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Music is the soundtrack to life and anywhere you go in Tucson, you will hear melodies that define our community; whether it’s a bluetooth speaker by the pool, the happy morning songs of cardinals, mournful midday coos of doves, or nightly yips of coyotes communicating across the desert. But, the sounds and styles of our local music continue to change. When John Proctor managed the Pioneer Hotel, popular music was much different than it is today. Back then, there was no TV or internet, so they would enjoy tunes on the radio with shows all the way from the Grand Ole Opry in Tennessee, recorded on phonographs or records in their homes, or even played live in places like the Pioneer Hotel. There was a music choice for every taste, from big band sounds like swing and jazz to country twang from western swing or bluegrass sounds, to Spanish language *música* like boleros, trios, or rancheras.

Some people liked to hear big band music. Big band music could be swing, jazz, boogie woogie, or even crooners like Bing Crosby. Some popular types of big band music in Tucson during John Proctor’s time were played at the Blue Moon Ballroom. There you might
hear Johnnie Barringer and his orchestra playing a cover of “Chattanooga Choo Choo”, and dance the night away.

If you prefer country and western music, you could visit John Proctor at the Pioneer Hotel for a chat then finish off the night at the KVOA Barn Dance. There, you might hear some popular music by the area’s best western swing and bluegrass bands including the local group, Larry and the Sunset Riders. On the radio, you could hear the Tucson region’s own singing cowboy, Rex Allen, singing “Arizona Waltz” or Apache County's Billie Maxwell, the first woman to record a country song, singing “Cowboy’s Wife”.

There was also popular music in Spanish. Because Tucson is so close to Mexico, Spanish language music is a big part of our popular culture. For example, Tucsonan Lalo Guerrero, made people dance in the 1930s and 40s with his hit, “El Aguador”. If you wanted live music, you could also get in line at the Blue Moon Ballroom to hear the famous Pedro Infante sing rancheras backed by Trio Janitzio. He played a one one-night show there on August 9th, 1946.

Music styles may have changed since John Proctor’s time, but the passion for music remains strong.
Connecting to Tucson’s Past Through Music

Whether you like big band, country, or Spanish language music, the diverse sounds of life in the Tucson region continue to unite us as a community. While the Pioneer Hotel and Blue Moon Ballroom may no longer play music, the melodies and memories from those places, and the people who played there, stay in our hearts, connect us to our past and will continue to inspire us for many years to come.

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