parks offered rides, games, swimming, dancing, performances,



electric lights, and food. Few of these early parks remain open, but Ohioans still enjoy amusement parks; Cincinnati's King's Island, which opened in the early 1970s, is today a major tourist attraction. Cedar Point in Sandusky, King's Island's main competitor, got its start as a resort in 1870. Another popular Lake Erie vacation spot, Lakeside, was established in 1873 as a Christian Methodist summer resort and camp meeting grounds. It became known as the "Chautauqua of the Great Lakes" in the 1880s, when music, art, and secular education were offered in addition to religious study.

Paralleling the growth of amusement parks was the development of zoos. German immigrants in Cincinnati established a zoological garden in 1875. Cleveland's Wade Park, a forerunner to Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, opened in 1882 on land donated to the city by wealthy industrialist Jephtha Wade. Toledo's zoo was launched in 1900. The Columbus Zoo, the second to be established in the city, was founded in 1937. In addition to exhibits of native and exotic animals, most zoos also presented musical concerts.

Ohioans joined clubs and organizations of all varieties: charitable, literary, artistic, athletic, patriotic, political, social, educational, recreational, historical and more. Women's clubs were especially popular, partly because in the early 20th century, women who did not work outside the home were interested in activities to keep themselves busy. Children participated in groups such as 4-H, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Camp Fire.

Technological innovations also transformed the ways in which Ohioans spent their free hours. Although Ohio's citizens still enjoy some of the pastimes that were historically popular, the phonograph (1870s), automobile (1890s), nickelodeon (1900s), moving pictures (1910s), radio (1920s), television (1940s), personal computers (1980s), and, most recently the World Wide Web (1990s), greatly expanded leisure-time options.

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