



Music and Musicians in Berks County

Although most people have heard of Berks County's most famous musician [Taylor Swift](#), they may not have heard of musicians who came before Taylor. A wonderful resource is Cedric N. Elmer's book *Musical Remembrances : Profiles of Creative Berks Countians Copiously Illustrated* which is available at many [Berks County public libraries](#).

Berks County has one of the oldest community bands in the country – the [Ringgold Band](#) – which was formed in 1852 and is still active.

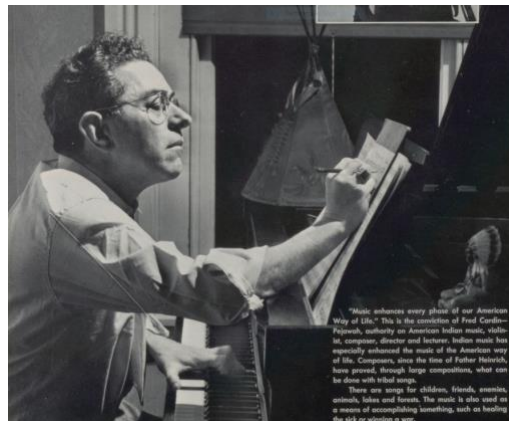
Berks County has produced composers such as [Monroe A. Althouse](#) (1853-1924) who was known for his marches such as the [C.K.W. March](#) that honored Calvin Kline Whitner of Whitner's Department Store in Reading.



In the early 1900s a Berks Countian [Paul L. Specht](#) was described as the “Angel of Tin Pan Alley” and was a popular composer and band leader.



Also in the early 1900s [William Frederick Cardin](#), (1895- 1960) "hailed as the most accomplished Native American violinist of his time" was a native of the [Quapaw Nation](#) in Oklahoma and a long-time resident of Berks County, Pennsylvania. Cardin (also known as Pejawah) had a long career in Berks County music circles as a lecturer, director of the Ringgold Band, the Reading High School music program, and as a performer in the Reading Symphony Orchestra. Below is an image of Cardin from the [1958 Whitehall PA yearbook](#).



Berks County has also produced two renowned opera singers –

[Paul Shearer Althouse](#) from Reading (1889-1954) who sang with the Metropolitan Opera in New York for thirty years.

[Kenneth Riegel](#) from Womelsdorf (1938-2023) who performed around the world.

In the mid-20th century Berks Countians [Dolly Dimples and Shorty Long](#) were well-known for country-western music as performers with their group the Sante Fe Rangers as well as producers of shows at their Ontelaunee Park in New Tripoli, Lehigh County. Their real names were Gladys J. Ulrich of Mohnton and Emidio Vagnoni of Reading. Another well-know country-western musician with Berks County ties is [Pat Garrett](#) whose [Bethel, PA venue](#) offers performances.

Today Berks County offers many opportunities for people to enjoy music including

[Berks Fiddle Fest](#)

[Berks Opera Company](#)

[Boscov's Berks County Jazz Fest](#)

[The Reading Buccaneers](#)

[The Reading Pops Orchestra](#)

[The Reading Symphony Orchestra](#)

[The Ringgold Band](#)

and at multiple venues including the [Miller Center for the Arts](#), the [Santander Arena and Performing Arts Center](#), and the [WCR Center for the Arts](#).