Music of the Great Depression

"Brother, Can You Spare a Dime," lyrics by Yip Harburg, music by Jay Gorney (1931)

This downbeat song reflects the plight of the thousands of unemployed World War I veterans, who camped out in Washington, D.C. in the summer of 1932 to lobby for payment of the 'bonus' Congress had pledged they would get in 1945.

They used to tell me I was building a dream, and so I followed the mob,
When there was earth to plow, or guns to bear, I was always there right on the job.
They used to tell me I was building a dream, with peace and glory ahead,
Why should I be standing in line, just waiting for bread?
Once I built a railroad, I made it run, made it race against time.
Once I built a railroad; now it's done. Brother, can you spare a dime?
Once I built a tower, up to the sun, brick, and rivet, and lime;
Once I built a tower, now it's done. Brother, can you spare a dime?
Once in khaki suits, gee we looked swell,
Full of that Yankee Doodly Dum,
Half a million boots went slogging through Hell,
And I was the kid with the drum!
Say, don't you remember, they called me Al; it was Al all the time.
Why don't you remember, I'm your pal? Buddy, can you spare a dime?
Once in khaki suits, gee we looked swell,
Full of that Yankee Doodly Dum,
Half a million boots went slogging through Hell,
And I was the kid with the drum!
Say, don't you remember, they called me Al; it was Al all the time.
Say, don't you remember, I'm your pal? Buddy, can you spare a dime?

Bing Crosby sings it on Youtube with Dorthea Lang Pictures:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZHEkU__Ijw

"Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries," lyrics by Lew Brown, music by Ray Henderson (1931)

People are queer, they're always crowing, scrambling and rushing about;
Why don't they stop someday, address themselves this way?
Why are we here? Where are we going? It's time that we found out.
We're not here to stay; we're on a short holiday.
Life is just a bowl of cherries.
Don't take it serious; it's too mysterious.
You work, you save, you worry so,
But you can't take your dough when you go, go, go.
So keep repeating it's the berries,
The strongest oak must fall,

The sweet things in life, to you were just loaned
So how can you lose what you've never owned?
Life is just a bowl of cherries,
So live and laugh at it all.
Life is just a bowl of cherries.
Don't take it serious; it's too mysterious.
At eight each morning I have got a date,
To take my plunge 'round the Empire State.
You'll admit it's not the berries,
In a building that's so tall;
There's a guy in the show, the girls love to kiss;
Get thousands a week just for crooning like this:
Life is just a bowl of . . . aw, nuts!
So live and laugh at it all!

Sung by Rudy Valley on Youtube:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mc6RS9e3Dhw

"We're in the Money," lyrics by Al Dubin, music by Harry Warren (from the film *Gold Diggers of 1933*, 1933)

We're in the money, we're in the money;
We've got a lot of what it takes to get along!
We're in the money, that sky is sunny,
Old Man Depression you are through, you done us wrong.
We never see a headline about breadlines today.
And when we see the landlord we can look that guy right in the eye
We're in the money, come on, my honey,
Let's lend it, spend it, send it rolling along!
Oh, yes we're in the money, you bet we're in the money,
We've got a lot of what it takes to get along!
Let's go we're in the money, Look up the skies are sunny,
Old Man Depression you are through, you done us wrong.
We never see a headline about breadlines today.
And when we see the landlord we can look that guy right in the eye
We're in the money, come on, my honey,
Let's lend it, spend it, send it rolling along!

Original song from the musical-movie found here:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJOjTNuuEVw

“It Don’t Mean a Thing if it Ain’t got that Swing” by Duke Ellington, 1932

Wat-dat-to,
Wat-dat-to,
Wat-dat-to,
Wat-dat-to, dat dat do, da da do.
It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing,
It don't mean a thing, all you've got to do is sing,

It makes no difference if it's sweet or hot,
Just keep that rhythm, give it everything you've got!
It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing!
Wa da da do,
Wa da da do, da doh,
Whup de dittle ittle up,
Dat dat dat doh!
It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing!

1943 Recording with Duke Ellington on YouTube:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDQpZT3GhDg

“Dust Bowl Blues”, Woody Guthrie

I just blowed in, and I got them dust bowl blues,
I just blowed in, and I got them dust bowl blues,
I just blowed in, and I'll blow back out again.
I guess you've heard about ev'ry kind of blues,
I guess you've heard about ev'ry kind of blues,
But when the dust gets high, you can't even see the sky.
I've seen the dust so black that I couldn't see a thing,
I've seen the dust so black that I couldn't see a thing,
And the wind so cold, boy, it nearly cut your water off.
I seen the wind so high that it blowed my fences down,
I've seen the wind so high that it blowed my fences down,
Buried my tractor six feet underground.
Well, it turned my farm into a pile of sand,
Yes, it turned my farm into a pile of sand,
I had to hit that road with a bottle in my hand.
I spent ten years down in that old dust bowl,
I spent ten years down in that old dust bowl,
When you get that dust pneumony, boy, it's time to go.
I had a gal, and she was young and sweet,
I had a gal, and she was young and sweet,
But a dust storm buried her sixteen hundred feet.
She was a good gal, long, tall and stout,
Yes, she was a good gal, long, tall and stout,
I had to get a steam shovel just to dig my darlin' out.
These dusty blues are the dustiest ones I know,
These dusty blues are the dustiest ones I know,
Buried head over heels in the black old dust,
I had to pack up and go.
An' I just blowed in, an' I'll soon blow out again.

Recorded performance from Woody Guthrie in 1940:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2CLqYPUHfI

“This Land is Your Land, This Land is My Land,” Woody Guthrie

This land is your land This land is my land
From California to the New York island;
From the red wood forest to the Gulf Stream waters
This land was made for you and Me.

As I was walking that ribbon of highway,
I saw above me that endless skyway:
I saw below me that golden valley:
This land was made for you and me.

I've roamed and rambled and I followed my footsteps
To the sparkling sands of her diamond deserts;
And all around me a voice was sounding:
This land was made for you and me.

When the sun came shining, and I was strolling,
And the wheat fields waving and the dust clouds rolling,
As the fog was lifting a voice was chanting:
This land was made for you and me.

As I went walking I saw a sign there
And on the sign it said "No Trespassing."
But on the other side it didn't say nothing,
That side was made for you and me.

In the shadow of the steeple I saw my people,
By the relief office I seen my people;
As they stood there hungry, I stood there asking
Is this land made for you and me?

Nobody living can ever stop me,
As I go walking that freedom highway;
Nobody living can ever make me turn back
This land was made for you and me.

On Youtube as Sung by Woody Gurthrie:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wxiMrvDbq3s

“Hobo's Lullaby,” Woody Guthrie

Go to sleep you weary hobo
Let the towns drift slowly by
Can't you hear the steel rails hummin'
That's the hobo's lullaby

I know your clothes are torn and ragged
And your hair is turning gray
Lift your head and smile at trouble
You'll find peace and rest someday
Now don't you worry 'bout tomorrow
Let tomorrow come and go
Tonight you're in a nice warm boxcar
Safe from all that wind and snow
I know the police cause you trouble
They cause trouble everywhere
But when you die and go to Heaven
You'll find no policemen there
So go to sleep you weary hobo
Let the towns drift slowly by
Listen to the steel rails hummin'
That's a hobo's lullaby

Performed by Woody Guthry on Youtube:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NN_xvE79iXE

More on Woody Guthrie at the Library of Congress:
http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wwghtml/wwghome.html

Count Basie: One O'Clock Jump!
Instrumental
Can be heard on Youtube here:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQi4jglT0Vo

The Big Rock Candy Mountain, Harry McClintock, 1928

One evening as the sun went down and the jungle fire was burning
Down the track came a hobo hiking and he said boys I'm not turning
I'm headin for a land that's far away beside the crystal fountains
So come with me we'll go and see the Big Rock Candy Mountains

In the Big Rock Candy Mountains there's a land that's fair and bright
Where the handouts grow on bushes and you sleep out every night
Where the boxcars are all empty and the sun shines every day
On the birds and the bees and the cigarette trees
Where the lemonade springs where the bluebird sings
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains

In the Big Rock Candy Mountains all the cops have wooden legs
And the bulldogs all have rubber teeth and the hens lay soft boiled eggs
The farmer's trees are full of fruit and the barns are full of hay
Oh, I'm bound to go where there ain't no snow

Where the rain don't fall and the wind don't blow
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains.

In the Big Rock Candy Mountains you never change your socks
And the little streams of alcohol come a-tricklin' down the rocks
The brakemen have to tip their hats and the railroad bulls are blind
There's a lake of stew and of whiskey too
You can paddle all around 'em in a big canoe
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains

In the Big Rock Candy Mountains the jails are made of tin
And you can walk right out again as soon as you are in
There ain't no short handled shovels, no axes saws or picks
I'm a goin to stay where you sleep all day
Where they hung the jerk that invented work
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains

I'll see you all this coming fall in the Big Rock Candy Mountains

Different Lyrics, for Children:

In the Big Rock Candy Mountains
There's a land that's fair and bright
Where the handouts grow on bushes
And you sleep out ev'ry night
Where the boxcars are all empty
And the sun shines ev'ry day
Oh, I'm bound to go where there ain't no snow
Where the rain don't fall and the wind don't blow
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains.

Oh, the buzzin' of the bees in the peppermint trees
'Round the soda water fountains
Where the lemonade springs and the bluebird sings
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains

In the Big Rock Candy Mountains
You never change your socks
And little streams of lemonade
Come a-tricklin' down the rocks
The hobos there are friendly
And their fires all burn bright
There's a lake of stew and soda, too
You can paddle all around 'em in a big canoe
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains.

Websites used: http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/dept/history/lavender/cherries.html
http://recollectionbooks.com/siml/library/mirror/Depressionmusic2.html
http://www.woodyguthrie.org/
http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wwghtml/wwghome.html
http://chnm.gmu.edu/courses/hist409/swing.html